





By [Desmond Butler](#), [Amy Brittain](#) and [Alice Li](#)

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Officials of bodybuilding's two premier federations have been sexually exploiting female athletes for decades — pressuring them to pose for nude photographs, posting those photos to soft-core pornography sites, and, at times, manipulating contest results in favor of cooperative competitors, a Washington Post investigation has found

For more than 15 years, J.M. Manion, whose father, Jim, has been running amateur and professional bodybuilding contests for decades, shot the photos and operated a network of paid soft-core pornography websites that at one point advertised “over 30,000 images” of competitors in the sport. A Post review of website archives identified more than 200 female athletes in photos ranging from casual bikini shots to graphic, sexual images, including those of nude women together in beds, bathtubs and showers. One of J.M.'s sites, Fitness Divas, bluntly stated: “Your Favorite Fitness Athletes ...Naked!”

Jenn Gates, who won the figure category at the prestigious Olympia contest in 2008, graced the covers of fitness magazines and earned enough sponsorship money to quit her nursing job. Her manager, J.M., asked her to take off her bikini top and bottom for photos. Gates refused, and was surprised recently to learn from Post reporters that her swimsuit photos had been featured alongside nude female competitors on one of J.M.'s pornography sites.

“I never consented to having my pictures put on a soft-porn site,” Gates said during an interview at her home in Indianapolis. Less than three years after winning the Olympia, Gates gave up the sport in disgust — and warns young women to stay away from the contests.

Interviews with dozens of competitors, judges, officials and others connected to the sport reveal the systematic exploitation of female athletes often rendered vulnerable by extreme dieting and workouts, lack of financial stability and a drive to win. The Post found that some women believed their scores depended on their willingness to pose for sexual photos or to please the sport’s leading judges, promoters and managers, almost all of whom are male.

J.M. did not respond to questions The Post emailed him about the allegations. Rob Rosetti, a prominent trainer who sometimes attended the photo shoots for J.M.’s pornography websites, said the women had consented.

“In the very few photo shoots I was asked to attend, I witnessed no athlete being forced, pressured, persuaded, intimidated or coerced into posing nude by J.M. or any other individual assisting in the photo shoot,” Rosetti texted The Post.

“It was done completely on the athlete’s own free will,” he said.

BUILT&BROKEN

A Washington Post investigation into a tip about the exploitation of women in bodybuilding led to the family that has dominated the sport for decades. This multipart series explores the family’s stewardship of the sport and the impact on the thousands of athletes who participate.

Have a tip on the bodybuilding world? Email the reporters at builbandbroken@washpost.com.



The Women: Female bodybuilders say they were pressured to pose for sexual photos by the son of the man

The Reporter: How a Post reporter whose father brought bodybuilding into the mainstream ended up

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Mandy Henderson, a former sheriff's deputy in Santa Clara County, Calif., detailed in an interview how the pressure was exerted on women. She agreed to nude photography with the expectation of winning a pro card, which allows athletes to move from amateur competitions to the professional league. A pro card can mean more money, sponsorships, and the chance to compete in the headlining competitions: the Arnold Classic and the Olympia.

At an amateur contest in 2009, she placed fourth and was surprised that it was taking so long for her to earn her pro card. When she asked why, she said, a prominent judge told her: "Because you didn't come to my room last night."

Another athlete, who was at a shoot attended by Rosetti, described a "humiliating" experience in which J.M. told her to undress and enter a shower with two naked women to pose for photographs — even though she'd previously told Rosetti she didn't want to pose nude, said the woman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. "I cannot tell you how terrible of an experience it was."

Aly Garcia said she abandoned the sport after it became clear she wouldn't get a top win unless she had sex with power brokers. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

Aly Garcia, a bikini competitor, said she refused to do the nude photos, and had to fend off advances from judges and promoters as gently as she could to keep her career alive. She abandoned the sport in 2017 when she concluded that she would never get a top win if she didn't have sex with the power brokers. "This is the only way I'm going to hit my goal?" she thought. "Guess I'm not going to hit my goal."

The leading amateur and professional federations are run by Jim Manion, J.M.'s father, a 78-year-old ex-bodybuilder, from his offices in Pittsburgh. Jim Manion presides over the amateur National Physique Committee (NPC) and the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness Pro League, known as the IFBB Pro League.

In response to a detailed query from The Post sent to Jim Manion, the two organizations issued a statement through Hammond Strategies, a crisis communications firm, but did not respond directly to any of the questions.

"As part of our efforts to grow the sport we have expanded events and opportunities for all competitors, grown prize purses for female athletes, and improved communications for our competitors to raise any concerns they may have with an event or their experience," the statement said. "We address all concerns raised with the utmost care, concern, and timeliness."

The statement said that more than half of registered competitors are women and that many shows feature all-female judging panels.

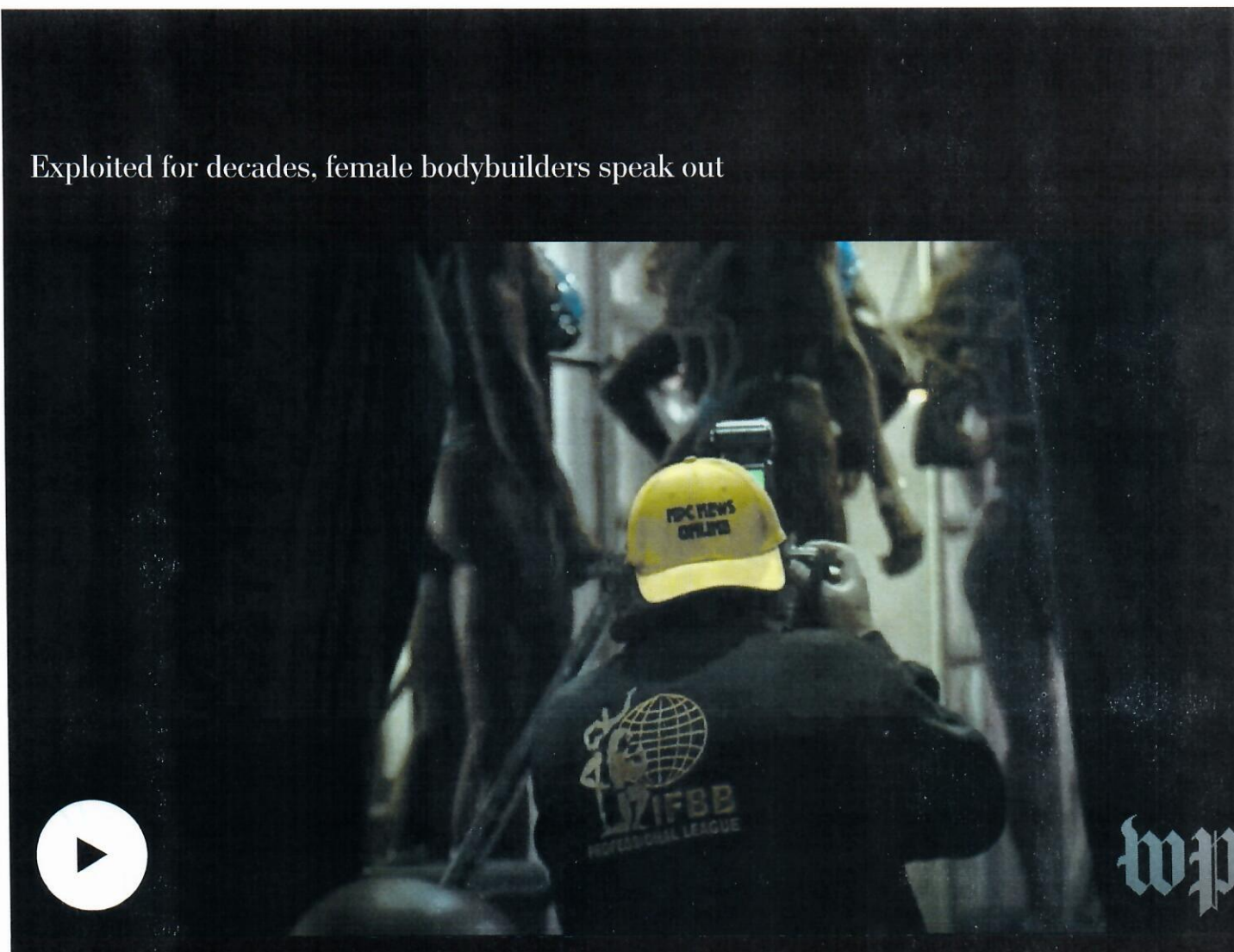
At bodybuilding's biggest competitions, J.M. can be found front and center, his baseball cap worn backward as he snaps pictures of muscled competitors onstage. J.M. was a teenager when his father took the helm of bodybuilding's newly created amateur organization. In 1977, with the release of the [film "Pumping Iron."](#) starring [Schwarzenegger](#), bodybuilding exploded onto the

[How a Post reporter wound up investigating the sport his father made famous]

Bodybuilding is both a sport and an **art form**. Athletes sculpt their bodies through weight training and diet to compete in contests where they are judged on their muscular development after performing poses onstage. The sport has multiple categories based on weight classes and the degree of musculature, ranging from the most muscled (bodybuilding) to the lesser-built categories of figure and bikini. The latter two are for female athletes only.

Prize money is awarded to the top five winners in the pro contests. At the top of the game is the Olympia, with Mr. Olympia claiming a reported \$675,000 last year, and Ms. Olympia just \$60,000. Most of the hundreds of contests each year pay far less.

Exploited for decades, female bodybuilders speak out



A Washington Post investigation found that scores of female athletes were sexually exploited by officials of the two major U.S. bodybuilding federations.

J.M., who runs the sport's online news operation, also oversaw a management company that directed the careers of the top female competitors, including Gates. He served as a gateway to endorsement deals, magazine covers and other financially promising opportunities and could shut down income potential or competitive success if an athlete crossed him, numerous competitors said.

Two former officials told The Post that they witnessed other officials either inflating scorecards in favor of competitors managed by J.M. or trying to.

Steve O'Brien, who served as a judge and district chairman of the NPC for Northern California, recounted two incidents when he said John Tuman, a judge, changed scores, once after O'Brien observed him discussing the placings with Jim and J.M. Manion.

Jim Rockell, who was once the head judge of the Olympia and a close associate of Jim Manion's before a falling out, said that Tuman once chided him at an event about his placings and suggested he make changes.

"Tuman leans over to me and says, 'You know that girl that you got in fourth or fifth place? That's one of J.M.'s girls,'" Rockell recalled. He said he did not change his scores.

O'Brien and Rockell said that some years ago, Tuman was suspended as a judge after his then-fiancee provided evidence that Tuman had affairs with contestants while he was judging. Several athletes also complained to officials about Tuman's behavior, they said. Months later, Jim Manion called O'Brien to discuss reinstating Tuman, which O'Brien resisted. But Manion overruled him.

"Jim's remedy was: 'I'm not going have him judge women,'" O'Brien said. "Well, that didn't last very long."

Soon, Tuman was back to judging all kinds of contests across the country, O'Brien said.

Tuman declined to comment on specific allegations.

Competitors at the 2022 Arnold Classic in Columbus, Ohio. The Post attended the event, but did not interview these women on the allegations of sexual exploitation in the sport. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

Rockell said he often observed Jim Manion complimenting J.M.'s clients to the judges during contests. "And these are the women that were winning," he added.

The federations declined to answer questions about J.M.'s influence on the contests. But The Post found that at the 2013 Olympia, among the 20 athletes who placed in the top 10 of the bikini or figure divisions, at least 18 were at one time listed on J.M.'s business websites as clients.

The Post attempted to contact more than 80 of the 200 athletes who appeared on J.M.'s websites. The majority did not respond to requests for comment. Twenty women agreed to speak to Post reporters about their experiences. Of those, nine women who had posed nude agreed to be interviewed — with eight speaking on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution from the Manion family and damage to their current careers if the photos received public attention.

Several women described personal problems and vulnerabilities that made them susceptible to posing nude: financial strain, troubles at home or feeling they had no other option if they wanted to advance in the sport.

The women told The Post that nude photo shoots were often held a day or two before the weekend competitions, and they believed that their odds of winning depended on their state of undress. The events were so regular, a former judge and top Manion lieutenant, Lee Thompson, told The Post, that they were called “Thursday shower nights.”

Thompson, who split with the Manions several years ago, said that Jim Manion would sometimes clear out of his hotel suite so that J.M. could do the shoots there, indicating that the elder Manion was aware of his son's photo shoots.

J.M. advertised “fan clubs” of certain women, charging roughly \$10 a month for access to their photos. Several women said they did not know they had been featured on the websites until Post reporters notified them. Other women described signing contracts that promised a 50-50 profit split with J.M.'s company, along with a regular review of invoices. With one exception, the women told The Post they did not recall receiving money from income the websites generated. One woman said she got just \$40. Post reporters reviewed three athlete contracts, along with emails exchanged between J.M. or his associates and some of the competitors.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar runs Champion Women, a group that advocates for girls and women in sports. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

“It’s not consent when it’s your boss and it’s someone that holds power over you.”

— Nancy Hogshead-Makar, Olympic gold medalist swimmer and lawyer



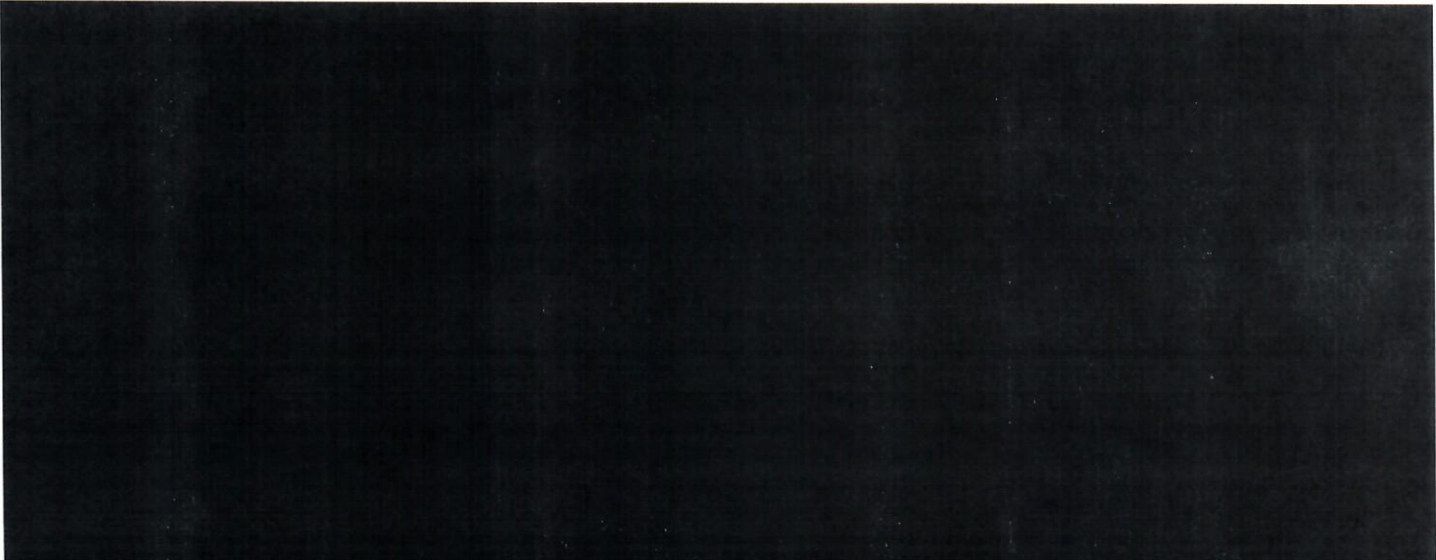
Nancy Hogshead-Makar, an Olympic gold medalist swimmer and a lawyer who runs Champion Women, a group that advocates for girls and women in sports, said that bodybuilding managers, judges or promoters may have more sway over athletes because the sport is based on subjective scoring.

That power dynamic means that the sport has a [responsibility to protect its athletes](#), she said: “The bodybuilding industry should be subject to very strict precautions for athletes.

“It’s not consent when it’s your boss and it’s someone that holds power over you.”

The Manions’ bodybuilding empire is a private, for-profit company, with no oversight structure or requirement to share revenue or membership numbers. Competitors described an overall lack of transparency within the sport. They told The Post that the organizations are devoid of any meaningful safeguards for athletes, such as a human resources department, health insurance or unions that could protect against abuses of power.

For Gates, the sport lost its way with the addition of the bikini division, which was introduced to the Olympia competition in 2010.



More competitors at the 2022 Arnold Classic. The Post attended the event, but did not interview these women on the allegations of sexual exploitation in the sport. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

“I don’t know what woman would want other women to stand up onstage and turn around and show their behinds and then be told to walk halfway across the stage and poke their butts out,” she said. “Why are we doing this?”

While Gates said that her ability to say no to powerful men, including J.M., spared her from the most degrading situations, others said they sometimes felt trapped in hotel rooms with power brokers who could [make or break their careers](#).

Former competitor Amber Littlejohn, who now works as a lawyer in D.C., said the culture values compliance and punishes those who speak out. She said women in the sport find themselves “ripe for predation” because of the amount of money they invest and their dependence on the Manion family to succeed.

Jeweled posing bikinis can cost \$1,000, and women reported spending thousands of dollars to compete.

“I am not at all surprised by anything that can be said about these people, because I’ve watched them do it for so long,” said Littlejohn, who posed one time in a bikini for J.M. “Nothing has changed for the athletes. If anything, it’s gotten worse.”

'Epic booty pose'

After an amateur event in New Jersey earlier this year, J.M. lined up nine of the top female competitors on the asphalt in front of a New Jersey Marriott, their backs to him.

"All right, so this will be the epic booty pose," he tells them, according to video footage posted on the NPC News Online website.

He directs the women to stick out their butts and brace themselves with a hand on the athlete next to them.

J.M., now 59, grew up in the bodybuilding world, and then became official photographer and senior writer for NPC News in the mid '80s when it was a magazine.

J.M.'s ventures converged in the late 1990s when he launched his Erotic Fitness paid website to sell topless and fully nude photos of star female bodybuilders. "Gym workouts sans tops are too rare!" the website stated. "How many times have you been in a gym, seen a fine babe, and wished she was doing those chest flys topless?"

J.M. Manion at the 2022 Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

Erotic Fitness folded in 2000, but J.M. soon launched larger websites: Alluring Fitness and Fitness Divas. Over time, his photography grew more sexually graphic and targeted in its attempts to lure paid subscribers. The websites disappeared in 2015 with no explanation. It is unclear how much income J.M. collected from the sites.

A Post review of J.M.'s past websites found that of the more than 200 featured athletes, a third posed in bikinis, which are traditionally worn for bodybuilding and fitness competitions. More than a quarter of the women posed either fully or partially nude or in suggestive settings, according to archived images of the websites reviewed by Post reporters. A smaller number posed in lingerie. For others, the nature of the photography could not be discerned from archival screenshots.

A handful of women said that they had no problem with lingerie or sensual photographs and did not view the photography as a significant departure from a sport judged on one's appearance in little clothing.

"I actually loved doing pictures," said Timea Majorova, a former professional competitor who was born in the former Czechoslovakia. She said she benefited from J.M.'s career management in the 1990s when, then in her early 20s and knowing little English, she tried to adjust to life in the United States.

"He was very nice to me. He never pushed me to do anything," she said, noting that she never posed nude, nor did J.M. ask her to do so. "As far as I know, the girls I worked with, they never told me they were pushed to do anything."

Several women spoke to The Post about their experiences on the condition of anonymity to protect their privacy and out of fear of retaliation.

One woman who competed from 2008 to 2010 said that she signed with J.M. because she believed he would look out for her and help her gain a platform in the fitness industry. Her first photo shoot took place with other women, all in

bikinis, on a California beach. But the next photo shoot took a troubling turn, she said.

A couple of days before a competition, she said, she was asked to join two women in a hotel room, wearing lingerie and posing in bed. Then, J.M. asked her to remove her clothing. She agreed.

“I felt that if I said no, that could end my career,” she said. “But that could have just been me. I knew how known and powerful [J.M.] was in that world. And that was the choice I made. I call it the dark side.”



Mandy Henderson and J.M. Manion/J.M. Manion Productions, Inc. are to be equal, (50%-50%) partners

Mandy Henderson in 'Playboy-style' topless, semi-nude and full nude poses,

D E N T I A L



FITNESS MANAGEMENT GROUP

(d/b/a J.M. MANION PRODUCTIONS INC.)

P.O. Box 293-Presto, PA, 15142-0293 (412) 257-4555 Fax: (412) 257-1337
E-mail: jmmnpe@aol.com Web Site: www.alluringfitness.com/fmg

FITNESS-FIGURE COMPETITOR / FITNESS MODEL CONTRACT

1. I, Mandy Henderson, hereby retain **FITNESS MANAGEMENT GROUP** (d/b/a J.M. MANION PRODUCTIONS INC.), hereinafter called "The Manager", to render services to me as my personal manager in the fitness modeling, fitness-figure competition, bodybuilding and health industry, sports industry and entertainment industry.

2. The term of this agreement shall commence upon the date it is signed by both the manager and me, and will continue for a period of two (2) years; it shall automatically be renewed from year to year thereafter unless the manager or I gives notice in writing by certified mail no later than thirty (30) days prior to the expiration date. I understand and agree that the manager has the right to terminate this agreement at any time in writing by certified mail for any reason the manager deems necessary. (Some examples include the voiding of any clause in this contract, conduct regarded as unprofessional whether in public, turning an assignment or an appearance, failure to appear for a scheduled assignment whether for a client, the NPC, the IFBB the manager or management company unless a valid medical excuse is provided in writing. The manager has the right to verify the written medical excuse.)

A Fitness Management Group contract shared by bodybuilder Mandy Henderson.

CONF

obtain for me, and collect and disburse all compensation for me and on my behalf. I hereby appoint **FITNESS MANAGEMENT GROUP** (NEW J.M. BATH PHOTO PRODUCTIONS, INC.) as my manager and attorney-in-fact to collect and receive for or on my behalf all monies or other compensation due to me by reason of any contracts or assignments obtained for me, and to sign vouchers, and endorse all drafts, checks and contracts in my name for me for such assignments and bookings.

5. I agree that manager will not disburse monies owed to me as a result of endorsement contracts or assignments that the manager has obtained for me until manager has collected the fee from the client. Should the client not pay the management firm for the contracts or assignments, the manager will utilize all its resources and best efforts to collect the appropriate fee from client. The cost of collection will be paid for by client.

6. I agree that the manager will negotiate the salary to be paid to me as a result of assignments and that the client will pay the gross salary to the manager. The manager agrees to accept an industry standard compensation sum equal to twenty (20) percent of the gross salary negotiated for me as a result of

Agreeing to the photography stripped the joy from the sport, she said.

“I felt ashamed,” the woman said. “I felt like a failure. I felt scared. I felt like I made poor decisions, and then I felt trapped.”

A second woman — then a single mother who competed in the early 2010s — described a similar, rapid progression from an initial bikini shoot to nude photography. “That’s how he operates,” she said of J.M., noting that women developed a whisper network to warn one another of what was next.

She said holding such photo shoots before competitions amounted to “taking advantage” of women who dieted and trained to the extreme for months, knowing that contest results were on the line.

A third woman, who competed in the mid-to-late 2000s, said that J.M. once suggested she dress in comic hero costumes, catering to his fascination with comic book culture and his desire to show real-life female bodybuilders as fictional, sensual superheroes who fought off villains.

Then, she said, he directed her to strike a sexy pose and undress.

Though she could not locate the document, she recalls signing a contract that included language about photo shoots and paid websites and promised a 50-50 profit split with J.M.’s company. She did not have a problem with “tasteful” nudity and needed the money. Bodybuilding “was not cheap,” she said.

But after being photographed, she felt “mortified,” especially when several contest judges remarked that they had seen her photos. J.M. wanted her to

promote the website to drive up membership numbers, she said, but she couldn't bring herself to do it.

"I never got one dollar," she said. Not too long after, J.M. terminated her contract, telling her: "I never made any money off of you," she said.

'Absolutely disgusting'

The effort to recruit women to pose provocatively extended beyond the Manions. Multiple women described close associates of the family who introduced them to J.M. and encouraged them to do whatever he asked, saying that it would launch their careers from amateur status to professionals. Earning a coveted pro card could make bodybuilding less of an expensive hobby and more of an income-generating career.

The women said the network of enablers allowed sexual harassment to thrive in plain sight. They described judges and promoters requesting private visits to their hotel rooms and sponsors making sexual passes.

When Gates traveled to Los Angeles in 2009 to promote a supplements company, the owner, Moe Elmoossawi, asked her to stay with him. She called J.M. to ask how to handle the request since she did not feel comfortable. J.M. told her she risked making the sponsor "angry." She booked her own hotel.

On a trip to New Zealand, Gates said Elmoossawi made an "aggressive" pass at her while the two were traveling together. She bolted from his truck to escape, she said, and shortly afterward recounted the story to her then-partner, whom she has since married, and a coach. The Post confirmed that account with both of them.

Reached for comment in New Zealand, Elmoossawi denied any impropriety.

"I honestly can't believe that she would say anything negative about me," he texted The Post. "I have always treated her with ultimate respect and when she

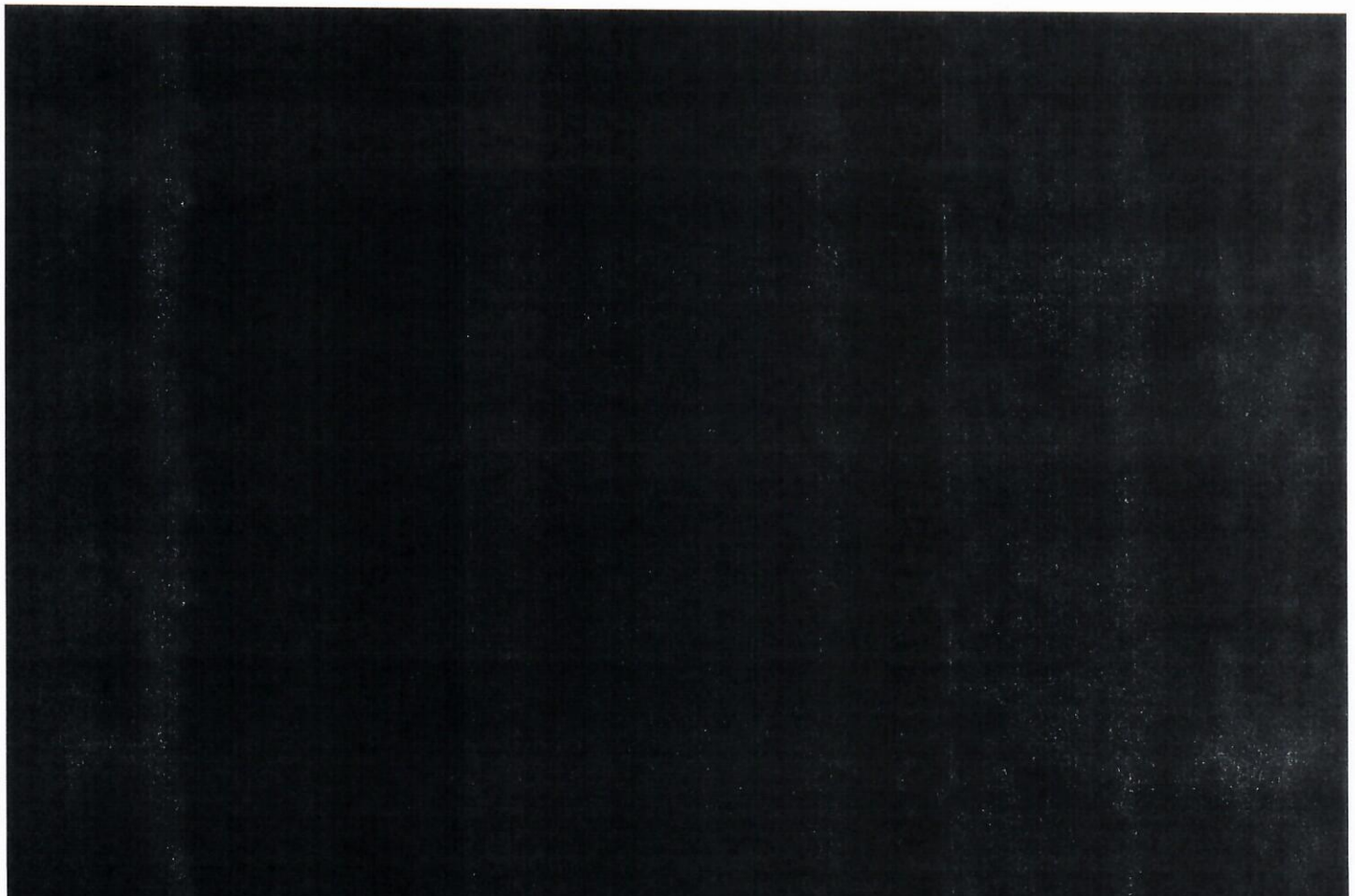
Henderson, the former sheriff's deputy, heard about J.M.'s success as a manager from Tuman, whom she met through a trainer at her gym. Tuman assured her that if she signed with J.M. and did the photo shoots, she said, she would win her pro card.

Henderson recalled that in about 2005, the day before her first competition, Tuman told her to visit his hotel room to learn how to pose.

"I was a little nervous to meet anybody in their hotel room by myself," she said. "I was a cop at this time, so I did have a little bit of a clue that maybe going to someone's room, a male that I just met, would not be a good idea."

Her husband and young son tagged along. Tuman was clearly surprised when he opened the door, she said.

"The look on his face, it was kind of like, 'Oh, you brought your husband and your son,'" she said. "It was kind of like, 'Oh, I didn't expect that.'"



Bodybuilder Mandy Henderson. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

“The look on his face, it was kind of like, ‘Oh, you brought your husband and your son. It was kind of like, ‘Oh, I didn’t expect that.’ ”

— Mandy Henderson

Tuman also served as the competition’s head judge. She placed poorly, and Henderson said that Tuman then suggested she meet J.M. for career guidance.

Over the next two years, despite posing for J.M. in a bikini photo shoot, Henderson continued to struggle in competitions. She said Tuman assured her that doing more photo shoots and signing with J.M. would result in a pro card. In an email to J.M., which Henderson shared with The Post, she wrote that she had no issue with nudity and posing in a bikini for J.M. and his wife.

with her name filled in, promising a 50-50 profit split for websites that involved “Playboy-style” photos. Henderson recalls signing it and faxing it back, although the emails do not confirm that the agreement was ever finalized.

Her first nude photo shoot occurred in a Las Vegas hotel room with two other women during a competition weekend. She said J.M. took the photos while Tuman directed the women.

In one photo, Henderson appears nude with the other athletes, according to archived website images. In another photo, the three women pose in bed together, wearing high heels and red lingerie.

“It was, you know, John saying, ‘Okay, take off your tops’ and ‘Okay, you tug on that’ and ‘You guys pretend to look at each other and pretend to kiss’ or ‘Do this’ or ‘You turn around and stick out your butts.’ And you know, we’re fully naked,” she said. “I just remember thinking to myself, ‘Okay, this is all worth it.’ ... I was now doing this shoot and I was going to get my pro card, and then I was going to go and be this big, famous fitness girl.”

During the shoot, she said, Tuman approached her from behind. “He put his arms, his hands, on my shoulders, and he put his groin against my rear end,” she said. He told her that she looked “really, really good” and that the photo shoot looked “really hot.”

She laughed it off but felt deeply uncomfortable. “It was absolutely disgusting,” she said.

Reached last week by The Post, Tuman said, “I don’t know what you are talking about. I’m a married man. I’m a family man. I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Asked whether he wanted to hear about specific allegations, Tuman said: “No, I don’t. Because it’s all lies.”

Henderson posed nude for at least one other group photo shoot. Her husband, Kenneth Henderson, said in a phone interview that his wife frequently confided

“There was a normalcy,” he said. “It wasn’t like you said no. I never heard of someone saying no.”

At a 2009 national competition, Henderson placed fourth. She was livid that her pro card status remained elusive despite agreeing to nude photography. Once offstage, she confronted Tuman, saying: “What the f---? Why didn’t I get my pro card?”

When he told her she hadn’t visited him the night before, she grew even angrier.

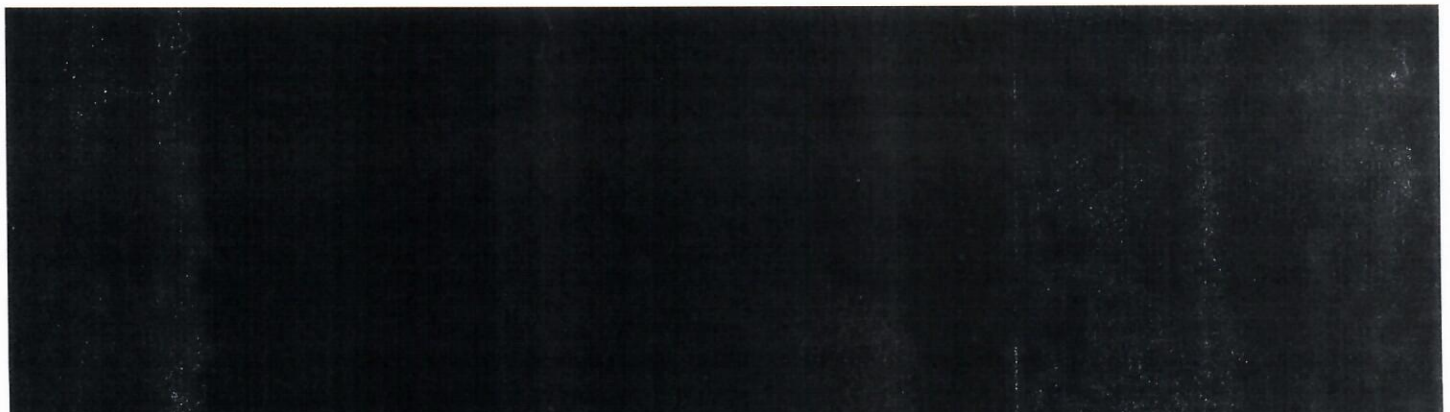
Henderson raised her voice and asked, “So you’re saying that because I didn’t go to your room and give you a blow job or f--- you, I didn’t get my pro card today?”

Tuman told her that she had misunderstood his comment, she said.

In 2010, Henderson placed first in the USA Championships, an NPC competition, and finally earned her pro card. Then she quit the sport.

“It was not the best person onstage that was winning,” she said. “It was the person that was J.M.’s favorite or whoever was doing the most for J.M. and whoever would bring in the most money.”

Henderson’s law enforcement career later ended in scandal after she was accused of faking an injury and improperly collecting workers’ compensation benefits. In 2019, she pleaded no contest to a felony count of making a false or fraudulent claim or statement and was sentenced to six months of house arrest. After successfully completing probation, Henderson’s record was expunged, according to county court records.



Contestants warm up before taking the stage at the 2022 IFBB Miami Grand Prix. The Post attended the event, but did not interview these women on the allegations of sexual exploitation in the sport. (Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

She has returned to the sport, competing in the Manions' IFBB Pro masters' bikini division for athletes over 40. She said that this time, her eyes are open.

"It still is a toxic environment. It hasn't changed much," she said. "I am truly competing for myself."

Team Bombshell

Thompson, a former senior judge on the bodybuilding circuit, admits to witnessing inappropriate behavior and engaging in it himself — sins, he said, that he acknowledged only after finding religion.

In 2005, during his first judging experience, he got a quick education in the power that judges hold over athletes. While in his hotel room, Thompson said, he got a call from Shannon Dey, who alongside her then-husband, Rosetti, led a Florida-based group of competitors called Team Bombshell.

Dey told him that she wanted to send a woman to his room to make sure that she looked ready for the next day's competition. "I'm like, 'Yeah, okay, that's great,'" Thompson said. "Like, I don't even know what judges do at this point."

naked underneath. He said she began to spin around and asked him, “Is there anything that I might do to make your life a little easier today?” Thompson sheepishly said no. Later that evening, he said that Tuman, the show promoter, quipped: “I heard you didn’t partake of the fruit.”

A spokesman for Team Bombshell, Art Sims, said that they had no “official comment.”

After that, Thompson said his life “spun out,” and he had frequent sexual encounters with competitors. In 2015, Thompson fell out publicly with the Manions after a legal dispute over the future of the organization, in which he tried to establish a rival bodybuilding federation.

Several of the women who posed nude described being recruited by Bombshell’s Dey and Rosetti. The couple have since divorced, but Dey continues to run Bombshell.

One woman, a former Bombshell team member who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of privacy concerns, shared emails from Dey that instructed her top athletes on how to keep J.M. happy during photo shoots.

“This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to shoot with the Man who made the careers of some of the greatest IFBB Pro’s,” Dey wrote in April 2009. “I can not stress enough how fortunate we are to have been chosen.”

The email included numbered rules for the shoot at Manion’s studio in Pittsburgh. “No full bottom suits. Brazillian and thong bottoms only,” Dey wrote. “ABSOLUTELY NO COMPLAINING. If it’s cold you don’t act cold, if it’s hot don’t act hot, hungry don’t say a word, etc.”

She added that no boyfriends or husbands could attend.

The Bombshell team member said she attended a photo shoot in a hotel room with J.M., another female competitor and edible props, including whipped cream and chocolate. J.M. photographed the scene.

“I kind of felt like this is the game and you’ve got to play along because this is the son of the head of the sport,” she said.

A second Bombshell member who spoke on condition of anonymity to protect her privacy recalled that she had repeatedly made it clear to both Rosetti and J.M. that she would pose topless but would never agree to full nudity.

At a national competition roughly a decade ago, J.M. requested that she attend a photo shoot involving two other women.

“I hear J.M. call my name, and I’m thinking he needs me to hold a reflector or a light or something,” she said. She rounded the corner in the hotel and saw J.M. standing near a bathroom and Rosetti sitting on a love seat. “I’m like, ‘Hey, yeah, what do you need?’” she recalled. J.M. nodded toward the two women, who were naked in the shower.

“And he says, ‘Get in.’ And I’m like, ‘What?’ ” she said. “And he says, ‘Get in with them.’ ”

She looked to Rosetti for help, she said, because he also knew her objections to fully nude photographs. But he did not intervene. “You pulled the rug out from under me and set me up,” she thought.

The woman said she viewed noncompliance as “career suicide.” She undressed and stood in the corner of the shower, as far away as possible from the other two women.

When it was over, she went back to her hotel room, sick to her stomach.

Rosetti told The Post that at the shoots he attended the women signed a release form before the shoots and were “well aware days in advance” that they “were ‘glamour’ fitness photography sessions,” he said in a text message.

“What the athletes brought to the shoots was their decision. Outfits were not provided by anyone. If they wished to be photographed in swim suits, lingerie, implied nude or nude, it was done completely on the athlete’s own free will.”

“I kind of felt like this is the game and you’ve got to play along because this is the son of the head of the sport.”

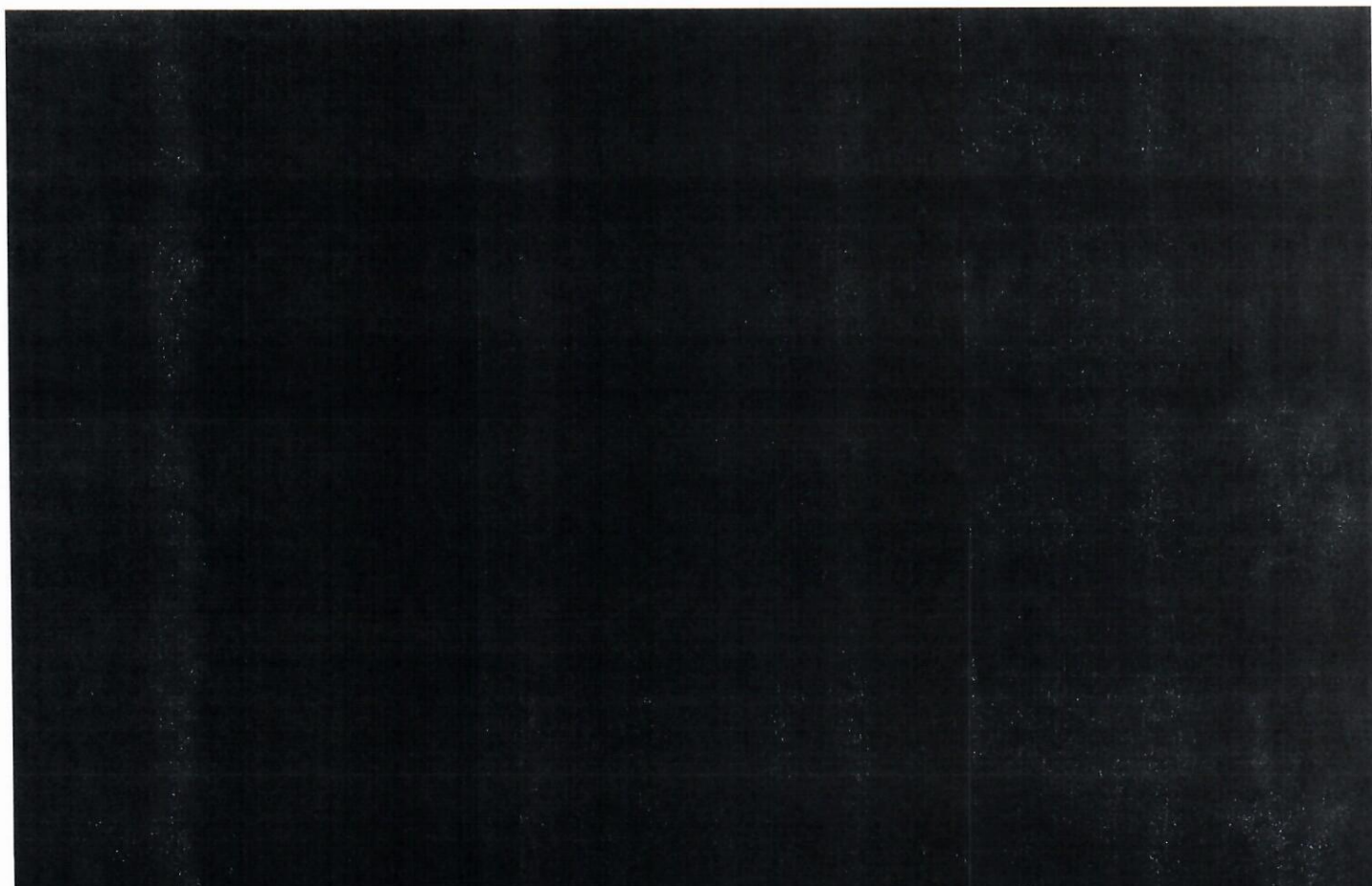
— Former Bombshell team member

Many of the women interviewed said that saying no to the Manions had its price. Ava Cowan, who competed professionally in the figure category, said J.M. attempted to sign her in the mid-2000s after she showed early promise. But a friend who was a lawyer reviewed the contract, telling Cowan she would be “out of your mind” to sign.

“He will own you,” the friend warned. After she “blew off” J.M.’s proposed contract, Cowan said, she placed poorly in a national show. Frustrated, she took to an online bodybuilding forum to voice her objections over the family’s outsize influence.

“I posted a paragraph about how corrupt everything was, how you have to sign a contract to place well, how it’s like the mafia,” she said. Less than an hour later, she deleted the post.

“But the damage was done,” she said, noting that she soon heard her remarks had gotten back to the Manions. Cowan said she was “blacklisted” for four years as she struggled to make any income.



Ava Cowan at the 2015 Arnold Sports Festival in Columbus. (Frank Jansky/AP)

“I wouldn’t do nudity. I don’t judge it, but what I do judge is when you feel like you have to do it to place well.”

— Ava Cowan

“You can never come back. Even if you’re back, you’re ostracized forever,” she said. “I was just kind of drug through the mud eternally.”

After a potential sponsor said he did not want to upset the Manions by signing her, she said she was able to salvage the deal by apologizing to the family for her remarks.

Cowan also agreed to pose for J.M. in lingerie. “I wouldn’t do nudity,” she said.

place well.”

In 2011, she finished No. 3 in the figure category at both the Arnold Classic and Olympia competitions. Later, in a final attempt to reach the top, she said she signed with J.M. Her career fizzled soon after, she said, when she suffered a neck injury during a backstage accident.

Garcia, the bikini competitor who said she refused sexual advances, said that crossing J.M. could quickly kill a career. When her son had just turned 1 and was still breastfeeding, she entered her first bodybuilding contest. Her coach advised her to try to sign with J.M.’s Fitness Management Group. “The girls on that team, they usually place better,” Garcia said. “People know who they are.”

At the next show, she asked J.M. for a chance. Soon, she had a contract, a pro card and an invitation to Pittsburgh for a bikini shoot in his studio. She was short on money and caring for her baby but did not hesitate to make the four-hour drive from D.C.

J.M. began setting her competitive schedule, and Garcia started to do well. At a show in Orlando in April 2013, she placed third behind two of his athletes who would later win the Olympia. The following day, she was invited to a hotel pool for a photo shoot with a male competitor.

While J.M. shot still photographs, a videographer filmed the scene under a pool waterfall with Garcia in a thong bikini and the male bodybuilder in tight shorts.

“I want the models to be themselves and loosen up,” J.M. says in the video.

At one point, Garcia bent forward laughing, while the man put his hand on her back. She says that the video was edited to make it look like the two were having sex.

Videographer John Hawley, in a text message to a Post reporter, said he edited the film to emphasize the look J.M. “appeared to be going for.”

Garcia says she now cringes at the footage, particularly the flattery she directed

pretty sure that I was just lying out of my face,” she now says.

J.M. soon approached her about shooting nude for “a website where the athletes make money.” He pulled out his phone, she said, and showed off some website photos: two athletes she knew, both naked and making out in a shower.

“I started to make the connections,” she said, recognizing some of the women who had bested her in recent competitions. “I was like, ‘Oh, my goodness.’ ”

Garcia said she viewed her contract termination as a direct result of refusing to take nude photographs.
(Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post)

Garcia explained to J.M. that she drew the line at bikini shots. She had a young son and couldn't imagine having nude photos online that he might someday find.

Not long afterward, a letter from J.M. arrived in the mail.

“At this time since we have nothing in the foreseeable horizon for you in terms of

Competitor/Model Contract with Fitness Management Group,” read the letter Garcia shared with The Post.

Garcia said she viewed the termination as a direct result of refusing to take nude photographs. In the years since, she has struggled to maintain steady employment, survived a major car accident and experienced bouts of homelessness.

To Gates, the demands on female athletes were bad enough, but the bikini division horrified her. After she left the sport, women came to her and asked her to coach them so they could compete in the bikini contests for the NPC and potentially the Olympia.

Gates had never seen a bikini show.

“And then I started watching it online and like, there is no way I am going to work with a girl and tell her how to turn around and poke her ass out,” Gates said. “I just morally, I can’t do it.”

“I feel like it got a lot worse after I got out, which is kind of like a godsend for me — that I did get out.”

Have a tip on the bodybuilding world? Email the reporters at builtinbroken@washpost.com.

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