

# Issues of Gender in *Muscle Beach Party* (1964)

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*Muscle Beach Party* (1964) is the second in a series of seven films made by American International Pictures (AIP) based around a similar set of characters and set (by and large) on the beach. The Beach Party series, as it came to be known, rode on a wave of surfing fever amongst teenagers in the early 1960s. The films depicted the carefree and affluent lifestyle of a group of middle class, white Californian teenagers on vacation and are described by Granat as, "...California's beautiful people in a setting that attracted moviegoers. The films did not 'hold a mirror up to nature', yet they mirrored the glorification of California taking place in American culture." (Granat, 1999:191) The films were critically condemned. *The New York Times* critic, for instance, noted, "...almost the entire cast emerges as the dullest bunch of meatballs ever, with the old folks even sillier than the kids..." (McGee, 1984: 150) Despite their dismissal as mere froth, the Beach Party series may enable an identification of issues of concern in the wider American society of the early sixties.

The *Beach Party* films are sequential, beginning with *Beach Party* (1963) advertised as a "musical comedy of summer, surfing and romance" (*Beach Party* Press Pack). *Beach Party* was so successful that AIP wasted no time in producing six further films; *Muscle Beach Party* (1964), *Pajama Party* (1964) *Bikini Beach* (1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965) *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965) and *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (1966). As the series progressed, the films developed the gloss of the mainstream Hollywood musical, featuring larger and more contrived production numbers and losing much spontaneity in the process. Such was their success that other film studios copied the idea of teenagers on holiday with a background of surfing and a dash of sex in films such as Twentieth Century Fox's *Surf Party* (1964), Paramount's *The Girls on the Beach* (1965) and *Beach Ball* (1965). AIP varied the generic formula with two films in the series, *Pajama Party* and *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini*; the former transposed the beach to a suburban back garden, and the latter blended the horror and beach genres. The surf motif was mixed with other popular genres in AIP's *Dr Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965) a blend of spy/surf. The surf/horror blend was also used in *The Horror of Party Beach* (1963), described as "the first horror monster musical" (Granat, 1999: 187) and U.S. Films Inc, *Beach Girls and the Monster* (1965). AIP also transposed the teenagers from the surf to the ski slopes in *Ski Party* (AIP 1964); Lenny Weinrib too copied this in Universal's *Wild Wild Winter* (1966).

However, the Beach Party series was the most popular of all the surf inspired films. Their popularity may have been due to a subtext of reassurance in the face of the threat from outsiders to American society (Morris, 1993) or because of their depiction of a watered down version of exotic otherness (Rutsky, 1999). Familiarity with characters and a continuing narrative from film to film may also play a part in this reassurance. Comedians such as Morey Amsterdam and Harvey Lembeck played secondary characters Cappy and Eric von Zipper; Don Rickles played the same character Jack Fanny/ Big Drop/ Big Drag, but changed his persona from film to film. The films also had intergenerational appeal with old time stars

Boris Karloff, Buster Keaton and Peter Lorre for adults and surfers such as Deadhead (Jody McCrea), Johnny (John Ashley) and Candy (Candy Johnson) for teen audiences.

Most of the films starred or featured Frankie Avalon as Frankie, the leader of the surfers, and Annette Funicello as his girlfriend, Dolores/Dee Dee, on their last vacation before adulthood. The plots usually centred on the ways in which the surfers responded to the problems posed by the arrival of outsiders on their beach, perhaps reflecting a response to the Cold War and the threat of Communist invasion felt in America. The *Beach Party* films' production, approximately three months from conception to distribution, was so rapid that one could argue the film narratives would more readily reflect concerns and worries of the day in American culture. *Bikini Beach*, for instance, produced late in 1964, features English pop star Potato Bug, played by Frankie Avalon in a Beatle wig, as a parody of the Beatles who toured America in February of that year. The depiction of Potato Bug is a caricature of the American perception of Englishmen, an exaggerated tally ho, upper class manner emphasising the Englishman's sense of fair play. However, a sense of disquiet underpins the representation exhibited by the male characters -- not only does Potato Bug attract all the girls on the beach, he also steals America's rock 'n' roll music.

The "invaders on the beach" in *Muscle Beach Party* are a group of bodybuilders lead by Jack Fanny (Don Rickles). AIP probably included bodybuilders in this film because of the popularity of Peplum films at the time. Indeed, AIP starred Rock Stevens (Peter Lupus) in several films such as *Hercules and the Tyrants of Babylon* (1964) and *Goliath and the Conquest of Damascus* (1964) for AIP (Brian's Drive in Movie Theatre, 13/03/00: 2). *Muscle Beach Party* explores and mocks different notions of sexuality and gender identity of concern in the early sixties. Mockery and ridicule are targeted on the bodies and lifestyles of the bodybuilders and transgressive characters such as Contessa Juliana (Julie). The film begins with the return of Frankie, Dee Dee and their friends to the beach for Easter vacation. They discover that a group of bodybuilders led by Jack Fanny (Don Rickles), their trainer, have set up a gym on the beach. Fanny and his shadowy partner, ex-bodybuilder Mr Stringdower (Peter Lorre), own the rights to Flex Martian AKA Mr Galaxy, (Peter Lupus, then called Rock Stevens). They aim to get funding for a string of gymnasiums throughout America promoting Mr Galaxy's body and Fanny's training methods. Lascivious, rich European Contessa Julie (Luciana Paluzzi) appears on the beach lusting after Flex Martian. She has the capital that Fanny needs to further his ambitions, so he sells her Flex and the rest of the bodybuilders who are all under contract to him. The fickle Contessa, however, turns her attention to Frankie when she hears him sing. Romantic complications ensue between Frankie and Dee Dee, but Frankie gives up the Contessa when he realises she wants to control him. Despite his seeming easygoing nature, Frankie, is unwilling to be controlled by any woman, even if she promises him an easy life, his heart's desire, and sexual availability without responsibility. He prefers to stay with his friends and keep his freedom on the beach. The price of dependence on a woman is too high. Articulating the early 60s ideology of man the hunter in the sex war, Frankie tells the Contessa, "When there's moves to be made, I'll make them." The film climaxes in a comedy fight sequence between the bodybuilders and surfers. The confrontation is resolved when Mr Stringdower, Jack Fanny's partner and Flex's father, appears and restores order by dragging Flex away.

*Muscle Beach Party* and the *Beach Party* films seem to deal with gender in a simplistic way. Surfers, through the values expressed by Frankie, articulate an ideal notion of masculinity, they are real men who will not be ruled by a woman. Their lifestyle, free from parental restraint, suggests they are independent and responsible. Bodybuilders, in the person of Flex,

however, seem willing to be bankrolled and dominated by women. Flex is dominated by a quasi mother, Jack Fanny, who fusses over his eating habits and daily routine, and his absent father, Mr Stringdower, who drags him away in the final reel, telling him he is too young for girls. Flex's last words, "Poppa don't spank me," identify him as a child in a man's body, under parental control unlike the surfers. It is the difference between surfer independence and bodybuilder dependence which is at the root of the different representations of the two sports. In this context it is important to consider the historical and discursive similarities in these sports.

Surfing became popular in California from the late fifties through a combination of mass media exploitation and advances in surfing technology. Before the late '50s surfing was regarded with suspicion by the middle classes. *Time* ran a series of articles in the late '50s linking surfing with other signs of juvenile delinquency such as biking, hot-rodding and drug taking. However, by the late fifties/early sixties, surfing was becoming increasingly popular; the September 1961 issue of *Life* notes: "...now the surf that sweeps in on the beaches bears flotillas of enthusiasts standing on long buoyant boards...Surfing has become an established craze in California." (Szatmary, 1996: 83) The growing popularity of surfing, especially with teenagers, owed much to the release by Columbia of the film *Gidget* (1959) starring Sandra Dee and James Darren, which sparked a mass media craze for surfing extending over pop music, films, magazines and television shows. The accessibility of surfing as a pastime was made possible by the production of foam rather than rare balsa wood boards. Hobie Alter, a pioneer surfboard maker claimed, "If that movie [*Gidget*]...come out in the balsa era...no one could have supplied 'em" (Kampion, 1998: 69).

Like surfing, bodybuilding culture was centred on the beach in California. However, it was also linked with the gym and entertainment. The bodybuilders in *Muscle Beach Party* are modelled on the bodybuilding subculture that sprang up around Santa Monica Beach at the beginning of the 1930s. Crowds of up to 10,000 people gathered to watch athletes and bodybuilders exercise and perform tricks on Santa Monica Beach from the early 1930s (Website: Remembering Muscle Beach 06.01.00). Indeed, some of the male stars from epic and peplum movies of the 1950s and 60s, notably Steve Reeves, had their origins at Muscle Beach. Like surfing, bodybuilding was regarded with suspicion in the fifties, although for a quite different reason -- homosexuality. Homosexuality in this era was regarded as potentially more damaging to society than the wild antics of surfers. The link between bodybuilding and homosexuality has a number of different origins and is elaborated in more detail below, but centres around the display of their bodies in "physique" magazines in the late fifties and early sixties (Waugh, 1996). "Physique" culture which reached its peak between 1955-65, consisted of male models either posing naked or in erotic fantasy scenarios. The male as object of desire raised concerns about homosexuality, concerns which were not alleviated by the Kinsey Report on Male Sexuality (1948) which suggested that many more men were homosexuals than had been thought. Homosexuality undermined the basis for masculine power in America of the early sixties as it destabilised the perceived "natural" order of what it was to be male.

The notion of the naturalness of sexuality depends upon biological difference for its validation. Who wields the penis has the power. In the binary male/female, the male has the power and this power is invested in the penis. The penis is regarded as the penetrative organ, the vagina, its receptacle. However, as Bordo points out, this hierarchical relationship could just as easily be explained as, "...the vagina...actively holding, containing or enclosing the penis as being 'penetrated' by it." (Bordo, 1997: 288-289) It is clear that the notion of the

active penis is at the basis of a perception of masculinity and that it is a cultural construction. In early sixties America, the notion of masculinity was predicated upon heterosexuality and family life. It is this binary in which male is predicated on "not female" which is at the root of notions of gender in sixties America. The male body is a site in which the distinction between male/female is most potently depicted for the male torso is differentiated from the female by its hardness and angularity (Easthope, 1992; Pronger, 1990). The binary male/hard: female/soft is founded on heterosexuality (Easthope 1992) for it assumes the normality of masculinity and femininity and the roles of man and woman based on culturally ordained norms. MacInnes (1998) notes that gender is an historical and cultural construct to explain the different roles and inequalities of men and women in society. It is in the interests of men, who hold the power in early '60s America, for the roles to remain this way. Representations of the happy family and the happy housewife are repeatedly shown on television in sitcoms such as *Bewitched* and *Father Knows Best*. In light comedy films such as *That Touch of Mink* (1962) and *Pillow Talk* (1959) there may be romantic complications, Cary Grant and Rock Hudson may think they enjoy their bachelor lifestyle, but they always succumb to marital bliss and the prospect of happy family life in the final reel. However, *Muscle Beach Party* (and a study of gender in some Rock Hudson vehicles such as *Pillow Talk* [Vanneman, 1999]) seems to disrupt the simplistic and essentialist ideas of sexuality in early sixties America.

A reading of *Muscle Beach Party* in accordance with the producers' preferred meaning (Hall, 1996) suggests a set of binaries derived from the above discussion:

Surfer	Bodybuilder
Freedom/power	Control/restriction
Adult	Childish
Outdoors (beach)	Indoors (gym)
Independent (no parents)	Dependent (parental control)
Heterosexual	Homosexual

The binaries indicate an ideal notion of American masculinity which positions masculinity with independence, freedom, the great outdoors, against bodybuilders as controlled, dependent and immature. The binary articulates the perception of wider American society towards gender, it assumes that masculinity and femininity may only be expressed in a specific way. This article will demonstrate how representations of gender in *Muscle Beach Party* reveal the tensions particularly concerning masculinity in America in the early sixties. To better understand why representations of gender are depicted in a specific manner in *Muscle Beach Party*, it is important to explore how and why the beach series was produced by AIP and the cultural context for the production of the film, for as Austin points out, "...emphasising the individual procedures of market research, textual assembly and promotion corrects the implication in some studies that audiences read or 'activate' texts in scenarios unshaped by such practices." (Austin, 1999: 147) It will then be possible to identify contradictions of gender representation within the text.

### **Exploiting The Beach: American International Pictures, Beach Appeal And Teenage Audiences**

The mode of production of the Beach Party series cannot be dissociated from the narrative of *Muscle Beach Party* as it provides insight into why certain marginalized groups such as bodybuilders, juvenile delinquents and beats were ridiculed and stereotyped. AIP was one of the few film production companies in the 1950s to make a profit on most of the films it produced. AIP's success was due to clever marketing strategy, quick turnover of cheaply made films, and the distribution of films to independent cinemas and drive-in theatres. James Nicholson, one of the two founding directors of the company admitted, "We are not interested in Academy Awards...only in pictures which the exhibitor can play with the assurance that he will make a profit." (McGee, 1984:16) The company made their profits by targeting teenagers, the fastest growing film audience; a Motion Picture Association study in 1958 showed that 58% of film-goers were under twenty-five (Granat, 1999:107). AIP identified older teenage boys as the most important teenage group. The reasoning behind this strategy is based on what the AIP publicity department described as "The Peter Pan Syndrome":

- a) a younger child will watch anything an older child will watch;
- b) an older child will not watch anything a younger child will watch;
- c) a girl will watch anything a boy will watch;
- d) a boy will not watch anything a girl will watch; therefore,

to catch your greatest audience you zero in on the 19-year old male. (Doherty, 1988:157)

Prior to the Beach Party series, AIP's output consisted of a string of low budget B movies which emphasised violence, sex and juvenile delinquency. The favoured genres were horror (*Bucket of Blood* [1958] *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* [1957]), science fiction (*The Beast with a Million Eyes* [1956]) and social comment films (*Hot Rod Gang* [1958] *Hot Rod Girl* [1958]), known as Juvenile Delinquent (JD) films. As Rutsky (1999) notes, JD films tended to be serious, masquerading as social commentary, they depicted teenagers acting in an aggressive, anti-social and wild manner. Production values were cheap -- until the early '60s, the films were made in black and white, shot within three weeks for between \$10,000 to \$65,000 and the emphasis was on sensation. In the Beach Party series AIP moved away from its representation of teenagers as a problem to teenagers as "normal" fun loving kids out for a good time. Doherty places this change in representation of teenagers as part of a wider cultural pattern which he identifies as the "clean teen phenomenon." Morris (1993) claims that *Beach Party* (1963) is symptomatic of AIP's move towards respectability. As AIP was investing more capital in its films, it aimed to move towards mainstream films; where previously it commented from outside the system, now it attempted to articulate mainstream sentiments more overtly and "toe the line." AIP may, as Morris (1993) argues, have been attempting to achieve greater respectability. However, they may have also attempted to follow the lead of the first surfing film, *Gidget*, and its sequels.

*Gidget* was a watered down adaptation of Fred Kohner's 1956 bestseller about his daughter Kathy's exploits with a group of surf bums at Malibu. The press pack described *Gidget* as, "...a holiday in the sun for audiences", simultaneously positioning the film as a holiday and aimed at both teenagers and adults who were "young at heart." (*Gidget* Press Pack) *Gidget* is part of the "clean teen phenomenon", starring Sandra Dee, the epitome of the clean, virginal,

middle class, white teen. Set in Malibu, *Gidget*, tells the story of Frances (Sandra Dee), a teenage girl on the brink of womanhood, who is saved from drowning by Moondoggie (James Darren), a surfer. The romantic rivalry between Moondoggie and the leader of the surf bums, Kahuna (Cliff Robertson) for Frances results in Moondoggie returning to college and Kahuna going off to find a job, something he has previously avoided. The teenagers represented in *Gidget* are middle class kids, rebelling briefly against middle class conformity before settling down. Moondoggie is also revealed as a slumming white, middle class kid and there is little question that he and Gidget will eventually marry and settle down. Although surfing is little more than a backdrop to the main story, the romanticised hedonistic lifestyle and Californian culture made a deep impression on teenagers in America. The surfing lifestyle was depicted as hedonistic and carefree; surfers live on the beach, scrounge off their parents and friends, and enjoy themselves drinking, surfing and partying. Conversely, the comfortable middle-class Californian lifestyle is epitomised by Frances' family who live in suburbia, can afford a car and give her twenty dollars to buy a surfboard.

Following the success of *Gidget*, Columbia released *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961) in which Gidget (Deborah Whalley) and Moondoggie (James Darren) travel to Hawaii to surf. It is the representations of "clean teens" in films such as *Gidget*, Pat Boone vehicles (*April Love* [1957], *Bernadine* [1957]), and Bobby Darin and Sandra Dee films (*Come September* [1960], *If a Man Answers Your Phone* [1962]), which AIP used as a model for the teenagers in the Beach Party series. Gone was the juvenile delinquent, the rebel without a cause of the '50s. In its place was a blander teenage consumer who took advantage of all the benefits of affluence won by their middle class parents and who possessed a significant disposable income: "The clean teen phenomenon was a quite literal product of the parent culture, fabricated from above, peddled down below." (Doherty, 1988: 221) Teenage groups became prime advertising and media exploitation targets. Surfing was primarily a white, middle class pastime. Surfboards and surf accessories were costly and needed transport to inaccessible beaches. Surfing, therefore was an ideal exploitation gimmick for the mass media as the teenage surfers were regarded as possessing a good deal of disposable income.

Pop music, the most visible sign of surfing in the early sixties, played a major part in promoting the surf craze and surf inspired music hits peaked 1963-64. In 1963 Jan and Dean reached number one in the American Billboard chart with *Surf City*, the Surfari's reached number two with *Wipeout*, and the *Beach Boys* reached number three with *Surfin' USA* (Szatmary, 1996). Surf music extolled the excitement of surfing and the Californian lifestyle. The Beach Boys, Jan and Dean, Dick Dale and His Del-Tones and the Hondells had hits devoted to surfing, in addition to songs emphasising themes such as cars (*Little Deuce Coupe*), girls (*Surf City* ["two girls for every boy"]) and fun (*Fun, Fun, Fun*).

Pop music was also a prominent feature of surf movies. Beach Boy Brian Wilson co-wrote the songs with Gary Usher for *Muscle Beach Party*. Pop stars often performed their latest hits as star spotlights; the Beach Boys performed in *The Girls on the Beach* (1965), and *Beach Ball* (1965) boasts five performing acts including The Supremes, The Righteous Brothers and The Animals. The stars of the *Beach Party* series, Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello, were manufactured teen stars. Avalon, discovered and groomed by Bob Marcucci, enjoyed chart success with hits such as *Venus*, a top ten hit in 1959 on both sides of the Atlantic. He also starred in films such as *Disc Jockey Jamboree* (1957) and became popular on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*, a television show designed to promote "clean teens." Annette Funicello was the most famous Mouseketeer of Disney's *Mickey Mouse Club* and brought her star persona of the girl next door to her role of Dolores/Dee Dee. Mouseketeers were

promoted as normal children who did not possess the precocious talents of the Hollywood child star. They were described by the *Boston Post* in 1956 as "a symbol of American youth...[who]...epitomize all that's healthy, normal and happy." (Granat, 1999:75)

"Healthy, normal and happy", however, were virtues based on sound middle class values, including a rigid attitude towards gender roles. A typical episode of the *Mickey Mouse Club* featured a slot entitled "When I Grow Up Someday" in which Mouseketeers expressed their ambitions. Boys aimed to be "a doctor, a lawyer, a financier", whereas girls wanted to be, "a nurse, a hostess, a bank cashier." (Granat, 1999:84) Within the context of the fifties and sixties the seeming lack of ambition in girls was by no means limited to the *Mickey Mouse Club*. It was accepted throughout American society that the ambition of most women was to be a wife and homemaker. It is this ambition which spurs Dolores/Dee Dee on.

Frankie and Dee Dee's relationship is articulated in the song, "A Girl Needs a Boy" sung by Dee Dee in *Muscle Beach Party*. Dee Dee sings of a boy being a girl's "own special boy", she acts as a support to the male, but does not seem to wish for any autonomy of her own. Conversely, Frankie represents healthy American male teenage values encoded in heterosexuality. In his response to Dee Dee's "A Girl Needs a Boy", Frankie sings that a boy needs a girl he can count on, to share his hopes, and the girl needs a boy she can cling to. This positions the man as holding the power in the relationship. A girl is weak and needs a man to protect her. The song binds both Frankie and Dee Dee together as it demonstrates they share similar values in a relationship based on the exchange of virginity for marriage (Marchetti and Slingo, 1982).

It may seem, therefore, that the Beach films articulate the white middle class values of the wider American society in the early sixties. However, as Rutsky argues, the films are underpinned by the danger and exoticism of otherness in surfing and rock 'n' roll: "the very idea of a beach party suggests teenagers listening to rock-and-roll music and dancing in a manner that was already seen by the guardians of morality to be heavily sexualised, and doing so in swim trunks, and, especially, bikinis." (Rutsky, 1999:17) This, according to Rutsky, is the basis for their appeal to teenagers. It may also be argued that AIP's mode of production is also a means of appealing to teenagers.

AIP's manner of production was not the usual Hollywood film studio method of producing a script which was then made into a film and marketed. Under the direction of James Nicholson, AIP produced a title which was tested on target audiences -- "teenager" was consistently popular in fifties titles such as *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1958). The attraction of "beach" and "bikini" was emphasised in beach series titles, linking sexuality with the transgressive potential of the beach. *Beach Blanket Bingo*, for instance, is a play on words of "back seat bingo" -- teenagers heavy petting or having sex in the back seat of a car, usually in the drive-in theatre. Of the seven beach films, "bikini" was used in three. The bikini was invented in the mid-forties and, although by the early '60s bikinis had become popular, they retained an air of daring. Indeed, Annette's contract stipulated that she was not allowed to wear a bikini in the beach films, as Walt Disney felt it would tarnish her image. If the film title proved popular then AIP produced a marketing campaign. In the Beach series, the advertising and marketing campaign copy reinforced the allusion to sexuality held out by the titles. For instance, the advertising copy for a *Muscle Beach Party* poster, "When 10,000 biceps go around 5,000 bikinis...you know what's gonna happen!" makes an indirect allusion to *Beach Party*, "you know what's gonna happen", whilst hinting at sexual freedom and a teenage orgy. Only when they were certain of the success of a film, would the script be

written and the film shot. This, in addition to what Rutsky argues is the attraction of the other may be key attractions for teenagers. However, the films' narratives did not live up to the promise of the posters, although they had all the ingredients for a sex romp. The premise of *Beach Party* (1963), for instance, is that an anthropologist, Professor Sutwell (Robert Cummings) studies the surfers through a telescope to discover more about their "tribe" for a book. The premise holds out the potential for the pleasures of illicit gazing on teenage sex. The film however, diverts this potentially sexual comedy into a light romantic comedy centred on the relationship of Frankie and Dee Dee, which as discussed above, is founded on gender stereotypes. It is the cultural gender stereotypes which Frankie and Dee Dee represent which must now be examined as they emerged from the cultural and historical context of American society of the early sixties.

### **Gender identity and the crisis in masculinity in sixties America**

As previously discussed, gender in the early '60s was constructed in a specific fashion: boys were expected to become doctors, lawyers or stockbrokers, girls, cashiers, mothers and housewives. In the fifties and early sixties, the "normal" American was encapsulated, and represented as white, middle class and a family man (Kimmel). In the media, the family was represented as a father who was the breadwinner, a mother who stayed at home and had two or three children. Sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* depicted a family unit based upon Christian values, togetherness, honesty and dependability. Children and wife looked up to and respected the father. However, there was a problem with the "family man"; he was predicated on the notion of the family man wielding the power in the family, yet he was shackled and tamed by home life and the necessity of earning a wage. It is precisely this notion of the "tame" white middle class man that is perceived in the late fifties-early sixties as the underpinning problem with American masculinity. Cohan (1995) asserts that masculinity in American films of the fifties responds to the perception of a crisis in masculinity. In the fifties the "cold warrior" abroad and the "soft" breadwinner at home represent the ideal man in film. However, these two representations of masculinity are problematic as the hardness and courage of the "cold warrior" is difficult to reconcile with the "soft" breadwinner. The "soft" breadwinner is a paradoxical concept. There is a clear difference between male and female roles before the fifties when the American male is represented as a producer of goods whereas the female is a consumer of goods. The "soft" breadwinner destroys this difference in roles as he is a businessman or advertising executive who manipulates symbols rather than making goods. The "soft" breadwinner is a college graduate, organisation man, tied to the boss, the company and the family. He can only dream and attempt to emulate his frontiersman roots with DIY and hobbies (Kimmel, 1996). The paradox in the representation of masculinity is expressed in magazine articles and in academic and psychological debates of the period. In a 1958 edition of *Look* Moskin writes, "...he (American man) is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness." (Cohan, 1995 :48)

In the context of ridiculing the "soft" breadwinner, it may be argued, surfers and surfing represent a trace of the myth of the American frontier man to castrated suburban man (Slotkin, 1985). Surfers are free from the shackles of domesticity. They are represented as free spirits, unwilling to work or settle down. This is shown in the lifestyles of Kahuna in *Gidget* and Frankie in the *Beach Party* series. Although it is obvious that Frankie and Dee Dee will eventually marry and settle down, Frankie's express aim is to avoid responsibility. In *Muscle Beach Party* when Dee Dee complains that he is irresponsible, Frankie tells her to "Relax, take it easy, let the world slide." When Dee Dee says she wants them to be together,

Frankie's rejoinder is that being together means being "in hock", in "Icebox City." He does not want to slip the handcuffs of marriage on yet. He rejects the role of suburban, family man and is unwilling to settle down and let the cares of the world and responsibility weigh him down. Frankie tells Dee Dee, "I want it easy and I want it free. I want it without the ropes, squares, bills or bombs. This is my world because I don't ask anything of it." In *Muscle Beach Party*, the concept of American masculinity encapsulated by Frankie demonstrates the paradox of masculinity. He denies the ideal representation of the "soft" breadwinner and its capitalist underpinning in favour of the surfer as frontier man. As such Frankie represents the myth of the frontier for the middle class suburban male. It is a myth of man in control of his environment and surroundings. To the middle class white suburban male existing in a world in which he seems to be losing control, the frontier myth was attractive and desirable. However, Frankie as a sign of the frontier myth was problematic for he would not have the means to relax, take it easy and let the world slide, were it not for the comfort afforded by capitalist culture. However, Frankie voices concerns expressed by American college youth in that era against the very group to whom they owed their comfortable lifestyles.

In the late 50s-early 60s the privileged position of white middle class masculinity was achieved by the marginalisation of other groups such as teenagers, women, homosexuals and black people. Marginalised groups began to organise themselves and voice their dissatisfaction with the status quo by the early sixties, or they protested in other ways such as civil disobedience or peaceful demonstrations. For instance, the number of women entering the workforce had grown from 4.1 million in 1948 to 7.5 million in 1958. Many women worked to strengthen the family income, but there were also many middle class women who wished to develop careers. However, inequality in the workplace with low pay and lack of job opportunities lead to complaints which were superficially addressed by a clause in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 banning discrimination on the grounds of sex. Women were also seizing control over their sexuality and fertility with the widening availability of the contraceptive pill in the early sixties. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 articulated women's concerns, describing the home as a "comfortable concentration camp." Yet women were represented in films and television as homemakers, or if they were career women, their aim, as shown in films such as *Pillow Talk*, was to become homemakers.

The threat posed by women to white, middle class masculine America can be measured by their representations in popular cultural texts, specifically in the way strong women were depicted. Strong women are either "tamed" or punished. In *Beach Party* and other surf exploitation films, "real" women do not surf, they ride on surfers' shoulders, adore the daredevil exploits of their surfer boyfriends, or wait for their men on the beach. Representations in the Beach films tend to fall into three types: the good girl (Dee Dee), exotic "bad" girls (Eva Six, Julie) and "magical" women. Bad girls are beautiful, alluring, often rich or famous, but unmarriageable because they are sexually available. They constitute temptation for Frankie because they promise sex without strings. Frankie resists temptation to return to the arms of his sweetheart, girl-next-door Dee Dee, who guarantees faithfulness. Women are also depicted as powerful forces of nature. Candy Johnson is able to knock men over with her dancing by merely jerking her hips in their direction. The girl in the bikini, in *Bikini Beach*, causes mayhem wherever she goes because men cannot take their eyes off her figure. The Bikini spirit conjured up by a witchdoctor (Buster Keaton) in *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* bedazzles all men (Rutsky, 1999). The representation of the allure of "bad" girls and male powerlessness against Candy Johnson et al is perhaps an indicator of masculine unease at women's power. "Bad" girls transgress a woman's role in the context of early sixties America in which a girl waiting on the beach may be regarded as a consumer accessory for

the middle class male surfer. A girl on the beach reflects a surfer's status or wealth, for the surfing lifestyle is expensive to maintain. In his semiotic study of the beach, Fiske asserts:

The beach is a place for looking, (Sun, Surf, Sand and See), for possession of the female by the male look. The girls are not sunbaking merely to produce a tan to take nature back into the suburbs, nor are they swimming out of culture into nature, but are constituting themselves as bearers of meanings for men. (Fiske, 1983:127)

"Bad" girls do not know their place as they usurp male power. Aggressive or clever women are frequently punished or mocked in films such as *Where the Boys Are* (1960) (Marchetti and Slingo, 1982). A woman's worth is measured by whether she is a virgin and placid. In *Beach Party* there is no doubt Frankie will marry Dee Dee/Dolores as she is the virginal girl next door.

However, just as women were constrained in a specific gender role, so men were straitjacketed into a specific type of behaviour and appearance. The unease over masculinity may be identified in "the womanization of America" campaign run by *Playboy* between 1958-1962. According to *Playboy*, the womanization of men resulted in an increase in homosexuality between 1912-1962. The claim that homosexuality was prevalent was supported by academic study of male sexuality. Homosexuals were thought to result from the absent or workaholic father figure and over-dominant mother. For instance, an article in *Better Homes and Gardens* of 1958 states: "You have a horror of seeing your son a pantywaist, but he won't get red blood and self-reliance if you leave the whole job of making a he-man of him to his mother." (Quoted in Kimmel, 1996: 147). The over-dominant woman, then, is regarded as the root of problems with masculinity. If a woman threatens male superiority he resorts to delinquency or homosexuality.

It is in this climate of paranoia over masculinity in which bodybuilders' sexuality was perceived as problematic and attacked accordingly. The main sources of visual display for bodybuilders were in physique magazines, and in films which carried images of bodybuilders posing naked or nearly naked. In his study of male erotic imagery, Waugh notes that by the late fifties/early sixties:

the "physique" movement comprised a vast international network through which circulated thousands of magazines, mail-order photographs, and films, not to mention subsidiary merchandise. The entire network was predicated on bodybuilding as a channel -- and at the same time a camouflage -- for the sexualised male body. (Waugh, 1996: 176)

As early as 1952 the House of Representatives' Gathings Committee on Current Pornographic Materials attacked "nudist" magazines and those which pandered to homosexuals by depicting "the male body beautiful." As Waugh notes, "The increasing gay-baiting and exposés that appeared in the straight bodybuilding magazines...elsewhere in the media, in sex education films, and even in Congress, simply confirms the presence of an open secret that everyone knew but didn't articulate." (Waugh, 1996: 222) The root of the problem of physique magazine images was the promotion of the male body as a site of spectacle and display. The representation of masculinity as spectacle is problematic, Dyer argues, because the male pin-up transgresses the traditional male/female roles of man as bearer of the gaze and woman as object of the look. The male model's body should not be gazed at because it

denotes passivity, the antithesis of masculinity. Therefore, to counter the aggressive and potentially castrating gaze, the male model either engages in activity, looks up or shows interest in an off-screen object.

Bodybuilders as pin-ups wear few clothes to better show off their bodies, and they flex their muscles. Dyer (1984), Kuhn (1985) and Waugh (1996) suggest that muscles and the tautness of the muscular male body may symbolise the phallus, the symbol of masculine power. By pumping up their muscles, especially their arms, bodybuilders mirror the actions of an erect penis. When the Contessa admires Flex, his ego inflation is suggested through his body language (flexing his muscles), speech and camera angle:

Contessa: You are so strong.

Flex: I'm the strongest.

Contessa: You are so handsome.

Flex: I'm the handsomest.

Contessa: You are so big.

Flex: Yes, ma'am.

The latter speech, "You're so big", "Yes, ma'am", implies it is not only Flex's size but also his penis which is big. This further mocks the notion of his masculinity for, as discussed above, the penis is the sign of manhood, and the phallus is the source of masculine power. (Dyer, 1984, Bordo, 1997) The low camera shot accompanying this extract gives Flex the appearance of a giant looking down on the Contessa.

The desirability of size is paramount in the minds of Flex, Jack Fanny and the bodybuilders. In his negotiations with Theodore Grub, Julie's lawyer, Jack Fanny constantly asserts Flex must be given a new title, something bigger than a galaxy. This, of course, is a joking reference to the Mr Universe title, nevertheless it also identifies the importance of size and mass to Fanny and Flex. Flex's description of Frankie as "that little thing" becomes a statement of his belief that big is beautiful. It also demonstrates arrogance, compensating for low self-esteem. Flex attempts to overcome this lack of self-esteem by becoming the best bodybuilder and winning titles. The body may be regarded in this sense as a type of armour and costume (Easthope, 1992), a masquerade. Julie's admiration of his body inflates and boosts his self-esteem.

The idea of the hypermasculine male's superiority over that of the "undernourished mouse" is depicted in the Charles Atlas advertisements featured in American comics and magazines of the early 1960s and earlier. The story is told in the form of a comic strip. A weedy looking boy, bullied on the beach and shunned by his girlfriend, takes the Charles Atlas course, turns on the bully and wins the girl through his enhanced body mass. The bullying and lack of self-esteem due to puny body spur the boy on to build up his musculature and win back the girl. The bodybuilders' low self-esteem is at the root of the Charles Atlas advert; the boy is shown to be inferior when he has sand kicked in his face by the beach bully.

The Charles Atlas narrative is turned on its head in *Muscle Beach Party* and the mouse gets the girl. This apparent contradiction in the typical notion of musculature as attractive in the early 1960s might be accounted for by the last lines in the sequence which suggest that the Contessa and Flex are not talking about Flex's body, rather they are discussing his penis. The reference to his size may also infer that Flex, and the bodies of the other bodybuilders, can also be regarded as penile.

In *Muscle Beach Party*, the bodybuilders are constantly shown as hard, and upright. When the Contessa is introduced to them, they pose, inflating their muscles. Flex, more than any of his gym colleagues, is upright and inflexible, his name indicates he is never limp but hard and flexed. However, Flex's inflexibility and size is a drawback as when he confronts Frankie and attempts to fight with him, Frankie is quicker and more quick-witted. He ducks past Flex, leap-frogging over his head and runs off. Throughout *Muscle Beach Party*, whether in his encounters with Frankie, Mr Stringdower, or as the pseudo-son of Jack Fanny, Flex displays his lack of power. He can never, therefore, hope to achieve the phallus, even though his body may emulate it. As Dyer asserts, the phallus is not to be confused with the penis. The relationship between the phallus and penis is symbolic:

The phallus is not just an arbitrarily chosen symbol of male power; it is crucial that the penis has provided the model for this symbol...This leads to the greatest instability of all for the male image. For the fact is that the penis isn't a patch on the phallus. The penis can never live up to the mystique implied by the phallus. Hence the excessive, even hysterical quality implied of so much male imagery (Dyer, 1984:71).

The phallus is a sign of masculine power, whereas the penis is the corporeal evidence of masculinity. A man does not necessarily possess the phallus because he has a penis. It may be argued that Flex's musculature as sign of masculinity is akin to an empty signifier as it is impotent and meaningless. Also, as noted by Fussell (1997), when he is posing, the bodybuilder is at his weakest as he has starved himself and restricted his intake of fluids to develop musculature. So the notion that Flex can aspire to the phallus is impossible.

Despite their hypermusculature, bodybuilders can never possess the Phallus. In addition, they are doubly disempowered, for not only can they never achieve the Phallus through their bodies, they are also powerless within their own culture. Entrepreneurs and gym owners hold power in the bodybuilding subculture. Bodybuilding subculture emasculates the bodybuilder as it is structured like a feudal/slave system in which the weak (the bodybuilders) are protected by the strong (gym owners and entrepreneurs). Entrepreneurs hold power over the international, national and ideological superstructure of the sport. Klein notes that:

Because of the sport's cultural isolation, bodybuilding ideologies pieced together an ideology and social system that suited its purposes and included elements of Feudalism and fascism, as well as contemporary capitalism. (Klein, 1993:84)

Entrepreneurs such as Joe Weider control the ideology of the sport through magazines and competitions and are frequently champions from the early days of bodybuilding. The nearest figure to the entrepreneur in *Muscle Beach Party*, is Mr Stringdower, Jack Fanny's partner and ex-world champion who is rich enough to own a plush car and a bodyguard.

Underneath the entrepreneurs come the gym owners who make their living from the localised distribution of merchandising. Jack Fanny makes money out of promoting Flex's "Mr Galaxy" title and through it promotes his training methods, gym and merchandising. Jack Fanny also instructs Flex in how he must behave, when he must come home at night, and what he eats. In return for the gym owner's protection, bodybuilders swear allegiance to the gym by signing over their autonomy in a contract. Jack Fanny is able to sell Flex and the bodybuilders because, as they are under contract to him, he owns them. So, when the Contessa's lawyer draws up a contract to buy Flex from him, they discuss plans to market Jack Fanny's wheatgerm bread cut in the shape of Flex Martian.

However, just as Rutsky (1999) highlighted the teenage audience's identification of and desire for otherness as at the origins of Beach movie appeal, I suggest that sexuality and gender in the *Beach Party* films are not as straightforward as might be thought.

### **Gender mutability in Muscle Beach Party**

If one scene encapsulates gender ambiguity in *Muscle Beach Party*, it is when Julie arrives on the beach to inspect the bodybuilders. She walks along the row of bodybuilders who strike rigid poses to show off their muscles until she reaches Flex. Julie gazes at Flex as one might inspect a prize bull (indeed Flex and the other bodybuilders are likened to animals throughout the film). As Flex averts his eyes from Julie's stare, Jack Fanny tells Julie's business manager, "I don't like the look in her eyes. That's not a ladylike look." Julie's penetrating look seems to contradict Dyer's description of the looks exchanged between a man and woman in a film in which there is a series of close-ups moving back and forth between the two, the female exhibiting maidenly coyness, the male looking off camera. Flex neither looks up, nor shows interest in an offscreen object, instead he adopts what Dyer (1984) describes as a female response and averts his eyes in a show of modesty. This behaviour seems contradictory to Dyer's description of the demeanour of the traditional male pin-up but, taking into consideration the preceding discussion about bodybuilders' gender, it is the perceived logical behaviour of a homosexual in sixties America.

However, gender positioning in this scene is more complex than an exploration of masculine spectacle, as it does not account for the behaviour of Julie, who exhibits what might be thought of as masculine behaviour. Here it is useful to consider some ideas of the fluidity of gender identity. Butler (1990, 1991) for instance, argues that sexuality is ultimately unknowable because gender identities are not stable, relying upon "...corporeal signs and other discursive means" in which to produce an *appearance* of gender. (Butler, 1990: 136) In *Muscle Beach Party*, of all the characters, Julie displays gender fluidity in a range of performances. At times, when with Frankie, Julie acts as a coy girlie-girl, dressing in soft fabrics and letting her hair down; with her business manager she is assertive and business-like, but can then become vulnerable and crave affection. When with Flex she almost enacts a drag performance, taking the lead in the relationship and dressing in masculine clothes such as captain's uniform, the ultimate symbol of power on the sea. Julie's cross-dressing subverts and mocks the notion of "true" gender construction (Butler (1990), Kuhn (1985) by highlighting the performative nature of gender. The performative aspect of gender identity proposes various signs of a male or female identity that "produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this over the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause." (Butler, 1990: 136) The notion of gender as a superficial effect rather than an indication of a core identity disrupts the idea of an ultimate, knowable truth about gender. The conclusion

that Butler draws from the unknowable truth about genders is that they "...are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity." (Butler, 1990: 136) As discussed above, in the early sixties the idea that gender is mutable would be dismissed as gender is based on a "primary and stable identity" encapsulated in a male/female binary. The concept of the male/female binary may be developed using Derrida's notion of phallogocentrism (Derrida 1978). Derrida argues that western thought is predicated on the notion of phallogocentrism in which the masculinity is privileged because of a belief in the phallus as a primary signifier and the original. This positions "female" as negative signifier in the binary and therefore, copy of the male. However, "male" cannot exist without "female" as it depends on the negative to construct the positive. Therefore "female" is as important as "male" for without it the binary cannot exist.

Butler uses Derrida's deconstruction of male/female, original/copy, as a model on which to deconstruct heterosexual/homosexual. In Butler's model homosexuality is situated as copy against heterosexuality as the original. This model proposes that if you are gay you can never be heterosexual as heterosexuality is a given state, therefore you can only act out the role of heterosexuality:

Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that "being" lesbian [or gay] is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plenitude of naturalised heterosexuality which will always and only fail. (Butler, 1991:21)

Butler contests this hierarchical situation, arguing that the binary on which heterosexual as original, homosexual as copy is based is problematic. Using Derrida's argument to interrogate the binary, Butler questions the hierarchical positioning of originality versus copy arguing that the notion of heterosexual as "original" requires an essential gender position on which to base its uniqueness:

...origins only make sense to the extent that they are differentiated from that which they produce as derivatives. Hence, if it were not for the notion of homosexuality as copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as origin. (Butler, 1991 :22)

Butler proposes the substitution of "imitation", with its connotations of artifice and performance, for "copy" -- in the binary it is possible for individuals to exhibit a range of gender identities. Imitation implies that gender performance may be affected by societal or cultural constructions of gender behaviour. However, even as it is impossible for homosexuals to imitate the ideal heterosexual position, it is also impossible for heterosexuals to achieve this position, as the position constantly shifts. Moreover homosexuals may exhibit heterosexual behaviour and vice versa.

By applying Butler's ideas to *Muscle Beach Party*, it is possible to demonstrate the ways in which gender in early sixties America was highly problematic, despite its seemingly simplistic representation. As a drag artist Julie does not attempt to pass herself off as masculine, the clothes are merely the means to enact a series of diverse power positions through an invocation of gender masquerades. These masquerades, however, do not define sexual preference, but are often used by women in enacting a series of "masculine" roles, from tomboy and drag king to female husband. (Halberstam, 1988) This position may be

developed to include masculine positions. Masculinity may enact a series of "female" masquerades. To return to Dyer's argument of the male as site of the gaze, in the scene between Julie and Flex, both exhibit mutable gender positions: he as the object of the gaze, a female position; she as the subject of the gaze, a male position. This problematises the power relationship for it is almost like the male/male gaze when both subject and object is male. In this scenario the weaker object becomes feminised, (Bordo, 1997: 286) therefore in this context, it may be entirely natural for Julie to gaze at Flex in this way.

It may seem from the preceding argument that Flex and Julie who exhibit overtly fluid gender identities display attributes which, in historical, societal and cultural contexts, are deemed undesirable. These traits are positioned against the more desirable behaviour of surfers, as real men. However, this might be a mistaken assumption, as the boundary between surfers and bodybuilders might be more ambiguous than at first thought. This may be identified in an examination of the bodies of the surfers, specifically Frankie. In *Muscle Beach Party*, Frankie and the surfers may perform the culturally constructed perception of how men behave, but what if the audience is homosexual? Surfers, despite their avowed dislike of homosexuality, may be subject to the gay gaze on the beach or the locker room where semi-nakedness is the norm (Pronger, 1990). The hard body of the bodybuilder is not the only type of male body prevalent in the "physique" culture of the early sixties: "...by the end of the fifties, slim sensitive types in moody introspective poses had made inroads into the galleries of the impassive jocks." (Waugh, 1996: 245) These new models consisted of dancers, university students and actors, "slim or rounded figures that formerly would have been considered effeminate" (Waugh, 1996:245). Frankie's lithe, small body, his androgynous looks, and bouffant hairstyle which has probably seen the inside of a hair studio rather than the ocean, could be considered effeminate. Frankie, therefore, could be appropriated as an object of gay desire. Frankie may look androgynous; however, in *Muscle Beach Party* the narrative positions him as the locus of truth, a specifically masculine quality (Easthope 1992, Brod 1995). The notion of masculinity as a sign of truth assumes femininity or non-masculinity as a sign of deceit. The concept of masquerade or performance, implying artifice, may therefore be regarded as akin to displaying perceived effeminate traits (Brod 1995). This artifice and deceit may be identified in the naming of characters in *Muscle Beach Party*. Frankie's name suggests honesty and transparency; his name is not changed from his "real" name, Frankie Avalon and the serial continuity of the films suggests that he is "real." He is, therefore, positioned as open and truthful. The bodybuilders, however, are renamed Biff, Raff, Tug, Rip, Hulk, Sulk and Claude by Jack Fanny. Their names describe perceived masculine attributes; aggression in Biff and Rip, strength and bulk in Tug and Hulk and moodiness in Sulk. When juxtaposed with Claude, a French name with connotations of refinement, culture and homosexuality, the masculinity of the names becomes ridiculous and suspect. More significantly, they assume alter-egos. However, of all the characters in the film, Flex displays the most alter-egos. Flex possesses three names: his original name which we never discover; Flex Martian which was given to him by Jack Fanny; and Mr Galaxy which he wins at a bodybuilding contest. The juxtaposition of Martian with "Galaxy" infers a character who is "out of this world", an alien. It is by no means tenuous to link Flex with Superman for he wears a strongman costume and is dubbed "Superman" by Theodore Grub. Like Superman in the early sixties, Flex not only has a secret identity, he also has problems forming relationships with women. When Julie first meets him, he is more interested in his musculature and his lunch than her charms:

Julie: I want to be alone with you.

Flex: Do you see this tricep...

Julie: I want to take you away with me...

Flex: ...the way I can make it ripple...

Julie: ...right now...

Flex: I haven't had my lunch.

In this encounter Flex acts as a disaffected, narcissistic teenager in a man's body who cares more for his appearance and lunch than engaging with a woman.

The above descriptions of Flex's behaviour demonstrate a potential range of many identities in a multiplicity of elaborate masquerades. The deceit of Flex's masquerades positions him as unmasculine when constituted against Frankie's open and honest manliness.

However, through a closer examination of his position it is possible to identify problematic aspects of Frankie as star and character in *Muscle Beach Party*. Frankie Avalon's name was given to him by his manager Bob Marcucci from his original name, Frankie Abalone. This mirrors the way in which Jack Fanny gives Flex his name in *Muscle Beach Party*. Frankie's star persona is also constructed from biographical details, film roles, and in this case his pop star image and media coverage (Dyer 1998). Frankie's body, too, is a site of contradiction, too slight and androgynous to be considered traditionally masculine in the context of early sixties America. Frankie, therefore, like Flex, is a site which blurs the boundaries of the natural versus the artificial, sincerity versus deception and in terms of gender identity, masculine versus feminine.

## Conclusion

Butler claims that gender performance is an effect influenced by social structures, the historical moment and culture rather than the natural attribute of an individual. This article has shown how *Muscle Beach Party* articulates the societal perception of gender in its representations of masculinity and femininity. Gender, particularly masculinity, is depicted as a site of concern in which surfers and bodybuilders are represented as masculine stereotypes: surfers represent the masculine ideal, bodybuilders represent failed masculine identity. Both of these masculine representations are based on a social system in which marriage, heterosexuality and middle class values predominate. The hierarchical privileging of heterosexuality in early sixties America results from the importance of family values and family life. Heterosexuality and notions of stable and unified genders are produced through discourses within American culture in the early sixties. This may be identified in the way in which certain characters such as Flex and Julie are punished for transgressing their proper gender roles. However, the gender stereotypes depicted in *Muscle Beach Party* also reveal contradictions in the way society polarises gender representations. These contradictions may result from AIP's targeted audiences and modes of production. AIP's declared aim is to make money in whatever way it can, and to do this it represents characters in specific ways, such as exploiting the attraction of sex. AIP uses sexuality to attract heterosexual males with images of bikini-clad girls and semi-clad surfers and bodybuilders to attract heterosexual girls in its advertising. Moreover, AIP borrows elements of pornographic discourse in its gender representations of male and female bodies to attract its audiences. Waugh (1996) notes that in

gay male pornography the male body is fetishised, infantilised and feminised, "in the same manner that heterosexualist culture, 'feminized' representations of women in the 1950s 'Bunnies' and other pinups." (Waugh, 1996:229-230) In *Muscle Beach Party* bodybuilders are depicted as infantilised and feminised, girls are treated as pretty but vacuous or sexually available and therefore exploitable. In borrowing from pornographic discourse, however, AIP also reveals the ways in which early sixties notions of genders are disrupted by gender fluidity. However, a closer examination of "normal" gender types within *Muscle Beach Party* reveals a multiplicity of gender roles which constantly fluctuate according to the individual, cultural and societal context, as for instance with the gender positions adopted by Julie. These fluid gender identities disrupt and reveal problems with the perceptions of genders in America at that time. The representation of surfers as real men as opposed to bodybuilders as abnormal, which at first seems so uncomplicated, demonstrates the contradictions in perceptions of gender roles inherent in society. The early sixties belief that surfers could be "real men", suggested in *Muscle Beach Party*, is the final, impossible American white middle class male dream.

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