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## Miners' Bodies and Masculine Identity in Britain, c.1900-1950

In the first half of the twentieth century representations of the bravery, toughness and, above all else, physical strength of male coal miners abounded in art, novels, films, journalism, social investigations, and political tracts. Developing a muscular body was inevitable for underground miners in an industry which demanded hard and very physical labour. But within British culture, the muscular bodies of miners were a physical representation of more than their bodily strength: it also suggested the manliness or hypermasculinity of miners. Miners were often held to be at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of strength and endurance amongst working-class men. In the pamphlet *The Coal Miner*, Sir Andrew Bryan (member of the National Coal Board) advised readers that “There is no typical miner any more than there is a typical man – though I think if I wanted to find him [sic] the most real man, I should go among the miners to look for him.” For Bryan miners had to be “physically strong and spiritually courageous ... It is not that he is braver than other men ... but that he needs his courage more.” The cover of the pamphlet included a photograph of a miner captioned with the words “A real man.”<sup>1</sup> The manliness of miners so vividly captured by Bryan was most usually connected to their muscular bodies. In the age of photography and film, miners' bodies were culturally prevalent and especially in semi-naked form.<sup>2</sup> In artwork, the granite-like muscles of miners were made all the more prominent as they are captured in the glow of lamps amidst the sweat and toil of the other-worldly darkness of the mine.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps one of the most famous depictions of miners' muscular manliness is in George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937):

The fillers look and work as though they were made of iron. They really do look like iron – hammered iron statutes – under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them from head to foot. It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you

realize what splendid men they are. Most of them are small (big men would be a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere ... No one could do their work who had not a young man's body, and a figure fit for a guardsman at that.<sup>4</sup>

The masculine ideal of the muscular body of a 'real man' had a lived reality for miners themselves. Even in old age former miners spoke with pride of the physical prowess of their younger days.<sup>5</sup> But, there is another side to the almost heroic representation of miners. For the historian sitting in the archive, listening to former miners recall the physicality of their younger days through a narrative broken by wheezes, coughs, and rasping breaths is a particularly poignant reminder of how the mine also broke the bodies of men and disrupted ideals of manliness.

While the image of the muscular manly miner might have been prevalent, we know little of what miners themselves felt about their bodies. Despite the association between muscular bodies and masculinity, there have been relatively few studies of miners' embodied masculinity or, indeed, miners' construction of masculine identity more broadly.<sup>6</sup> Ava Baron's observation that one very notable absence in gendered histories of the American workplace was men's bodies, also holds true for many studies of miners' masculinity.<sup>7</sup> In part, this absence can be explained through the more gradual development of studies of working-class masculinity.<sup>8</sup> Recent works on miners' masculinity have explored masculine identity during periods of strike action and unemployment, as well as how disability, ageing, and sexuality shaped experiences of manliness.<sup>9</sup> Together, these works stress the importance of an 'ideal' of heteronormative hypermasculinity based upon work, level of skill, physical strength, codes of respectability, and performing the role of family provider. But, the role of the body in

constructions of masculinity remains underexplored. How far did miners revere their bodily strength as the ultimate symbol of their manhood? How important was developing and maintaining a muscular body to working-class ideals of masculinity? How did class shape ideals of body and masculinity? In ignoring the body a key site for both representations of miners' masculinity and subjective constructions of masculine identity is neglected.

Recognising that the body was a site for constructing gendered identity is as important as understanding the spaces of home, neighbourhood, and workplace for shaping performances of masculinity. For miners, as other working men, bodies in a very real sense were their source of income; the physical strength of an able body was paramount for enjoying a relatively steady wage regardless of almost all other mental or intellectual capabilities. Employers viewed working men's bodies as tools of labour and the issue of 'ownership' can be thought of as not just in the sense of the inequalities of income and labour. This perhaps exaggerated importance of the physical body was potentially reinforced in popular representations where miners' bodies were arguably more objectified than men in other trades. While studies of miners' masculinity have stressed the importance of work and the workplace for constructions of masculinity in engendering a particular mindset, the body was also undoubtedly key to feelings and performances of manliness. Indeed, miners tended to narrate their emotional lives through the site of their bodies. Exploring gendered identities from the site and space of the body, therefore, allows us to consider an integral and inescapable component in constructions of gendered identities beyond just recognising the importance of performing physical labour. As Joanne Begiato has pointed out, an embodied approach shifts the focus onto how gender was inhabited in bodies and not only performed.<sup>10</sup> While the physical muscular body was essential to feelings of manliness, embodied masculinity should also encompass the appearance and adornment of bodies. For working men, the labouring demands of the workplace played a much greater part in shaping their appearance than for middle-class men whose bodies were shaped by physical

exertion (or not) in leisure time. How working-class men responded to the shaping of their body within the workplace and shaped their own appearance, inside and out of it, through dress and personal grooming helps draw out the intersection between age, class, and gender. Such understandings of embodied masculinity highlights the importance of how gendered identity was constructed in a particular time and place and as part of a wider cultural context.<sup>11</sup>

In this article, I argue for the importance of embodied masculinity to studies of working-class masculinity and the significance of representations of muscular miners within British culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Given the importance placed upon health and fitness for the general population against the backdrop of war, debates about national efficiency, the rise of more sedentary forms of employment, concerns for degeneracy, and the spectre of mass unemployment in the 1930s, the early decades of the twentieth century make for an important moment to explore ideals of muscular manliness.<sup>12</sup> But to understand the importance of environment I adopt a regional approach by focusing upon the South Wales Coalfield. As a mono-industrial region, with low-levels of female employment (in the formal economy), the economic and cultural significance of coalmining in the south Wales coalfield cannot be underestimated. It was to prove a draw for writers and social investigators from the later nineteenth century, and, therefore, provides an excellent case study for an exploration of both national representations and local experiences of manliness amongst mine workers. The regional context stresses the importance of the cultural codes of the neighbourhood alongside middle-class ideals of masculinity, popular culture, and transnational representations of miners. In south Wales, the image of the hardened hypermasculinity of the coalminer has predominated: an embodied approach allows for a fuller understanding of the origins and importance of this image not just culturally, but as a lived experience.

There are two main source bases for exploring working-class embodied masculinity: the first are self-reflective sources to uncover subjective experiences; and the second is middle-

class representations of working-class men's bodies. Reading the body in self-reflective sources shows the importance of embodied experiences to how miners narrated a masculine identity. I draw primarily upon memoirs and oral history collections as older men's reflections across the course of their life reveal the importance of corporeal change to feelings of manliness.<sup>13</sup> Oral history collections and memoirs were in part prompted by the desire to capture mining histories at a moment of deindustrialisation from the 1970s. The changing labour, social, and cultural landscape prompted some men to evoke a world of 'hard labour' and 'hard masculinity' they felt had already disappeared. The body was a key site for helping to explain such change and allowed men to reassert masculinity lost in older age. There are, however, some differences in the way expressions of embodied masculinity are framed. In autobiographies miner authors imbue a collective identity.<sup>14</sup> Writers from south Wales often magnify their experiences for the wider workforce and there are discernible patterns in how miners wrote about their embodied experiences of key moments such as the first day of work. While oral histories mirror the significance of many of these events, they are often narrated from a personal perspective with subjective rather than collective experiences foregrounded. Oral history interviewees capture a given moment in their lives without always considering it within the whole: a response to the interviewer and the conditions of the interview. The responses from the South Wales Coalfield History Projects are more 'raw' in this sense with admissions to fighting, drinking, and sexuality which are much less common in memoirs.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in both memoirs and oral histories, muscular bodies are similarly essential to constructions of masculinity. Deconstructing the way miners narrated their bodies allows historians to consider influences beyond the workplace. The body is often a starting point for emotional accounts of boyhood dreams of manhood, relationships with parents, fear, bravery, and pride. Although emotions are not the primary focus of this article, such affective expressions are explored because they did form part of a masculine self.

The body is also a key site for representations of miners' masculinity in newspapers, novels, artworks, films, social surveys, polemical studies, and trade union records. Imaginings of miners' masculinity tended to be centred overwhelmingly on how their bodies were observed. As Ava Baron has noted when considering representations of labouring bodies, awareness of the gaze of the observer is crucial.<sup>16</sup> Drawing upon these sources within a particular time frame allows for an examination of working-class responses to popular representations and ideals of masculinity including the wider cultural context which shaped performances of masculinity. The contrast between representations seen through a middle-class gaze and miners' lived experiences is revealing of the intersection between class and gendered identity. It also helps to add nuance to more popular imaginings of miners' embodied masculinity.

I explore miners' embodied masculinity based upon the three primary ways men narrated their bodies. First, I explore the importance of a muscular physique as part of the transition to manhood, feelings of masculinity, and popular representations of miners' bravery and strength as a national symbol. Second, dress, appearance, and the public presentation of bodies as part of the performances of masculinity are considered. Locating bodies outside of the workplace and as part of cultural trends in standards of beauty helps add nuance to miners' relationship to their muscular bodies. Lastly, I address the masculine characteristic of independence by examining ownership and the body from the perspective of self, work, family, and government. Approaching miners' embodied masculinity from these three perspectives shows how the literal shaping of bodies in the workplace, subjective attempts to alter appearance, and the response of audiences to bodies were all fundamental in the construction and performance of miners' masculinity. Miners could be equally proud and loathing of how mine working shaped their bodies, even when ultimately the muscular body of the average miner was pivotal to a hypermasculine identity. An embodied approach better allows us to

access the intimate connection between, and men's feelings of, workplace, home, popular culture, and neighbourhood in performances of masculinity. By drawing upon a range of examples at different moments in the lifecycle, in the settings of work and home, and considering the perspective of the individual, family members and the wider community, I highlight an approach to working-class masculinity which will help to enrich our understanding of the emotional and gendered lives of working men.

### **Muscular bodies and masculinity**

The relationship between physical toughness and the hypermasculine culture of working-class communities is fairly well-established. In their study of masculinity in Clydeside, Ronnie Johnston and Arthur McIvor found that from a young age boys became imbued into the “hard-man” culture of the area through the stories of older workers, a tough street culture, and risk-averse attitude.<sup>17</sup> The underground world of the miner was filled with displays of manliness from the physical exertion of cutting coal and filling trams to the bravery and nerve needed to fire shot and avoid collapsing seams. But, it was not simply the act of physical labour which was important, and the way such exertion shaped men's bodies was itself key a signifier of manhood and manliness. As I demonstrate in this section, while representations of miners in trade union literature connected muscular manliness to displays of strength and bravery in the workplace, in memoirs and oral histories the home was also a crucial space for engendering the relationship between masculinity and muscularity from a young age.

In the mining villages of south Wales, boys grew up in a world surrounded by the strong bodies of adult men. Miners in the region could work underground from when they were twelve or fourteen years old until they were in their sixties or seventies. While by their sixties their faces often bore the marks of respiratory disease, men's bodies were still noted to be relatively



muscular in appearance.<sup>18</sup> The muscular bodies of fathers, brothers, and uncles in the home normalised the hard and fit labouring body as a symbol of manhood and not least because of how stories of the manly attributes of strength and bravery were related to its form. Autobiographies attest to the childhood influence of stories of strength and acts of heroism down the mines at a formative moment in the transition to manhood. Dai Dan Evans (1898-1974) recalled how “all the discussions and stories we heard in the family and amongst adults outside were about mining ... about the prowess of some individual ... Discussion of matters outside the pit would always be about the physical prowess of someone or other”. This environment, Evans felt, wrongly conditioned boys for the pit from a young age and not least because other forms of employment, such as retail, were considered “degrading” or for “weaklings to perform”.<sup>19</sup> Boys wished to construct a particular form of embodied masculinity. In his case, Evans decided not to sit the county school exam because he thought the uniform would make him look “really effeminate”, a decision he later regretted.<sup>20</sup> In his oral history interview, Penry Davies (b. 1898) linked the good character of individuals from his childhood to their stature recalling the “hard worker” Will Richards who was a “big fellow, a big tall chap” and his brother who was “a fellow that size you know, a big hefty fellow”.<sup>21</sup>

For some miners, the desire for a muscular body was affectively expressed as a way of becoming like their fathers and emulating their qualities of manliness. Robert Morgan, in *My Lamp Still Burns* (1981), was particularly effusive in his descriptions of his father’s body, and through such narrations he is also capturing his childhood awe and love for his father. He vividly recalls his thoughts and feelings as a boy watching his father bathe in the front room: “When he peeled off his shirt and vest to wash the upper part of his body, he looked to me then a giant, muscular and with great strength and toughness.”<sup>22</sup> Following his entry down the mines, Morgan became desperate to equal the body of his father: “My father seemed a giant besides me. I admired his muscular arms and powerful shoulders and the quantity of his

strength ... I wanted more than anything else to develop arms, shoulders and great strength like my father.”<sup>23</sup> This was more than wanting to be a man: this was a desire to imitate the man that he clearly loved. Alan Chivers’ memoir of his father’s life similarly draws upon imagery of his father’s physical prowess as a means of describing their relationship and his character. Chivers who went to university and onto a career as an instructor and lecturer in the military was clearly very taken with the strength of his father to perform such physically demanding labour. His descriptions of his father, largely imagined, as an “athletic 18-year-old”, his “hardened muscular fitness by hard work”, and even noting that his occupation as a “coal hewer” recorded on his marriage certificate “held implications of strength and virility” helped to inform his constructions of his father’s masculinity.<sup>24</sup> Upon the cusp of adulthood, acquiring the muscular body of an average miner, and all this symbolised, helped to confirm the passage from boyhood to manhood, along with earning a wage, participating in social activities such as drinking and, eventually, courting and marriage. But, understanding how the culture of embodied masculinity functioned helps to further explain another aspect of young men’s decisions to enter the mine as well as the dynamics of the father / son relationship.

In the life-writings and oral histories of miners, the physical transformation of the body is as important as the emotional or mental leap of beginning work. Recalling the tiredness, both physically and mentally, of the first day down a pit is an almost literary function of writers to show their personal progression from the carefree days of youth to the hard reality of working life.<sup>25</sup> Many miners recalled their impatience to start working down the mine and enter the world of men. Their exuberance was only brought into check by the physical trauma of labouring and the peculiar environment of working underground. In oral histories, a contrast is drawn between the anticipation of work and the reality of the actual labour. John Williams (b. c.1900) was particularly keen to begin working, he saw it as “a badge of manhood”, visiting the pit regularly with his friends before starting his employment. On his first day, however, he

was shocked at the nature of the work and remembered how the “other people were working very hard, harder than what I thought”.<sup>26</sup> Similarly B. Edwards (b. 1898) was surprised that he could only fill five or six trams as “it was hard work”.<sup>27</sup> Recounting in detail the physical exertion of the first shift in autobiographies serves to show the reader how the exhaustion experienced then, became merely part of the everyday life of the strong miner the boy became.<sup>28</sup> For older miners, framing a discussion of the first day around physical strength stresses how muscular bodies remained paramount to their ideals of masculinity at a time when their own bodies were weakened through decades of hard labour. That many miners also felt that mining was physically more demanding in the earlier twentieth century stresses this point. Jim Evans (b. 1900) remembered coal mining as the “toughest job in world” and for Ernest Fervert Simons (b. 1915) coal filling “was a lot harder than it is today [1981], a lot harder”.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between muscles and masculinity within mining communities was enhanced by a wider cultural context which celebrated miners’ strength as a manly attribute. In mining literature, the world of danger was normalised and strenuous labour quotidian. The Miners’ Federation of Great Britain called upon the British public in 1933 to think of the risks of “mutilation and death” the miner encountered “every moment of his working life” and the “enormous amount of human suffering and misery” that this caused.<sup>30</sup> Detailed descriptions of miners’ sculpted form, in contrast to the bodies of other men, were designed to stir in the reader both admiration for their labour and manliness as well as sympathy for their plight.<sup>31</sup> George Orwell’s account of his time underground certainly eroticised the bodies of miners as Robert Clarke has argued, but such works did not necessarily romanticise their labour or bodies.<sup>32</sup> Rather, stressing the strength and, therefore, manliness of miners made their exploitation all the more vicious; that the dangerous labour of manly men went unrewarded was not only a socialist, but a national travesty.

The muscular bodies of miners could be used as a national symbol of physical strength and emotional courage, something which became particularly important in the context of wartime. A 1945 Miners' Welfare Commission pamphlet wrote of how "the miner's daily work is hard and heavy", but, rather than buckling under this pressure, "he has accepted, as part of that work, discomforts and disadvantages affecting not only him, but, to a lesser extent, his wife and family."<sup>33</sup> Miners' bodies were imagined by some union leaders as literally holding the economic and wartime hopes of the nation together. Arthur Horner, the President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, declared, "wherever the miners are, the Government know they are the steel framework around which some of the best war industries have been built up, and that they form the nucleus of the finest fighting regiments." Horner connected, like writers before him, the physical strength and bravery of miners; "Hard work has no terrors for them ... The miner is in a totally different category from any other section of workers ... his work demands tremendous physical exertion."<sup>34</sup> Such representations of miners' bodies universalised strength and bravery. For miners themselves, the transition to accepting the danger of the mine and feelings of bravery were in part experienced through the corporeal transformation from a youthful soft body to a muscular manly body.

The dangerous environment of the mine, and especially in south Wales, made injury an almost daily experience. Dai Dan Evans became quickly disillusioned with the reality of the physicality and danger of the mine in contrast to the stories which had lured him into the pit. He described his "raw ... cut hands and fingers ... open sores on the back ... sore knees through kneeling all day in low seams, and lumps like eggs on ones [sic] head".<sup>35</sup> In the South Wales History Project interviews, miners most readily talk about their fear when discussing negative emotions attached to their early days down the mine. The "fright" of a head injury left B. Edwards taking a couple of weeks of work before developing enough nerve to re-enter the mine. This behaviour, he revealed to his interviewer, made him "a bit of a chicken".<sup>36</sup> In

constructing a masculine identity, some miners downplayed the damage and toll mining took upon bodies.<sup>37</sup> Evans' laments the battering his body took, but such descriptions form part of a wider narrative of endurance and bravery. The union leader Will Paynter is, perhaps, one of the most demonstrative in his descriptions of his love for working down the mine. But, he notes how at first "there were ... one or two occasions when tears fell."<sup>38</sup> Although he admits he "was pretty easily scared as a youngster and lay no claim to bravery as an adult", within the wider narrative of the book, his admission to fright reinforces his bravery through his continued endurance of these conditions.<sup>39</sup> Former miners often related feelings of fear not only to their youth, but also to their stature. Edward Thomas (b. 1918) cried when he returned home after his first shift at fifteen as his "hands were all cut and bleeding, my knees were sore and cut and bleeding". His "beat knee" became a recurring problem, but he struggled to find work on higher seams as "unfortunately I was small in body".<sup>40</sup> The description of the fear G. A. W. Tomlinson experienced underground is followed by his acknowledgement that he was a "weak-backed kid".<sup>41</sup> A strong muscular body made men feel brave and manly as they reached adulthood.

How miners recalled episodes of fright and fear and the attempts to display the manly qualities of endurance, bravery, and strength are revealing that the body was not a static site for the construction of masculine identity: injury, age, and work all shifted men's relationships with their bodies and performances of masculinity. For example, unemployment was one of the more obvious factors which potentially disrupted the relationship between muscular bodies and the ideal masculine quality of physical strength. In the interwar period, when unemployed, miners' bodies became a metaphor for the declining coal industry; images of physically tough miners were replaced with photographs and descriptions of the weakened unemployed, shuffling away idle hours on street corners.<sup>42</sup> The growing association of modernity with strenuous activity and physical health served only to exacerbate the image of miners' gaunt appearances with another era.<sup>43</sup> For miners, the relationship between muscularity and

embodied masculinity established at a formative moment remained a life-long feature of constructions of manliness. Further interrogating men's relationship to their muscular bodies, and in environments beyond the home, deepens our understanding of the meanings and significance of muscularity and embodied masculinity.

### **Dress, grooming and displays of manliness**

Beauty is a vital element to consider in enquiries into the body and identity as Paul Deslandes has shown.<sup>44</sup> While few miners explicitly discussed bodies and beauty in the South Wales History Project interviews, and certainly were not questioned on this, through memoirs and recorded viewpoints in social surveys we are able to build a picture of standards of attractiveness and dress within mining communities. Working men shaped their bodies to construct a performance of masculinity within a specific time and place. Given the well-established link between the fitness movement and standards of beauty in the 1920s and 1930s, I here explore the presentation of bodies primarily within this period.<sup>45</sup> It is within the context of the appearance and the display of working men's bodies that we see the tension between representations of embodied masculinity from middle-class writers and working-class men's own relationships with their bodies. While miners' muscular bodies were part of a middle-class ideal of masculinity, in other respects they were observed as lacking in some of the more refined masculine qualities of intellect, self-control, and independence. Exploring embodied masculinity, therefore, allows us to better understand the power of the middle-class gaze as well as the intersection between class, age, and gender.

Muscular bodies have long been associated with manhood and in the nineteenth century, for the upper and middle classes, there was a clear relationship between muscularity, power, virility, and manliness.<sup>46</sup> While in the interwar years fit, healthy, and muscular bodies

were “indispensable to hegemonic masculinity”, from the Edwardian period, the physical culture movement was as much about health as it was displaying mesomorphic bodies.<sup>47</sup> Slight male frames suggested effeminacy and obesity, concomitant with domesticity and lack of control, became the antithesis of ideal manliness.<sup>48</sup> The “muscular ideal”, a counterpoint to the perceived threat to national manhood in the tumultuous interwar years, was most prevalent in the large outdoor displays connected with fascist movements.<sup>49</sup> The muscular bodies of middle-class ideals of masculinity were, of course, most prevalent amongst working men who developed such stature through physical labour. Elite men had sought to emulate working men’s bodies from at least the early 1800s, and later in the century the muscular form of the male labouring body was depicted in art and literature as virile and heroic.<sup>50</sup> It was, however, a desire to emulate a particular physique; the reality of the dirt of the mine and the peculiar conditions of working underground were, conversely, not so much emasculating as dehumanising within some middle-class imaginings.

Coal miners’ employment underground, their dirty blackened appearance, and their physical strength saw the emergence in the nineteenth century of an image of miners as otherworldly, coarse, and wild. The Miners’ Welfare Commission pondered that although the “dusty condition was honourably come by”, blackened faces and clothing contributed to the “incongruous appearance” of miners which hid a “self-respecting and oft-times highly cultured citizen”.<sup>51</sup> The often physical separation of miners from other workers enhanced their ‘otherness’ as many from outside of the coalfield rarely had contact with the workers. Stories of heavy drinking, brawling, and even a belief that miners lived underground were prevalent.<sup>52</sup> The Mining Association of Great Britain still believed in the mid-1930s that “the average man” held an image of miners as “a grimy race of troglodytes”.<sup>53</sup> Even more sympathetic portrayals of miners’ lifestyles reinforced their distinctive appearance. The writers Walter Greenwood and Ferdynand Zweig both noted how easy it was for outsiders to “spot” a miner.<sup>54</sup> The

assumption of miners' character based upon their appearance influenced understandings of their masculine identity as a mass and, in contrast to middle-class ideals of masculinity, a rough form of manliness is more evident.

How working-class men negotiated, responded to, and performed to standards of beauty was highly subjective. In men's accounts of their bodies the muscular miner's physique is viewed as part of more conventional notions of beautiful bodies in its toned stature but, miners also reconceptualised more popular imaginings of beauty by celebrating the attractiveness of a body transformed through toil and labour. Bert Coombes' depiction of men in pit baths aligned with more conventional standards of beauty and he stressed that "Few better advertisements for nudism than these baths are possible. Almost every bare body there was slim and well-shaped. Very few pit men are ever podgy; their work and bending see to that."<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, the reader of former miner Thomas Idris Lewis's autobiography is compelled to admire the beauty of a working man's toughened body. For Lewis, mining was "a man's job" and he marvelled at how "the human body could stand up to eight and nine hours" of intense labouring, concluding, "the miner is a proud, tough character, in spirit as well as physical strength, his daily demands strenuous physical exercise, his corny hands are hardened like leather, his sinews and muscles as tough as rubber."<sup>56</sup> While the flattering descriptions of bodies in memoirs underlines the importance of muscularity, the responses from contemporaries to the physical culture movement are more revealing of generational and class attitudes towards the mesomorphic form.

In the physical culture movement of the interwar period developing the fit and muscular bodies of its strongest proponents was equated with a performance not just of personal, but national strength. As such, the British government endorsed a nation-wide plan to extol the virtues of regular exercise in classes and gymnasiums led by an army of fitness instructors. In the Physical Training and Recreation Bill parliamentary debates while Lord Burghley,



Marquess of Exeter and an Olympian, spoke with pleasure of working people taking “pride in their physique”, former miner Aneurin Bevan (MP, Ebbw Vale) described the existence of men who devoted hours every day to physical training as “obscene”.<sup>57</sup> Bevan argued that while better sporting facilities were needed, “to suggest physical training to a man who for 7 ½ hours a day is performing herculean tasks of physical exertion is to talk utter rubbish.”<sup>58</sup> But, in the context of the Depression, such training became important amongst some age groups. For younger men who were unable to achieve a muscular body through regular work, physical training classes allowed them to develop the physique associated with conventional forms of beauty and local performances of masculinity.<sup>59</sup> Older unemployed men, in contrast, could feel frustrated at such activities. The National Council of Social Services sponsored documentary *To-Day We Live* (1937) made public this disquiet.<sup>60</sup> When a committee of unemployed men meet in the film to discuss activities for their newly established club, one member suggested that “physical jerks now seems to be the fashion”. Glyn, the voice of dissent, argued that such activities were “only killing time” and that “we can do physical jerks until we are blue in the face, but it isn’t paid work, that’s what I mean”.<sup>61</sup> We are offered a rare insight into the feelings towards physical training through the voice of Glyn, but his views must have been shared more widely given the lack of popularity of the movement. In south Wales, physical training found its greatest audience amongst women and the middle classes.<sup>62</sup> For example, at a public display of the Welsh Association of Health and Fitness team before the Wales rugby union match against Scotland, the participants were noted to be women and business men.<sup>63</sup> For older miners, muscularity as a component of masculinity was inextricably linked to the workplace because developing a strong physique through other means was not a marker of manliness.

How miners presented their bodies was also at odds with the more performative posturing of the physical culturist movement. In art the semi-naked form of the miner might have been common, but aboveground displays of naked or semi-naked muscular bodies were

not a feature of south Walian working-class cultures of masculinity. The National Fitness Campaign surveys into recreational activities revealed that the range of sports men participated in, rather than simply spectating, could rarely be seen as demonstrations of physical prowess. Tennis, for example, was very popular along with bowling, quoits and cricket.<sup>64</sup> There was, perhaps, an aversion, or a wider distaste even, to displaying naked bodies outside of the workplace. Again, the context of the home is important. Bert Coombes took a few days to forget his shyness when washing in front of his landlord during his first week of work. He was relieved that the girls in his house left the room when he was bathing, and his friend Jack felt “torture” that this was not the arrangement in his lodgings.<sup>65</sup> The naked body revealed the vulnerability of miners and the limits of the body in performances of masculinity. Although most of the men Coombes worked with eventually lost their inhibitions, not evening bothering to “put his towel in position”, in the early days of pithead baths, men were anxious of displaying their naked form and some always refused to bathe communally.<sup>66</sup> Given that miners’ days were filled with acts of strength and endurance, in many ways there was no need for miners to show off their bodies to display these embodied masculine attributes. But, the shyness of the naked body also reveals the importance of local culture to performances of masculinity.

The presentation of bodies through dress and personal grooming are particularly revealing of the performances of a masculine self dependent on age, place, and audience. Masculinity was inscribed in clothing.<sup>67</sup> Many older miners noted the importance of parading around in new moleskin trousers the evening before a first shift, or even a month before in the case of John Williams, to show off the impending manhood that employment occasioned.<sup>68</sup> But, beyond these youthful episodes, the majority of miners appear to have had a more complex relationship with their appearance as a working man. The daily dirt of the mine was abhorrent to miners. It transformed men’s skin as dust became embedded in every nook of flesh. Removing the dirt of the mine can be viewed as a desire to simply become clean, but men’s

descriptions of bathing, especially their first bath, suggest a deeper meaning that can be related to performances of manliness: real men were clean men. A south Wales miner interviewed by the novelist Walter Greenwood attached strong feelings to the process of showering: “A fellow likes to keep himself clean. And you can get *proper* clean there: it freshens you up and makes you *feel* good”.<sup>69</sup> There was also a sense of a return to individuality. The writer and former miner Walter Haydn Davies drew a distinction between the “common identity” of unwashed miners returning home “in one black mass ... an ‘army strong’ marching together from their underworld” in his youth, and miners in the 1970s who enjoyed the benefits of pithead baths and were “hardly distinguishable from any other class of worker”:

Day in, day out, these dusky sons of toil battled in most trying conditions deep in the bowels of the earth, not at all resembling the miners today in physical appearance. These modern counterparts look as if they are returning from a dance as they trip up their steps on their light fantastic toes, having washed and changed at the pithead bath, and left behind the dust and grime encountered in their fiery struggle with King Coal.<sup>70</sup>

The clean body was a lighter and more attractive body, and younger miners were concerned that they did not sweat black through their white shirts during a Saturday night’s dancing.<sup>71</sup>

Outside of the workplace, miners’ appearances were further transformed through clothing. The Sunday best suit, although an essential item in homes where resources allowed, could disrupt the expectation of miners’ dress and behaviour amongst external observers. In the foreword to the miner author G. A. W. Tomlinson’s *The Coal-Miner* (1937), the writer Arthur Bryant betrays his class prejudices and imaginings of miners in two ways. First, he was taken-aback that Tomlinson was a miner given that he was wearing a smart suit as “for all the angular splendour of his physique, [it] scarcely suggested a coal-miner”. He was next surprised

that Tomlinson was knowledgeable of the works of Byron and Shelley given “he did not look a bookish fellow”.<sup>72</sup> Bryant’s admission here is perhaps a challenge to the reader not to see miners as a one-dimensional figure, a theme common in autobiographies and the later historiography, yet it is still revealing of attitudes to dress. Thomas Idris Lewis’s recollection of his treatment at the 1947 ‘Industrial Wales Exhibition’ at Olympia, London, neatly conveys the tension between work, appearance, and dirt of which the body was central. Two young men from the RAF questioned Lewis as to whether he was a miner, and he put this down to his Sunday best suit which made him look, in his words, “more like a bank clerk”. Lewis, clearly pleased at the deception, “challenged them to step forward, to examine my hands, there they would find proof in the blue scars, that could be seen under my skin”.<sup>73</sup> Lewis’ use of his body to reveal his occupation, and ergo his true identity, conveys that dress and personal grooming could only go so far in distancing men from the mine. Miners’ muscular bodies were a symbol of their manliness, but in south Wales miners’ performances of masculinity were also shaped by a local culture with an aversion to displaying semi-naked forms, high standards of cleanliness and dress which reflected the fashion of the age. A muscular physique was an essential component of embodied masculinity because it displayed attributes of strength, hard work, and bravery. But, beyond the workplace, working-class masculinity in south Wales also encompassed thriftiness, cleanliness, education and independence, which were in part performed through displays of the body in dress and appearance.

### **Ownership and embodied masculinity**

Demonstrating independence, most notably financial, was a key part of the transition to manhood. An embodied approach allows historians to consider the subtle challenges to masculine independence (beyond economic dependency) and also how men reasserted

manliness through their bodies. Claims to ownership of miners' bodies came from within the family, workplace, and the state. Interrogating the power dynamic of this overlooked aspect of embodied masculinity helps further understandings of performances of masculinity and gendered structures within and outside of the home. This section explores this facet of embodied masculinity in the workplace, the home, and through the authority of the state.

The connections between men's bodies and the mines was imagined before ever a boy descended the shaft. The Wales Regional Officer for the Unemployment Assistance Board reported in 1936: "coal mining, at any rate in South Wales, seems to be in the blood of the people".<sup>74</sup> From his very first shift, a miner's body was in many ways given over to the mine. The detail in which older miners recount the injuries sustained on their first shift, and without prompt in oral histories, was implicit recognition of the loss of ownership of their own bodies.<sup>75</sup> This sense of loss, and conversely at the moment a boy held the expectation of manly independence, helps to explain the regret some miners later expressed once they had descended the pit shaft for the first time. The notion that the mines were filled with the blood of generations of miners was a powerful yet common image within mining communities. Miners' bodies became a part of the mine and not only upon death underground.

Damage to the body was an expected part of mining and its distinctive marks upon men's bodies distinguished them from other workers. Blue scars were a particularly idiosyncratic corporeal feature of the industry.<sup>76</sup> Thomas Idris Lewis expressed:

O yes, there is no need to ask a man if he is a coal miner, you only want to look at his face and hands, there you will find particles of the black diamond embedded underneath his skin, evidence that the black diamond is not easily got, the miner has to pay the price with his blood.<sup>77</sup>

The coal dust carried in blue scars intimately and inescapably connected miners' bodies to their workplace. Dai Dan Evans saw the blue scars on miners' bodies as representative of industrial damage upon the landscape; in both cases nature would inevitably triumph with the passing of time releasing both body and land from the scar of the mine: "nature is reclaiming its own, the scars of yester year is as surely being lost as the blue scars on the miner's body are obliterated in the grave".<sup>78</sup> It is unclear how miners felt about their blue scars. The commonality of the scarring suggests that it might have hardly been a noticeable feature within a mining community, and blue scars were deliberately created in distinctive designs as a form of tattooing in the south Wales coalfield.<sup>79</sup> Ava Baron has suggested how "deformed workingmen's bodies" were a performance and validation of masculinity.<sup>80</sup> The 'blue scar' can be seen in a wider cultural context with memoirs and a film taking the name.<sup>81</sup> Yet, while there is little evidence of an aversion to the scarring, and Lewis even took pride in his, it still suggests a hold, if not ownership, that the mine had over men's bodies. We might also consider this in terms of how the body was viewed as an object or tool of labour within the context of the home.

Before pit head baths, miners' bodies were daily displayed and touched by wives, mothers, daughters, and fellow miners. While at one level a necessary domestic chore, the act of washing the backs of the men in the house also held a degree of tenderness to it. Robert Morgan recalled his mother's "patience and gentleness" in helping his father bathe and tending to his injuries.<sup>82</sup> Evidence for the Coal Industry Commission found that "many miners' wives regard it as their privilege *and* duty to wash their husbands' backs".<sup>83</sup> For mothers, such regular physical contact of son's bodies resurrected an act of caring lost after childhood, with the added poignancy of the world of danger their sons inhabited. It was not only Edward Thomas who cried following his return from his first shift underground, and he recalled in some detail how his mother cried along with him attending to his injuries. She must have recognised that she had lost her son to the mine and all of its dangers.<sup>84</sup> Men spoke affectionately about mothers

from the site of their bodies, bodies which were also used by some to protect their mothers from the violent hands of fathers or step-fathers.<sup>85</sup>

Caring for bodies was an act of love, but the back-breaking labour of preparing baths should not be romanticised as a willing maternal sacrifice. It, ultimately, reinforced the gendered hierarchy of the home. Descriptions in oral histories of the ‘first bath’ reflected a shift in a boy’s status as he become much more noticeably ‘served’ by mothers and sisters who prepared baths and helped him wash. The occasion was marked and celebrated in some houses. In Jim Evans’ neighbourhood the “first great wash” included “a little bit of urine in the water of the bath” as “something magic”.<sup>86</sup> While miners and former miners spoke openly and affectionately about the sacrifices their mothers and wives made, male bodies were privileged over female bodies. The sacrifice the male body had made was literally inscribed upon it in the cuts and injuries sustained in the workplace: in this way the body secured the masculine authority of the miner within his home. The bodily sacrifice of women was instead hidden away as countless medical reports and social surveys revealed.<sup>87</sup> Part of Joseph Jones’ (president of the Miners’ Federation of Great Britain) lament over low wages in the coal industry was because of the impact upon mothers and wives: “These poor women sacrifice themselves in order to maintain the strength of their menfolk and to give their children as much as they possibly can. ... more often than not their sacrifices are deliberately withheld from the knowledge of their husbands and sons. They suffer in secret.”<sup>88</sup> Women’s bodies were washed in private, medical complaints were often invisible, and the toil and exhaustion of domestic labour was rarely discussed. In contrast, men’s status and authority as breadwinner was reinforced through the care for his body and spaces his body occupied; he was served first at the dinner table, he sat in a particular chair, and his body was tenderly looked after by the women in the house. There were, however, important limits to how men’s authority rested on this particular performance of embodied masculinity.

Ensuring that men were physically able to fulfil their role as breadwinner was essential to the fortunes of the family. The presence of women within the room of Bert Coombes' friend Jack as he bathed highlights how miners' bodies were viewed within families and the neighbourhood. Naked or semi-naked bodies were not hidden away in the home as a potentially sexual object, and were treated instead as an almost tool of labour which needed to be cleaned.<sup>89</sup> The body, as a tool of labour, was an object that needed to be maintained. This is not, of course, to suggest that the bodies of husbands, sons, or fathers were viewed in such an emotionless way. Instead, it is to recognise the subtle ways in which men did not always have autonomy over their bodies, and the implications of this for embodied masculinity. There was an expectation that the body would be used to support the family and old age or states of injury or unemployment revealed the potential fragility of the status men enjoyed, as once their bodies were not used for labour and income they could quickly lose their position as head of household.<sup>90</sup> Men's status within the home, therefore, in part rested on the health and strength of their bodies.

The claim of ownership of men's bodies, or at the very least, the assumption of power over men's bodies came from beyond the home and workplace. The National Government's response to the physical culture movement can be seen as an attempt to assume control over the bodies of the unemployed to sharpen the nation's tool of labour which had become blunt through idleness. This had begun in the National Government's attempt to develop a more sophisticated welfare system that went beyond providing financial relief: the 1934 Unemployment Act encouraged all able-bodied long-term unemployed to undertake some form of training, including physical training, for "the re-establishment of physical and moral fitness".<sup>91</sup> The newly created autonomous Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB), was particularly concerned with the position of older unemployed men, which included a disproportionately high number of former miners. The "training and reconditioning policy"



aimed to get unemployed older men back to a state of fitness where they would be able to withstand the physical exertion of the return to work. The UAB offered such programmes through Government Training Centres, Instructional Centres, and by working with the National Council of Social Services.<sup>92</sup> It even suggested in its 1938 report, that those men who had “drifted into the backwaters of industrial life” should be granted benefits on the condition of attending training centres to “restore in them that physical condition and that habit of work”. Such training and subsequent employment would allow men to re-join “the ranks of those who form the effective working force of the nation.”<sup>93</sup> The American sociologist Eli Ginzberg observed that unemployed miners in south Wales were not “sympathetic to the major objective” of the instructional centres, which was “physical reconditioning”. Instead, “the men felt that they had been keeping themselves in good condition by working the coal level, for such work implied much walking, digging, and carrying.”<sup>94</sup> In south Wales, embodied masculinity was inhabited in a muscular body created through labour, but the suspicion of the scheme might also be viewed as resistance to attempts at controlling bodies.

The body, in particular circumstances, could also be a weapon: standing on a picket line, marching, and demonstrating was a way for men’s bodies to occupy spaces and to publicly demonstrate the autonomy men had over their own bodies.<sup>95</sup> The body as a weapon of protest was a performance of embodied masculinity in its attempt to capture independence lost through the hold of the mine and the government’s reductionist views of the labouring class. In the home, the coalfield culture of prizing strength was a reassertion of independence and power at one level. Women’s bodies are rarely discussed beyond noting beauty. The relentless and exhausting labour of the home must have strengthened women’s bodies, even if widespread poor health rapidly weakened it from middle age. Men’s silences, in print and oral histories, can be viewed as another way in which their bodies were used to assert their masculine

authority over the home. Male physical power, and especially the threat of it, helped cement the position of head of household in addition to their financial breadwinner status.

## **Conclusion**

The nationalisation of coal mines in 1947 only enhanced the imagery of physically tough miners as these most manly of men now worked for the benefit of the nation. Even after the widespread mechanisation of mining and the introduction of pit head baths, the physical exertion of mining and the dirt and grime of the mine was still stressed in pamphlets about mining conditions. Bryan's description of miners as 'real men' was important because it reminded the public that mining remained a dangerous occupation that demanded both strength and bravery. Miners were not, however, anachronistic and their bodies could be reimagined for the modern working environment of manufacturing. The 1948 National Coal Board propaganda film 'King Coal' attempted to bridge the nineteenth century otherworldliness of the mines with the cleaner modernity of post-war suburbia. To attract men into the mines, coal is shown as vital to the nation, but it is the bodily images of the miners which is most captivating. In a Technicolor cartoon, the stooped bodies of miners who answer the call of King Coal are transformed into upright energetic citizens enjoying various leisure pursuits and comfortable living.<sup>96</sup> Miners' bodies could be represented as modern. But, as the self-reflections of former miners attest, it was, above all, physically strong bodies which allowed for performances of manliness and this remained unchanged.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, miners' masculinity was primarily linked to the muscular body. Boys grew up in an environment surrounded by strong bodies, where physical strength was prized, and within the cultural context of the health and fitness movement. Becoming muscular was a symbol of manhood. But, as I have shown here, the

subjective experiences of bodies are revealing of how men shaped the appearance of the body to perform a masculine self. Work was only one arena for the constructions of masculinity. An embodied approach better allows historians to consider masculinity outside of the workplace and moments of crisis. It is also another means of accessing the emotional lives of working-class men who could use the body as a site for expressing feelings and familial relationships. The importance of muscularity to embodied masculinity is revealed through men's attempts to reassert autonomy over their own bodies or to display their power in the highly gendered space of the home and at times of unrest and protest.

While I have here focused overwhelmingly on white British men in the early twentieth century, embodied masculinity should also be considered from the perspective of immigrants and black coal miners and into the post-1945 period.<sup>97</sup> An embodied approach might potentially help to explain why in deindustrialised south Wales body building became so popular. While miners' bodies with the stamp of the mine upon them might have struggled to always fit into the representations of the muscular ideal of the modern age, it was the almost timelessness of the imagery of the muscular hardworking man which made the miner so manly. Thomas Idris Lewis became the model for the enormous statue for the 'Industrial Wales Exhibition' at Olympia in 1947. He was reported in the *Daily Herald* as describing mining as "a real man's job". The statue still stands overlooking Seven Sisters and was called 'The Ideal Miner'.<sup>98</sup> Even in its now rusted form, the physical prowess is plain and it serves as an important reminder of not only portrayals of ideal miners, but an ideal of embodied masculinity which shaped the gendered landscape for the much of the twentieth century in working-class communities.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Andrew Bryan, *The Coal Miner* (London, c.1950), pp. 2, 6 and cover.
- <sup>2</sup> Series of photographs by James Jarche in the *Daily Herald*, 24 June 1931; *To-Day We Live*. Directed by Ruby Grierson and Ralph Bond. National Council of Social Services, 1937; *Blue Scar*. Directed by Jill Craigie. Outlook Films, 1949.
- <sup>3</sup> For example, Gilbert Daykin, *Miner Wedging Down Coal*, 1937-38.
- <sup>4</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 1937), p. 21.
- <sup>5</sup> For example, South Wales Miners' Library (SWML), AUD542, Jim Evans interview, 29 June 1986, and, AUD303, B. Edwards interview, 23 July 1973.
- <sup>6</sup> Miners' embodied masculinity is touched upon in: Keith Gildart, 'Mining Memories: Reading Coalfield Autobiographies', *Labor History*, 50, no. 2 (2009), pp. 139-161; Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, "'This is the Country of Premature Old Men': Ageing and Aged Miners in the South Wales Coalfield, c.1880-1947", *Cultural and Social History*, 12, no. 4 (2015), pp. 587-606. For a key example of working-class embodied masculinity in Britain see, Joanne Begiato, 'Between Poise and Power: Embodied Manliness in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Culture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), pp. 125-47.
- <sup>7</sup> Ava Baron, 'Masculinity, the Embodied Male Worker, and the Historian's Gaze', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 69 (2006), p. 241.
- <sup>8</sup> Paul O'Leary, 'Masculine Histories: Gender and the Social History of Modern Wales', *The Welsh History Review*, 22, no. 2 (2004), pp. 252-77; John Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?', in John H. Arnold and Sean Brady, eds., *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 24-5.
- <sup>9</sup> Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners' Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot, 2007); Neil Penlington, 'Masculinity and Domesticity in 1930s South Wales: Did Unemployment Change the Domestic Division of Labour?', *Twentieth Century British History*, 21, no. 3 (2010), pp. 281-99; Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales* (Cardiff, 2010); Stephanie Ward, 'Drifting into Manhood and Womanhood: Courtship, Marriage and Gender Among Young Adults in South Wales and the North-East of England in the 1930s', *The Welsh History Review*, 26, no. 4 (2013), pp. 623-48; Ben Curtis and Steven Thompson, "'A Plentiful Crop of Cripples Made by All This Progress': Disability, Artificial Limbs and Working-Class Mutualism in the South Wales Coalfield, 1890-1948", *Social History of Medicine*, 27, no. 4 (2014), pp. 708-27; Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (London, 2015); Daryl Leeworthy, 'Hidden From View?: Male Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century Wales', *Llafur*, 11, no. 4 (2015), pp. 97-119; Thompson and Curtis, "'This is the country'".
- <sup>10</sup> Begiato, 'Between Poise and Power', p. 130.
- <sup>11</sup> R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society*, 19, no. 6 (2005), pp. 849-50. For the importance of a regional framework in studies of gender and sexuality see, Helen Smith, 'Working-Class Ideas and Experiences of Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Britain: Regionalism as a Category of Analysis', *Twentieth Century British History*, 29, no. 1 (2018), pp. 58-78. McIvor and Johnston have shown how fruitful this approach is in Clydeside, Ronnie Johnston and Arthur McIvor, 'Dangerous Work, Hard Men and Broken Bodies: Masculinity in the Clydeside Heavy Industries, c.1930-1970s', *Labor History Review*, 69, no. 2 (2004).
- <sup>12</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska has demonstrated how the sculpted muscular body was a British ideal of manliness, but there is scope for further investigation of this amongst occupational groups where a muscular form was created through labour rather than training. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 2010); Joan Tumblety, *Rethinking the Male Body: Masculinity and the uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France* (Oxford, 2012).
- <sup>13</sup> For the importance of considering the diachronic composition of memoirs in the relationship between narrating a particular moment in the past but through the lens of the cultural context of the present see, Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (Abingdon, 2019), pp. 88-99.
- <sup>14</sup> Gildart, 'Mining Memories', p. 140.
- <sup>15</sup> SWML, South Wales Coalfield History Projects, 1971-4 and 1979-82.
- <sup>16</sup> Baron, 'Masculinity', pp. 148-9.
- <sup>17</sup> Johnston and McIvor, 'Dangerous work', pp. 138-40.
- <sup>18</sup> Enid M. Williams, *The Health of Old and Retired Coalminers in South Wales* (Cardiff, 1933), pp. 60-1.
- <sup>19</sup> SWML, Dai Dan Evans, *The University of 'Hard Knocks'* (unpublished, nd), p. 13.
- <sup>20</sup> Evans, *The University of 'Hard Knocks'*, p. 12.
- <sup>21</sup> SWML, AUD214, Penry Davies interview, 20 October 1973.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Morgan, *My Lamp Still Burns* (Llandysul, 1981), p. 18.
- <sup>23</sup> Morgan, *My Lamp Still Burns*, p.75.
- <sup>24</sup> Alan Chivers, *Coal, Guns and Rugby: A Monmouthshire Memoir* (Usk, 2005), pp. 15, 21, 39, 41-44.

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- <sup>25</sup> This was also true of miners in other coalfields, Gildart, 'Mining Memories', p. 144.
- <sup>26</sup> SMWL, AUD377, John Williams interview, c.1961.
- <sup>27</sup> B. Edwards interview.
- <sup>28</sup> Morgan, *My Lamp Still Burns*, pp. 71-4; B. L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales*, ed. Bill Jones and Chris Williams, Cardiff, 2002 (London, 1939), pp. 18-20; Will Paynter, *My Generation* (London, 1972), pp. 18-20.
- <sup>29</sup> Jim Evans interview; SWML, AUD111, Ernest Fervert Simons interview, 2 February 1981.
- <sup>30</sup> SWML, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC) Pamphlet Collection, Miners' Federation of Great Britain, *The Position of the Coal Miner: The Facts!* (London, 1933), p. 23.
- <sup>31</sup> David Lloyd George, for example, spoke of his visit underground as part of his famous Limehouse Speech. Parliamentary Archives, David Lloyd George, 'The Budget and the People', delivered 30 July 1909 [accessed via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) 24/10/2017]
- <sup>32</sup> Clarke, "'Noble Bodies'", pp. 430-4.
- <sup>33</sup> SWCC Pamphlet Collection, Miners' Welfare Commission, *Mining People* (London, 1945), p. 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Arthur L. Horner, *Coal and the Nation: A Square Deal for Miners* (London, 1943), pp. 6-17.
- <sup>35</sup> Evans, *The University of 'Hard Knocks'*, p. 113.
- <sup>36</sup> B. Edwards interview.
- <sup>37</sup> Johnson and McIvor, 'Dangerous Work', pp. 138-9.
- <sup>38</sup> Paynter, *My Generation*, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>39</sup> Paynter, *My Generation*, pp. 16-22.
- <sup>40</sup> SWML, AUD147, Edward Thomas interview, 21 May 1982.
- <sup>41</sup> G. A. W. Tomlinson, *Coal-Miner* (London, 1937), pp. 58-60.
- <sup>42</sup> *Life in South Wales Today, Third Annual Report of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Services, 1936-37* (Cardiff, 1937), p. 8; *Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Period Ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1936* [Cmd. 5526], vol. xii, 1936-37, p. 993.
- <sup>43</sup> Charlotte Macdonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935-1960* (Wellington NZ, 2011), p. 42.
- <sup>44</sup> Paul R. Deslandes, 'The Male Body, Beauty and Aesthetics in Modern British Culture', *History Compass*, 8, no. 10 (2010), p. 1196.
- <sup>45</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p. 222; Tumblety, *Rethinking the Male Body*, pp. 7, 31-33.
- <sup>46</sup> Roberta J. Park, 'Muscles, Symmetry and Action: "Do you measure up?" Defining masculinity in Britain and America from the 1860s to the early 1900s', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22:3 (2005), pp. 367-73.
- <sup>47</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p. 222.
- <sup>48</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, pp. 215-20.
- <sup>49</sup> Tumblety, *Rethinking the Male Body*, p. 17; MacDonald, *Strong, Beautiful and Modern*, p. 37.
- <sup>50</sup> Begiato, 'Between Poise and Power', pp. 137-41.
- <sup>51</sup> Descriptions of blackened faces could also be seen through a racialised lens and warrant a deeper analysis beyond the scope of this article. Miners' Welfare Commission, *Mining People*, p. 6.
- <sup>52</sup> Robert Wilson, *The Coal Miners of Durham and Northumberland: Their Habits and Diseases: A Paper Read Before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, at Newcastle, 1st of September, 1863*; Clarke, "'Noble Bodies'", pp. 438-40.
- <sup>53</sup> SWCC Pamphlet Collection, The Mining Association of Great Britain, *The Other Side of the Miner's Life: A Sketch of Welfare Work in the Mining Industry* (London, 1936), p. 6.
- <sup>54</sup> Greenwood, *How the Other Man Lives*, p. 32; Zweig, *Men in the Pits*, pp. 4-7.
- <sup>55</sup> B. L. Coombes, *Home on the Hill: An Autobiography* [Extracts from an unpublished manuscript], in Bill Jones and Chris Williams, eds., *With Dust Still in His Throat: A B. L. Coombes Anthology* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 14.
- <sup>56</sup> Thomas Idris Lewis, *The Ideal Miner* (Neath, 2003), pp. 18-9.
- <sup>57</sup> Hansard, House of Commons Debates, 7 April 1937, cc. 245 and 253.
- <sup>58</sup> House of Commons Debates, 7 April 1937, vol. 322, c. 252.
- <sup>59</sup> *Life in South Wales Today*, p. 32; *Social Service in South Wales 1937-1938: The Fourth Annual Report of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Council of Social Service* (c.1938), p. 8; GA, UDR/C/65/505, D. J. Jones (Clerk of the Council), Rhondda Urban District Council: Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937, 28 June 1938; and Rhondda Urban District Council: Education Committee Report, 29 June, 1938.
- <sup>60</sup> Producer Paul Rotha worked closely with local men to develop the script and it is a relatively authentic portrayal of working-class views.
- <sup>61</sup> *To-Day We Live*.
- <sup>62</sup> *Western Mail*, 17 January 1939; *Social Service in South Wales 1937-1938*, p. 12.
- <sup>63</sup> *Western Mail*, 6 February 1939.

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- <sup>64</sup> Glamorgan Archives (GA), UDR/C/65/505, Report: Sub-Committee Appointed to Deal with the Provisions of the Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937, 9 December 1937. Zweig also notes the particular appeal of tennis in south Wales. F. Zweig, *Men in the Pits* (London, 1948), p. 106.
- <sup>65</sup> Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, pp. 23-4.
- <sup>66</sup> Coombes, *Home on the Hill*, pp. 14-5.
- <sup>67</sup> For how clothing expressed masculinity see, Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p. 196.
- <sup>68</sup> Foster Lewis, *The Miner's Tale: Recollections of Events in the Inconsequential Life of a South Wales Coal Miner, 1916-1938* (Pontyclun, 1999), p. 14; John Williams interview; SWML, AUD/201, Henry Lewis interview, 4 February 1972.
- <sup>69</sup> Walter Greenwood, *How the Other Man Lives* (London, 1939), p. 35. See also, Coombes, *Home on the Hill*, p. 14.
- <sup>70</sup> Walter Haydn Davies, *The Right Place, The Right Time* (Swansea, 1975), pp. 16-7.
- <sup>71</sup> 'Herbert James Smith of Abertillery', in Jeffrey Grenfell-Hill, ed., *Growing up in Wales 1895-1939* (Llandysul, 1996), p. 97.
- <sup>72</sup> Arthur Bryant, 'Foreword', in Tomlinson, *Coal-Miner*, p. 7.
- <sup>73</sup> Lewis, *The Ideal Miner*, pp. 69-70.
- <sup>74</sup> *Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board, 1936*, p. 993.
- <sup>75</sup> For example, John Williams Interview.
- <sup>76</sup> F. Ray Bentley, 'Colliers' Stripes – The Coal-Miners' Dermatitis', *British Journal of Dermatology*, 52, no. 4 (1940), p. 129.
- <sup>77</sup> Lewis, *The Ideal Miner*, p. 69.
- <sup>78</sup> Evans, *The University of 'Hard Knocks'*, p. 11.
- <sup>79</sup> Bentley, 'Colliers' Stripes', p. 129.
- <sup>80</sup> Baron, 'Masculinity', p. 152.
- <sup>81</sup> *Blue Scar*; Chopper Davies, *Blue Scars: The Badge of a Miner* (Bloomington, IN: 2011).
- <sup>82</sup> Morgan, *My Lamp Still Burns*, p. 18.
- <sup>83</sup> SWCC Pamphlet Collection, The Mining Association of Great Britain, *The Other Side of the Miner's Life: A Sketch of Welfare Work in the Mining Industry* (London, 1936), p. 10.
- <sup>84</sup> Edward Thomas interview.
- <sup>85</sup> Penry Davies interview.
- <sup>86</sup> Jim Evans interview.
- <sup>87</sup> F. H. Smith, 'In a Mining Village', in Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *Life As We Have Known It* (London, 1997 edn), pp. 67-72; Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *Maternity: Letters From Working Women* (London, 1978 edn), pp. 1-17.
- <sup>88</sup> Joseph Jones, *The Coal Scuttle* (London, 1936), p. 18.
- <sup>89</sup> Coombes does note how younger women could discuss men's bodies in a sexual way. Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, pp. 23-4.
- <sup>90</sup> Curtis and Thompson, "'This is the Country of Premature Old Men'", pp. 594-5.
- <sup>91</sup> *Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Period Ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1935* [Cmd. 5177], vol. xiii, 1935-36, p. 18.
- <sup>92</sup> *Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board, 1935*, pp. 363, 393-5.
- <sup>93</sup> *Report of the Unemployment Assistance Board for the Period Ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1938* [Cmd. 6021], vol. xii, 1938-39, pp. 453-4.
- <sup>94</sup> Eli Ginzberg, *Grass on the Slag Heaps: The Story of the Welsh Miners* (London, 1942), p. 100.
- <sup>95</sup> For example, A. J. Cook 'Foreword', in, Wal Hannington, *The March of the Miners: How We Smashed the Opposition* (London, 1927).
- <sup>96</sup> *King Coal*. Directed by Jules Pinschewer. National Coal Board, 1948.
- <sup>97</sup> The experiences of black miners working within the region whose experiences is particularly important. The bodies of white immigrants could be viewed as weak in comparison to local British men: Stephen Catterall and Keith Gildart, 'Outsiders: Trade Union Responses to Polish and Italian Coal Miners in two British Coalfields, 1945-54', in Stefan Bergerm Andy Croll and Norman Laporte (eds), *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 168.
- <sup>98</sup> Lewis, *The Ideal Miner*, p. 70.