About the Image

The image for this issue has been sourced from the Wellcome Collection (Figure 1). The image depicts a group of men, all seemingly physically active. All of these men are part of the Physical Culture Society of Montreal. The one clothed man, in the background, is the coach. The photograph dates from 1905. How the men pose, for instance how they hold their shoulders, affects how their abdomens are viewed. The photograph plays with lightness and darkness, a technique that is often used in contemporary bodybuilding competitions. The picture, though, helps us to think through how the body is represented and about the importance of representing it in particular ways. Perhaps more recently, male bodies have become an increasingly important index of masculinity. As such, the body operates as a place where men and women can project, and have projected onto them, normative understandings of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, such bodily imaginations often operate normatively to discipline the self and others. Whether it is body control, body fascism, or the spornosexual body, we have long been fascinated by sculpting our bodies, not just for ourselves, but also for those around us, as this homosocial photograph testifies.

Figure 1. Male bodybuilders from the Physical Culture Society of Montreal posing semi-naked with their trainer in a photo (Public Domain).