Faith & Reason Honors Program

SENIOR THESIS

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Introduction

“Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it” – Plato. The notion that regular physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle is nothing new. Throughout history many cultures believed that exercise was an important factor in maintaining a healthy body as well as a healthy mind and spirit. In ancient Greece there was a branch of medicine known as gymnastic medicine that relied entirely on exercise to treat patients (Bucksworth & Dishman, 2002). In addition to the ancient Greeks, early Jewish religious writers noted the importance of physical activity in relation to a healthy mind and spirit in addition to the body (Bucksworth & Dishman, 2002). This belief that exercise is vital to building and maintaining a good moral character can also be found hundreds of years later in Victorian England and Colonial America in the form of Muscular Christianity (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). Throughout history and all across the world, cultures that seemingly have little in common have been able to agree on the fact that physical activity is integral to maintaining a healthy body, mind and spirit.

While the idea that exercise is a vital component to one’s overall well-being has been around for centuries, in recent years there has been a significant increase in the interest of physical activities’ connection specifically to the health of the body. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the prevalence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and stroke has emerged as the leading causes of death in the United States while prior to the 1900’s this distinction went to infectious diseases like pneumonia tuberculosis (McElroy, 2002). The reason for this transition from infectious diseases to chronic diseases being the leading cause of death in part can be contributed to the increase in life expectancy of the average American as well as the success of public health reform and advances in medicine during the turn of the century (McElroy,
The rise of these chronic illnesses and the staggering amount of money that they cost the United States every year can be linked to the rise in the interest of regular exercise over the past few decades.

Cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension, all leading causes of death in the United States, have all been linked to a sedentary lifestyle. These associations between a sedentary lifestyle and the increased risk of premature death have placed physical inactivity as one of the most prominent health risk factors, alongside smoking and a poor diet (McElroy, 2002). Researchers who have studied the link between physical inactivity and common chronic diseases discovered that if physical inactivity was eliminated completely, 256,686 deaths could be prevented and if only 50% of the sedentary population begin regular exercise then 21,800 deaths could be prevented (McElroy, 2002). These statistics are linked directly to inactivity, but if one were expand their scope and look at the deaths causes by obesity and high cholesterol, two conditions that regular exercise can help treat and prevent, the number of deaths that could be prevented would actually be much higher (McElroy, 2002).

This link between physical activity and improvements in health has led to an increase in individuals who want to begin exercising in order to improve their overall health as well as improve their quality of life. Because of this desire for self-improvement, regardless of the motives, an individual will do whatever they can to achieve these goals but they will rarely try and pursue regular exercise on their own. When an individual today does make the decision to begin a new exercise program, attend an exercise class or buy some new equipment in order to get in shape, they will inevitably turning to some aspect of the fitness industry for help.

The fitness industry we know today has undergone vast changes since its formation in the latter half of the nineteenth century. What originally began as a way to develop good morals,
build strong character and to allow the public to take responsibility for their health has morphed into a billion dollar industry which often uses this language of health to sell a wide variety of products and services that are not all necessarily healthy (Maguire, 2008). In addition to trying to sell products that are supposedly going to help you maintain a healthy lifestyle, many companies in the fitness industry promote how their products or services can give you the perfect body, which for many is an unrealistic goal.

Today the fitness industry is flooded with special equipment, books, exercise plans and diet pills all claiming to not only promote a healthy lifestyle but give the average American the perfect body. In contemporary society, status is linked to physical appearance (Maguire, 2008) which can explain why everyone wants that perfect body that is so commonly portrayed. While the majority of the individuals who are exposed to these products and their advertisements want to achieve the results depicted, not many people are aware of the fact that the models depicted don’t always look like that and the results these products claim to produce are very unrealistic for many people. Not only are the claims made by these products often invalid, but in many cases they can be extremely harmful to the overall health of the consumers (Maguire, 2008).

Due in part to the commercialization boom that has taken place in the fitness industry over the past few decades, the American consumer’s desire to improve their physical appearance and to a further extent their social status has been exploited. Many companies claim that if someone uses a specific product or they attend a new type of exercise class then they too can achieve the body that the models or athletes depicted have and just like them the average American can enjoy all the perks that come along with having the perfect body (Kretchmar, 2005).
This increasing role of commercialization in the fitness industry has made it necessary for there to be someone to manage the expectations, and well-being of those who want to begin to use these products or take advantage of these services that the fitness industry offers. In the fitness industry, exercise professionals are responsible for working with clients and helping them achieve their goals in a safe and constructive environment. Whether a personal trainer, nutritionist, exercise physiologist, or any number of other professionals found in the exercise science field, it is their job to ensure the well-being of anyone they work with. They have extensive knowledge about how the human body reacts specifically to exercise which puts them in a unique position to serve as vital resource to anyone interested in utilizing any products or services found in the fitness industry.

The fitness industry is a vast field that encompasses a wide range of topics and specialties. The only way for someone to know what products and services found in the fitness market are effective and safe to use, one would need to have extensive knowledge about the human body and how it responds to various activities, exercises and compounds. There is too much out there for one person to be able to make an informed decision about every single product found in the fitness industry on their own and for many they don’t have the time or desire to do the necessary research. This is where the exercise professional becomes a crucial component of the fitness industry. This insurgence of commercialization in the fitness industry has made it important, now more than ever, for these exercise professionals to implement and utilize personal ethics as well as professional ethics when dealing with clients in order to make sure that those who have the desire to exercise regularly will be able to redeem the full benefits in a safe and meaningful way.
As mentioned earlier, exercise is a vital component to the well-being of the mind, body and spirit. An exercise professional who is aware of this and who realizes that there is more to physical activity than simply losing weight and building muscle, they will be better equipped to help their clients achieve all of the benefits of regular exercise. Utilizing personal and professional ethics when dealing with clients will help exercise professionals see the big picture and respect the fact that they are working with human-beings. No two people are exactly alike and there is no one universally correct way to help every person. Every person is different and exercise professionals cannot believe that the same exercises or the same products will have the same effect on everyone they see. When an exercise professional realizes that God did not make us all alike, they are truly able to help their clients achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle and a better physical appearance. Implementing both personal and professional ethics can help an exercise professional navigate this industry in which there are millions of products that claim to be the answer to all of their client’s problems. An exercise professional that can truly put the well-being of their clients above everything else can prove vital to the navigation of this industry in which there is an increasing amount of commercialization which leads to companies valuing money over the health of their consumers.

**The Evolution of the fitness industry**

*Early Attitudes Towards Physical Culture in America*

In order to understand the contemporary fitness industry and why ethics are so important today, one needs to look at where this industry came from and what role commercialism has taken in its development. The modern fitness industry has developed from a long history of physical culture in America that can be traced back to the times of the Puritans in the seventeenth century. The history of this physical culture and the attitudes and ideas about why and how one
maintains a healthy body form the foundations for the contemporary fitness field. While the forms of physical activity and the goals and criteria that were deemed legitimate have changed over time, the idea that physical activity can be used as a route to individual and social improvement have remained constant since the beginning of the nineteenth century all the way through to today (Maguire, 2008). That being said, throughout history exercise has been seen as a means to some other end, but that end has changed over time.

While this theme truly began to affect the fitness industry in the nineteenth century, its creation stems from the thought and beliefs of the puritans in the seventeenth century. The original belief held by the puritans was that exercise and sports were “idle distraction[s] from one’s worldly and moral duties” (Maguire, 2008). This distain for sports and athletics can be linked to a few different factors. First being the fact the physical conditions that these early settlers lived in were harsh and unforgiving. They were surrounded by disease and starvation so they had to work all hours of the day just to survive (Russell, 2013). There was always work to be done as they were trying to survive this new hostile land so there was no time or energy that could be wasted participating in sports or other forms of athletics (Russell, 2013). The fact that there was so much work to be done often lead to policies that prohibited activities that were seen is idle and did help an individual complete their worldly duties (Russell, 2013).

In addition to the living conditions and the steady stream of work that the Puritans faced, the whole reason that they traveled across the Atlantic was because they believed in the “divine mission” to rid society of opulent and unnecessary pleasures that the aristocratic class in England enjoyed and to purge society of godlessness (Russell, 2013). They would not tolerate any activities that would go against these religious reforms.
Physical Activity and the Industrial Revolution

While these early puritans are known for this distain of sports, during the nineteenth century these ideas evolved into the gradual support and encouragement of certain activities like forms of calisthenics and running. This support emerged out of the shift in Puritan beliefs that everyone had a predetermined fate the idea that it was possible to perfect one’s self through physical and mental improvement (Maguire, 2008). From this point on, exercise was seen as a means to an end. Now instead of being viewed as a distraction from one’s moral and worldly duties, physical activity was seen as a way to build a healthy body, good values and a strong moral character (Maguire, 2008). This was the first time in America that exercise became seen as way to improve one’s self. The idea that achieving a state of perfection was possible became a strong justification for individuals to intentionally partake in physical activity (Maguire, 2008).

During the beginning of the nineteenth century, specifically between the years 1820 and 1860, this idea that exercise was a way to build good morals and a strong character was at its peak. In addition to the changing influence from religion, this shift in how exercise was viewed can also be attributed to the creation of cities and the transformation of urban life. More and more people began to migrate to these urban cities and the ever increasing industrialization led to what many considered the “degeneration of American Society” (Maguire, 2008). This erosion of society was thought to be cause by two factors, the poor and working classes living and working in extremely poor conditions and the middle class moving towards leading lives that were predominantly sedentary. The poor and working classes worked in the factories in these cities which exposed them to the new dangers of working with the new equipment (Vorspan, 2000). In addition, they were extremely large amount of people living in very close quarters which allowed
for the easy transmission of many deadly diseases. The middle class began to take jobs that were not as physical as they were in the past but that still caused high levels of stress (Maguire, 2008).

These new social conditions led to many challenges which made it more difficult for much of the population to engage in physical activity. In addition, during this time period there were outbreaks throughout the United States, but again focused in large cities, of many epidemics like cholera and tuberculosis (Maguire, 2008). The state of medicine and disease in the United States, especially in these large urban cities raised many concerns about the state of sanitation and water supplies as well as the need for open spaces and opportunities for individuals to engage in physical activity (Vorspan, 2000). The lack of regular activity that was observed in society and the implications it was believed to have on the health of the population led to the implementation of many moral and urban health reforms which promoted the idea that sports and physical activity were the cure-all for all the ills of society (Maguire, 2008).

This positive sports ideology was used in many reform movements to show the consequences that accompanied a sedentary lifestyle and how was in part responsible for the destruction of American Society and the erosion of the American morals (Maguire, 2008). Many reforms of this time promoted exercise as a way for the middle class to return the pastoral values, physical fitness and masculinity that was found during the colonial times (Maguire, 2008). In addition it was touted as a way for the poor, immigrant and working classes to become healthy, moral, respectful and cooperative Americans (Maguire, 2008).

While many private organizations that sought to capitalize on this new and developing physical culture, due to many of the national movements and reform efforts described above, many sites were made available to the general public to go and exercise in order to help build that strong character and develop the sound morals that America had been known for in the past.
Many outdoor public spaces were transformed into areas which could be used for recreation purposes. During the 1860’s through the 1900’s municipal parks became very popular in addition to public playground for children (Maguire, 2008). Local governments and wealthy entrepreneurs were also building gymnasiums which the public would have access to. In addition to these completely public locations, “semi-public sites” like the YMCA were increasing in popularity during this time as were private sport places that ranged from very exclusive country and athletic clubs to modest clubs for the working class and immigrants (Maguire, 2008). The one thing that all of these locations had in common was the implementation of this positive sport ideology and the belief that physical activity and sports were a detrimental component to leading a healthy and moral life.

*The Muscular Christianity Movement*

While there were many movements during this time that exemplified this positive sport ideology, none did a better job articulating this message more than Muscular Christianity. Muscular Christianity was a movement that originated in Britain in the mid nineteenth century and it stated that participation in sport could contribute to the development of Christian morality, physical fitness, and “manly” character (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). While the explicit advocacy of sports and regular exercise and the benefits it can have for those who want to achieve a healthy mind body and spirit, did not occur until the nineteenth century, the philosophy on which this movement was based goes back quite a bit farther to the time. In the New Testament, St. Paul and many others used athletic metaphors to help describe the challenges of the Christian life but it wasn’t until the 1850’s when Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes first coined the term Muscular Christianity in their writings (Lucas, 1975). Both of these men were sportsmen who believed “that a man’s body is given him to be trained and brought into
subjection and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes” (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). Kinsley, who was an avid fishermen and hunter, believed that sports and physical activity was necessary to counteract ones “. . . education and bookishness” (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). Hughes was also a strong proponent for physical activity and eventually went on to establish an athletics track and field program as well as the cricket team at the Working Men’s College in London, the school at which he eventually became principle (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005).

Both Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes were heavily involved in the Christian Socialist movement in Britain. They believed that the Church of England had become weak over time because of a culture that was growing ever more feminine (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). Like many others of the time, Kinsley believed that godliness was companionable with manliness and he viewed manliness as an “antidote to the poison of effeminacy” (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005). Out of this fear of effeminacy and the desire to return to a manlier and godlier way of living, the Muscular Christianity movement was born.

While these religious attitudes played a large part in the initial conception of Muscular Christianity, much like in the United States, the health of the population was a large motivating factor for this movement in England. Just like in the United States, the Industrial Revolution in Victorian Britain brought about an increase in sedentary lifestyles which directly correlated to an increase of cardiovascular and respiratory disease. In addition, working in factories exposed many of the poor and working class to new occupational hazards and long hours, both of which lead to a decline in the health of the population (Watson, Weir, & Friend, 2005).
Muscular Christianity and the YMCA in America

The one organization that is best known for implementing these ideas and beliefs that embodied Muscular Christianity during this time was the evangelical organization the Young Men’s Christian Association (Zald & Denton, 1963). Created in London in 1944, the YMCA was focused on integrating the mind, body and spirit with the help of physical activity and exercise. In the year 1951, the YMCA opened a chapter in Boston and the Muscular Christianity movement arrived in North America for the first time (Maguire, 2008). While the mission statement of the YMCA in the United States stated that its goal was the same as the chapters in England, up until the 1880’s the chapters of the YMCA found in the U.S. were focused almost exclusively on “the spiritual needs of rural young men moving to the city for the first time” (Maguire, 2008).

As mentioned previously, during this time there was a sense that the urbanization and industrialization that was occurring in the United States was leading to the degradation of the American way of life. These concerns placed a large emphasis on trying to protect and preserve the moral integrity of those who decided to move to these cities for the first time. The YMCA was a large part of this religious movement that was taking place during this time. It was common practice for the YMCA to organize prayer groups, bible readings and lecture series that focused on Christian morality (Zald and Denton, 1963). Prior to the year 1880, it was very rare to see a YMCA which contained a gymnasium (Maguire, 2008). In the year 1876 there were only two YMCA facilities that contained gymnasiums, but by the year 1886 there were 101 and by 1896 there were 495 (Maguire, 2008). In part this can be explained by the increasing influence of Muscular Christianity as well as the changing views of the importance of exercise in the fight against disease and the sedentary lifestyle.
The influence of Muscular Christianity and the changing view of exercise in the U.S. are a few reasons for the YMCA’s integration of gymnasiums and physical activity into their services, but they were not the only causes. The financial base of the YMCA during this time was extremely unstable. The YMCA was primarily funded by local churches, contributions from wealthy citizens and fundraising. In addition, the YMCA relied on the money that it received from memberships and dues to stay open and operational. Unlike today, these memberships offered members no special status or services (Maguire, 2008).

The spiritual needs of young men who were moving to cities was a major concern during the initial opening of the YMCA. Eventually this concern of morality and character had broadened and the concern over the inactivity of the population and all of the issues it had led to, had taken center stage. The bible studies and prayer groups that the YMCA had been known for were not drawing in enough people which in turn meant that enough money would not be brought in to keep each chapter open (Zald and Denton, 1963). The problems of society that had been attributed to physical inactivity had led to an increased interest in physical activity and sports (Zald and Denton, 1963). This need to stabilize its finances and the changing needs of its client base led to the YMCA introducing gymnasiums and taking sports and physical activity more seriously (Maguire, 2008). This need for members had also lead to the expansion of who was allowed to participate in programs that the YMCA offered (Zald and Denton, 1963). Instead of just allowing Christian men, the YMCA began to allow men who did not convert and eventually their services were expanded and women were even allowed to partake in everything the organization had to offer.

The YMCA had changed its mission and how it operated as a way to stabilize its financial base in order to remain open and continue serving the people of the community. This is
a very significant moment in the history of the fitness industry. This is the first time that money and finances had become a motivating factor behind exercise and physical activity. Up until this point exercise was seen as something that everyone needed to do in order to lead a moral life and build a strong character. It was also previously seen as something that should be done to help individuals avoid a sedentary lifestyle and all of the complications that go along with it. The YMCA and its willingness to add gymnasiums in order to stabilize its finances and increase the amount of people who were allowed to participate was the first glimpse of the commercial health clubs that we know today (Maguire, 2008)

Reform of the YMCA

This widening of the base of participants and the inclusion of gymnasiums in the YMCA are just some of the changes that the organization underwent on its way to becoming the modern company that is known for gyms and exercise classes more so then anything else. Over time the YMCA’s mission had underwent many changes, the most important being a shift from focusing solely spiritual development to giving equal attention to one’s physical development (Maguire, 2008). These changes along with many other reforms were the responsibility of one man, Dr. Luther H. Gulick Jr (Maguire, 2008). Gulick was a huge proponent of Muscular Christianity and was a major force behind the YMCA’s shift towards the development of the full body instead of focusing solely on the development of the spirit. Gulick was responsible for turning the YMCA into a leader of physical exercise (Maguire, 2008). Gulick was the individual that created the inverted triangle, which is a part of the YMCA logo to this day, as a way to symbolize the development of the mind, body and spirit.

Gulick did not want to abandon the YMCA’s focus on morality and spiritual development. Instead Gulick wanted to expand the focus to improving the whole body through
physical activity, specifically athletics and team sports. The YMCA began to offer more opportunities for individuals to participate in indoor sports like volleyball and basketball instead of activities like gymnastics (Maguire, 2008). Gulick chose to focus more on sports over other forms of exercise like running and calisthenics due in part to his belief that mankind’s “highest mortal principles and qualities were instilled through ‘higher’ stages of play” (Maguire, 2008).

In addition to shifting the focus of the YMCA from a strictly spiritual focus and from gymnastics and calisthenics to team sports, Gulick was responsible for linking the YMCA with other non-religious movements of the time. During the early 1900’s, there were major reforms and educational movements occurring in hopes of improving the quality of life of many Americans. Gulick was a major supporter of many of the educational reforms that were occurring during this time, especially the reforms that were taking place in New York City (Maguire, 2008). In New York City there were major reforms to the public school system which Gulick fully supported. Gulick truly believed that physical activity and athletics were “essential to a healthy, moral, American way of life” (Maguire, 2008). He believed that physical education should be a part of the school system and went on to serve as the director of the physical training program and athletic league for New York City during this time (Maguire, 2008).

While Gulick worked much of his life to show the public the importance of athletics and exercise, the YMCA was not an organization that was aimed at all classes. Many of the YMCA’s across the country during the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century could be found in middle-class neighborhoods (Maguire, 2008). This fact solidified the YMCA’s “mission to serve ‘better classes’ and work on a paid membership basis” (Maguire, 2008). This was the first time that the YMCA began to cater to those who could afford memberships. Before these reforms the YMCA was open to all Christian men in the community who wanted to lead a good
moral life and develop a strong Christian character, regardless if they were wealthy enough to pay for memberships. Now, unless the YMCA was financed by a specific company, like railroad and steel companies that were common during this time, it was very rare to see a chapter of the YMCA explicitly emphasize the recruitment of the working class (Maguire, 2008).

One could say that this was the first inkling of the effect that money could have on the sports and fitness industry. For the first time, those who were wealthy enough to afford memberships to the YMCA and other organizations that were popping up during this time were able to reap the rewards of regular exercise in addition to all of the social benefits of being associated with one of these athletic or country clubs.

Emergence of Health and Fitness Entrepreneurs

Organizations like the YMCA and the private country and sporting clubs were not the only ones to capitalize on the physical culture that was emerging in America during the latter half of the 19th century. During the Late 1800’s there was a boom in the number of entrepreneurs who based their businesses on getting healthy and exercising (Maguire, 2008). It was these individuals and the companies that they created that laid the groundwork for the mass-commercialization that would begin in the 1920’s and 30’s. During this time period, entrepreneurs like Sylvester Graham, John Harvey Kellogg and Charles Post became the pioneers of the health food industry. These breakfast cereal pioneers were the first to utilize and promote specific eating regimens, special types of fiber and all natural ingredients (Maguire, 2008). In addition to the creation of these food companies that have expanded exponentially and are still found today, there were individuals like S.D. Kehoe and Dioclesian Lewis who began by selling gymnastic programs, pamphlets and equipment and eventually went on to create successful businesses during the end of the 19th century (Maguire, 2008).
During the 1870’s and 1880’s there was also the emergence of large-scale sport retailers that sought to capitalize on the new interests of many Americans. In 1876 A.G. Spalding Brothers was formed and by the year 1900 they were selling equipment for every major sport, sponsoring events and contests, publishing sport books and advertising their brand nationwide (Maguire, 2008). The Spalding brothers were not the only sporting goods giant of the time and they were in fact in a heated competition with several other large companies during this time.

The emergence of these large companies had not only led to the early stages of commercialization of the health and fitness industry, it had created a new career for those who were in exceptional shape and who were looking to make money. With all of these companies in competition with each other to sell their products, everyone was on the lookout for new ways to grab the public’s attention. This competition and the desire to sell products and services led to the inception of product endorsements from well-known individuals who were in extraordinary shape. Today it is common to see athletes from every sport endorse a range of products and it has actually become so popular that endorsements have “eclipse[d] sports performance *per se* as the source of income for today’s top stars” (Maguire, 2008).

*Fathers of the Modern Fitness Industry*

One of these individuals who were fortunate enough to capitalize on this need for in-shape individuals to endorse fitness products was Eugene Sandow. Eugene Sandow is widely regarded as one of the fathers of the modern fitness industry for his role in preaching the importance of exercise and bringing physical development to the masses (Greene, 2003). Sandow was one of the first promoters of bodybuilding who “parlayed his reputation as an extraordinary physical specimen and legendary bodybuilder into a sideline career as a product endorser” (Maguire, 2008).
It was common to see Sandow on the cover of sporting good catalogs, like the Spalding catalog, promoting a variety of exercise equipment (Maguire, 2008). When Sandow began his career as a product endorser, the key to his success lied in the fact that everyone wanted to look like him. “Because of his success with his own development, it is clear Sandow had something to offer people looking to change their physical appearance” (Greene, 2003). The general public didn’t just want to watch him in his traveling physical culture shows that had made him famous, they wanted to know what he was doing to look the way that he did and they wanted to do the same thing.

Eugene Sandow began his career in the circus as a strong man and eventually went out on his own and began touring Europe demonstrating thrilling feats of strength (Greene, 2003). In June of 1893 Sandow made his way to the United States and began to perform on Broadway, which ended up being minimally successful (Greene, 2003). Sandow’s big break in the United States came in August of 1893 in Chicago when he met Florenz Ziegfeld (Greene, 2003). Ziegfeld was a master promoter and helped Sandow’s career immensely (Greene, 2003). With Ziegfeld’s help, Sandow began a successful tour of Chicago in August 1893 and eventually went on to successfully tour all of America showing off his extraordinary physique (Greene, 2003).

In addition to being one of the original promoters of the fitness industry, Sandow and Ziegfeld played a large role in sexualizing the fitness industry. Ziegfeld would cover whatever town they were in “with posters of the scantily clad muscleman and placed rather lurid advertisements in local theater programs to tantalize the public” (Greene, 2003). Through Ziegfeld’s advertisement, Sandow was depicted as a sexual object to be desired by women and to be the source of inspiration for men. While this advertising was meant to draw a large number of women to Sandow’s shows, it also had the unintended effect of helping to redefine the way men
in the United States looked at themselves (Greene, 2003). Sandow definitely played a role in numerous men all across America questioning how this physical culture and regular exercise could not only keep them healthy and leading moral lives but how this could benefit him socially. Men saw the way that women, married and unmarried alike, reacted to Sandow and they wanted to look like him in hopes that they would get a similar reaction. Sandow showed the population “the positive effects that a well-developed body could have on a women’s attention” (Greene, 2003).

The fact that Sandow was depicted as a sex symbol through Ziegfeld’s promotions greatly helped his career and sent his popularity through the roof. This popularity with women and men alike made him the perfect person to promote various exercise products and services. While the role that sex appeal plays in the fitness industry today and the social benefits that seemingly accompany being in shape are considered acceptable and the norm, during this time Sandow and Ziegfeld began their tour of the United States, these ideas were not yet mainstream. This was the first time that the idea that the physical culture and being “fit” could help propel one’s social status was explored. From this point on, exercise was seen not only as a way to lead a healthy or moral life, but it was seen as a way to improve the way one looks, which in turn would affect how society viewed someone.

Following Eugene Sandow and Florenz Ziegfeld’s lead were many young up and coming bodybuilders who wanted to capitalize on their exceptional physique. One such young man was Benarr Macfadden who was present at one of Sandow’s shows in Chicago in 1893 (Greene, 2003). MacFadden was blown away by the showmanship that Sandow exhibited during his performances and he wanted to learn everything he could in order to as successful as Sandow in the field (Todd, 1987). He took notes on “Ziegfeld's lighting effects, which accentuated the
German strongman's muscles in the contrast of highlights and black shadows…” (Greene, 2003). From his time in Chicago observing the famous duo, MacFadden took away two main points: the first being that promotion was a powerful tool as was the use of special effects on stage and the second being that the public’s interest in physical fitness was growing extremely quickly as evident by the large crowds that Sandow drew (Greene, 2003).

While MacFadden looked to Sandow as a source of inspiration, there were many differences between the way that MacFadden viewed fitness compared to Sandow. When he was growing up, MacFadden considered himself “weak and sickly” before he began working on his relatives farm in Chicago (Greene, 2003). Once he began working on the farm MacFadden stated that he felt “healthy and strong” for the first time in his life (Greene, 2003). These early experiences really helped shape the way that MacFadden viewed exercise and physical fitness. MacFadden believed that “physical activity could develop the body and as a result improve one's general mood” (Greene, 2008). While Sandow had promoted fitness and the importance of exercise his entire career, he did not base his beliefs on health and wellness like MacFadden.

During the 1890’s MacFadden had begun his career in the health and fitness field in New York City where he began a business in which he sold a new type of exercise device in addition to teaching classes at a local gymnasium (Greene, 2003). Eventually his business became so successful, he had to give up teaching in addition to other hobbies such as writing about fitness and the physical culture that was developing during this time. MacFadden was not the type of man to sit still for long and devote his time and energy to one source, so eventually he grew bored and restless from running his business, so he picked up and moved to England where he would “market and sell his exercise device” (Greene, 2003).
During his time in England, MacFadden traveled all over the place in an attempt to sell his exercise equipment. During this time, MacFadden realized that he was drawing in large crowds of people who wanted to hear his sales pitch or lecture as he called it, rather than buy his product. Because of this, MacFadden decided to sell tickets to his lectures and hand out pamphlets to the crowd during his speech. These pamphlets became so popular that many individuals came up and asked MacFadden if these were available by subscription (Greene, 2003). Out of this increased interest in physical culture and fitness from the public, McFadden had the idea to create the wildly successful magazine Physical Culture. This publication included everything that a white-middle class man had to know about improving every aspect of his being (Maguire, 2008). This magazine was the beginning of MacFadden’s fitness empire that would go on to include health resorts, books and even touring physical culture shows (Maguire, 2008).

Much like Sandow, MacFadden would combine bodybuilding and sexuality in his shows and magazines. While MacFadden was extremely personally devoted to his message about fitness and health, he was still in the business of making money. One of MacFadden’s greatest strengths was connecting with his audience and paying attention to what they wanted. MacFadden would use sexualized photos of Sandow and other famous bodybuilders to sell his magazines and give the public what they wanted but at the same time get his message about fitness and healthy living to the masses. That being said, MacFadden did use his many publications to preach the health benefits of regular physical activity. During early 20th century there were still major concerns about public health and there were still many movements occurring that preached how important exercise was in the prevention of disease. MacFadden truly believed that many of the major illnesses of the day could be cured through diet and
exercise and throughout many of his magazines and books one could find advice on how to “combat any health concern imaginable” (Greene, 2003).

While Sandow is credited with being one of the founding fathers of the modern fitness industry, Bernarr McFadden’s contributions cannot be overlooked. Sandow has been credited with bringing the idea and importance of physical development to the masses, but McFadden was the one who had the ability to “give a middle class audience practical advice on how to develop their bodies for both general health and physical development” (Greene, 2003). McFadden gave advice that everyone could follow and much of his advice did not target the upper class and the specific sports and activities that the rest of the population did not have the luxury of participating in. McFadden realized that fitness and physical development was a lifestyle not a hobby one could pay attention to only when it was convenient for them, “he took physical culture down to the daily tasks of living and made it into a true lifestyle” (Greene, 2003). McFadden believed that exercise and physical development were necessary for someone to lead a healthy life and he used his fitness empire to teach the public exactly how to make the necessary changes so they could improve their health and their quality of life. This can be seen at the beginning of health and overall wellness being used as a marketing tool to get the public to buy a variety of products and services.

During the 1920’s McFadden’s publication Physical Culture was at its peak of popularity. In 1921, McFadden held a competition to decide who the “most perfectly developed man” was (Greene, 2003). The individual that McFadden ended up selecting as the winner of this competition was a young man named Charles Atlas. This was the first time that Atlas had received any national attention. Up until this point, the young Italian immigrant had only had some work in New York City as a model for sculptures (Greene, 2003). The following year
*Physical Culture* and Bernarr MacFadden held yet another competition in order to find the most perfectly developed man, but this time all 750 contestants had to appear in person in front of a packed audience in Madison Square Garden. Once again Atlas won the competition, which eventually led to McFadden dissolving the competition because he believed that “Atlas would win every time” (Greene, 2003).

Atlas parlayed this success and national notoriety into a business in which he would sell his exercise programs through the mail. For the first few years, Atlas’s business struggled mightily and even came close to going bankrupt. These struggles continued until 1928 when he met Charles Roman and took him on as a business partner. Roman was an advertising writer who used Atlas’s biography as a promotional tool to increase the success of Atlas’s mail order business. Atlas was a poor scrawny child growing up in Italy, but through his exercise routine he developed into “the world’s most beautiful man” and a successful businessman (Maguire, 2008). Roman ‘marketed Atlas himself,’ making Atlas into a ‘do as I do’ teacher or guide for the young men who purchased the course” (Greene, 2003). Because of Roman, Atlas’s business flourished like never before and young men all across the country were turning to Atlas to help transform them into strong, macho men.

By the time that Atlas had reached the height of his popularity, physical culture was a part of the mainstream way of life. Public health and sanitation were no longer as big of an issue as they had been in the past, the massive urbanization and industrialization that had been a concern had also slowed down and the advances in medicine had led to medical professionals becoming more confident and efficient in treating diseases (Greene, 2003). During this time the benefits of exercise were well known and generally accepted by the public. “The image of the well-developed, healthy body, that Sandow and MacFadden and many others worked so hard to
promote, had become the ideal” (Greene, 2003). These social factors also played a large part in the success of Atlas and many others during this time. Many young men wanted to look like these famous strongmen and were willing to try anything to achieve this look.

During their Careers, Sandow and MacFadden capitalized on physical culture as a means by which to develop the body as a way to achieve better general health and quality of life. Charles Atlas and many others during this time focused their message, through his advertisements, to exploit the simple fact that many young men wanted to be strong and look a certain way (Greene, 2003). During the 1930’s there was a clear shift from believing that exercise and fitness could cure the ills of society to improving one’s physical appearance and status.

“Physical exercise had become a personal problem and project, tied not to moral character building, as it had in the nineteenth century, but to appearance and personality. The purpose of self-improvement was no longer represented in terms of a better, stronger society, as it had been…Popular culture in the early twentieth century was concerned not with the pursuit of a better society, but with convincing individuals to adapt and fit in” (Maguire, 2008).

Charles Atlas is credited with being one of the first extremely successful businessmen to capitalize on this sudden explosion of vanity in American society during this time period. Atlas was known for using the phrase “real men” to describe those who used his programs in addition to placing advertisements in places that young men would look like comic books or other publications which catered to this population (Greene, 2003). Atlas carefully targeted his audience in a way that would put him in an excellent position to succeed and make money. The advertising strategies that Atlas utilized during the 1940’s and 1950’s eventually caught on and many of these practices are still in use to this day.
Physical Culture and the Leisure Boom

During the 1940’s and 1950’s, a leisure boom arose in the United States as a result of the “postwar affluence, mass consumption and popular interest in quality of life” (Maguire, 2008). In this leisure boom, one such sign of this newfound personal affluence that many Americans were enjoying was a television set. During the 1950’s, watching television had become an integral component of the leisure industry. Americans were making more money, the quality of living was relatively high, and more and more energy was being placed on recreational activities. The popularity that the television gained during this time had huge implications for the physical culture and the fitness industry in addition to the way in which sports and exercise would come to be viewed by Americans.

The invention of the television and the subsequent popularity that it gained had turned sports and exercise into a spectator event (Maguire, 2008). Instead of going outside and playing a game of baseball or football, many Americans were staying inside on their couches watching the professionals play on their television. In addition, due to the large audiences that these professional and even college sporting events would draw, there was a substantial increase in the commercialization and competitiveness of these sports (Maguire, 2008). During this time it has been noted that this leisure boom and the effect that the television had on sports had led to the “the ‘degradation’ of sports into commercial entertainment spectacles and, and individuals into spectators” (Maguire, 2008). People were now content sitting at home on their couch, or going to a stadium or arena and watching others play sports instead of participating themselves.

The popularity of the television did not only affect the sports industry, it had huge implications for the fitness field and was responsible for the creation of many aspects of the industry that remain to this day. Much like in the nineteenth century, during the 1950’s physical
activity was becoming a problem for the middle class, but not for the same reasons. While during
the 1800’s individuals weren’t getting enough physical activity because of the changes in the
types of jobs that middle class individuals were getting, during the 1950’s, many Americans
weren’t getting enough exercise because of the “increasingly sedentary nature” of various leisure
activities (Maguire, 2008). This led to a select group of individuals who wanted to use the lack of
fitness in society and the increasing popularity of the television as a basis for commercial
ventures.

One such individual who wanted to utilize Americans fascination with the television as a
way to get them up and moving was a young entrepreneur named Jack La Lanne. La Lanne was
a fitness fanatic who preached the importance of regular exercise and proper nutrition. Based out
of San Francisco, La Lanne began his career by opening a health studio at the age of 21
(Goldstein, 2011). About a decade later La Lanne turned to television and in 1951 “The Jack La
Lanne Show” was born (Goldstein, 20011). While at this point in time the show was only shown
on a local station in San Francisco, by 1959 La Lanne had captured the attention of the whole
country and his program became a staple of daytime TV all across the country (Maguire, 2008).
On his show, La Lanne would perform exercises that required very little equipment and he would
courage everyone to get up and join him. Unlike many fitness icons of the past who had only
catered to the needs of men, La Lanne targeted men, women, the elderly and even the disabled
(Goldstein, 2011).

Throughout his career La Lanne amassed a fitness empire that included not only his
television show but health spas, exercise equipment, and nutritional supplements (Goldstein,
2011). While La Lanne is best known for his television show and the effects it had on the
development of the fitness industry, one could argue that that was not even his largest or most
important contribution to physical culture and the way people perceive exercising. As mentioned previously, La Lanne opened a health spa in 1936 at the age of 21. This was just the beginning of La Lanne’s long and illustrious career but the impact that this single health club had on the fitness industry is incomparable. La Lanne’s health club included not only a gym where people could exercise, but it also included a juice bar and health food store (Goldstein, 2011). Today, it would be extremely uncommon to walk into a commercial fitness center and not see a juice bar and a store where you can but supplements, healthy food or anything else that you could think of that could be associated with health and fitness. Back in the 1930’s and 1940’s this was not a common sight. Because of La Lanne and the increasing interest in not only physical fitness but in leading a healthy lifestyle, it has become normal for gyms and fitness centers to act as a one stop shop for all of your fitness needs.

**The Fitness Industry Today**

*Commercialization of the Modern Fitness Industry*

What are the common thoughts an individual has when they want to begin working out in the contemporary fitness industry? If an individual wants to take up a new exercise program, say a yoga class for example, more often than not they will begin by buying and necessary equipment, like a new yoga mat, and then begin searching for a place to take classes or for an instructional DVD. If they choose to go to a class more often than not they will need to go out and but cloths to wear to their new classes because they can’t be seen in just anything, they need all of the special gear.

Instead of just going and doing yoga like it had been in the past for hundreds of years, in the contemporary fitness industry, exercising and fitness is almost always associated with buying a membership to some type of fitness center or health club, buying specialized clothing or even
new high tech equipment. It is no longer simply about improving one’s health or trying to lead a moral life, it has become about appearance and many individuals and companies in the fitness industry have taken advantage of this new physical culture in which how you look effects where you are in society and how you are perceived.

*Issues Facing the Exercise Professional Today*

When one looks over this selective history of the fitness industry and the development of physical culture in the United States, there are a few long-term features and patterns that have developed which can help us understand the issues that a fitness professional faces in the contemporary fitness industry. Firstly, the commercialization of the equipment, venues and the guidance of fitness specialists associated with particular forms of activity has played a major role in the creation of the fitness industry that we know today (Maguire, 2008). What originally began as a means for self-improvement and the betterment of society had morphed into a billion dollar industry which relies heavily on the public’s obsession with physical prowess, good looks and the desire to lead a long life (Kretchmar, 2005). This obsession has put the exercise professional in such a position that their livelihood depends on selling equipment, memberships and most importantly the conception that what they have to offer is better then everything else out there.

In addition to the commercialization of goods and services found in the fitness industry, it can be noted that the changing nature of work, leisure and everyday life had led to issues with the way that exercise and fitness are viewed (Maguire, 2008). These factors have created the perfect conditions for exercise to be regarded as a choice and a status activity (Maguire, 2008). These notions about exercise and fitness that are present in society today can be credited with individuals utilizing various products and services in the fitness industry as a way to move up in
society and the desire to come across as an individual who cares about themselves enough to take the time and money to put towards this endeavor. In addition, this has led to the belief that those who do not work out, or don’t meet the idealized image of what someone who works out looks like, don’t take care of themselves, are lazy and that their physical appearance is a direct reflection of their character and who they are as a person. It appears that there is a bullying strain to the modern fitness ethos today (Bruni, 2011). This is one of the most alarming situations facing an exercise professional today. One’s physical appearance is only one aspect of one’s being and focusing solely on physical prowess is undermining everything that makes humans so special. In an industry that focuses so much on looks and appearance it can be a challenge for even the most experienced exercise professional to talk to clients about their expectations, what they can realistically accomplish and how these physical ideals are not possible for everyone to achieve.

Furthermore, this history is marked by the shift in physical activity being seen as a way to better one’s self and as a means of individual improvement as compared to a way to advance society (Maguire, 2008). This shift had meant that over time there has been a transition in the objectives and goals of fitness from building healthy bodies and strong morals to aid in the strengthening of society to a focus on adapting to society through attractive bodies (Maguire, 2008). Both health and appearance have become central to both the social order and to one’s occupational and social status (Maguire, 2008). Individuals have begun to use exercise as a way to improve their physical appearance in order to impress those around them and to get ahead in life instead of as means of self-improvement. Instead of focusing on being the best version of one’s self, getting closer to God and helping advance society, as was the focus of exercise in the past, many people today are worried about comparing themselves and what they have to others.
Individuals aren’t always worried about the progress they have made, often they are too preoccupied with the fact that they still are not doing as good as those around them. This is a situation that many exercise professionals find themselves in today. Instead of looking at the way their own personal improvements, individuals will compare what they have done or are capable of doing to what others are doing. This outward focus of many consumers found in the fitness industry makes it difficult for fitness experts to truly make a difference in someone’s life at times because they don’t see their own progress; they only see what they are lacking compared to everyone else.

Looking Towards the Future of the Fitness Industry

The Need for Professional and Personal Ethics

When one looks at the current state of the fitness industry, it is understandable why some may feel pessimistic about the future of the field. While it can be disheartening to see many of the practices utilized today, whether it be professionals promising physiologically impossible results, companies pushing products that do not have been fully tested and researched or even advertisements being shown that depict the benefits of regular exercise, all is not lost. Those individuals who work in the fitness industry and have direct contact with clients and consumers alike can change the direction that the fitness industry is headed through the implementation of professional and personal ethics.

For all professionals, there is always some type of personal standard put into place regardless of the industry. For the fitness industry various organizations such as the American Medical Association, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Recreation and dance have adopted codes of conduct to provide some guidance for its members (Kretchmar, 2005). While these organizations provide some guidance for
professionals, no code of conduct can produce good conduct on its own. On a personal level, each individual needs to rely on their “upbringing, role models and teachers who treat people fairly and respect the products or services for which they are responsible” (Kretchmar, 2005).

As humans, we are not simply products of our environment. We are capable of making our own decisions and over time, based on the decisions we do make we will develop a “moral signature” or “a typical way of behaving that may earn us deep respect or a reputation that is far less flattering” (Kretchmar, 2005). As human-beings, it is not in our nature to desire to behave immoral, and there are many surveys conducted that show that professionals regard integrity as more important than success and most people regard themselves as better than their peers (Kretchmar, 2005). While it is impossible for everyone to be above average when it comes to morality and ethics, this goes to show that as humans, integrity is something that we deeply value and we see this as a desirable trait in ourselves and others.

That being said, even though as humans we consider integrity and morality deeply important, in many professions and industries it is often the case that ethical behavior is often absent and professional ethics seem to face many challenges (Kretchmar, 2005). It is very common to turn on the news and see a story about a CEO of a major company going to jail or employees stealing from their companies and these crimes having major ramifications for many people who work at these companies. The Fitness industry is no different. Especially since the ever increasing presence of commercialism, ethics in the fitness industry has seemingly, for many individuals and companies, taken a back seat to recognition, success and money.

Ethics as a Tool for Improvement

As mentioned in the sections above, there are many situations facing an exercise professional today that prove extremely challenging. Individual’s morals and integrity are
constantly being pushed and put to the test every day in this industry due to conflicting ideas of what the end goal or purpose of the industry and their job is. Over time, the reasoning behind exercise and the physical culture present in the United States has evolved from the development of a stronger society through the creation of moral individuals with strong character, to individuals looking to improve their physical appearance to adapt to society or improve their social standing. This evolution has put a great deal of pressure on professionals working in this industry from various sources and in many of these circumstances there is no one universal answer. Implementing one’s personal ethics in addition to adhering to a standard set of professional ethics is the best tool for navigating through an industry in which an individual’s beliefs and ideals are constantly being challenged.

One issue that many exercise professionals face is that fact that they work in an industry that is so highly commercialized that their very livelihood is often based on their ability to sell products and services. More importantly then being able to sell equipment and memberships is their ability to convince the public that they can accomplish what they promise they can in an industry that in recent years has become flooded with numerous products and programs that all claim to be the end-all be-all for those looking to get in healthy and in shape (Kretchmar, 2005). This increase in commercialization due to changing ideals in society about what is important has made it necessary for those in the fitness industry to use develop a strong moral compass to use in situations that may not have one universally correct answer. Exercise professionals are at times put into situations where their livelihood and making money is often at odds with what is truly best for their clients.

There are many companies and facilities in which fitness professionals are forced to not only work with clients and help them with some aspect of their health, but they have quota
system in which they have to make sell a certain amount of products. While not all facilities have commission based pay scales, there are some who abide by this practice. What should a personal trainer do when they are faced with making the decision between making enough money to feed their family or convincing a client that there is no way that they can achieve their goals without that new supplement? There is no clear-cut universal answer to this question, but through the implementation of professional integrity and personal ethics and values, an exercise professional can make the best decision possible and have faith in their decisions. In circumstances like this, the issue that many individuals face is the lack of moral confidence (Kretchmar, 2005). They do not believe in their abilities to make the tough decisions so often they just go with the flow and do not stand up for what they know or believe to be right.

While the use of ethics and morals in the fitness industry would not eliminate or change situations that have no clear cut answer, it would give exercise professionals a sense of faith or trust in their own ability to make the tough decisions. While working in the fitness industry is their occupation, that fact does not define these professionals. Fitness professionals are working with people and their actions not only has bearing on themselves and the success of their career, but it affects other people’s lives and well-being. That needs to remain the most important variable when working in the fitness industry.

As humans, we have an innate desire to demonstrate integrity. In addition for some reason ethics are something that we find deeply important. Through the development and implementation of personal ethics, exercise professionals can develop a sense of morality that will help them intelligently determine what is truly worthwhile and valuable in an industry that is constantly changing its values. As an exercise professional, one already makes value judgments based on matters of worth every day. They use utilize some exercises over others every day
because they are more effective or safer for clients. In addition they talk to clients about eating foods that are considered healthier than others. They also have to talk about goal setting and expectations with clients. Since this fact is unavoidable, it is best to make these decisions about worth and what it important and realistic based on reason and reflection.

**Conclusion**

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, the fitness industry has undergone numerous changes to the fundamental core of what is important and what is valued. In the beginning, physical activity was seen as a way to get closer to God and as a way to lead a moral life. These attributes were thought to help build a stronger society, which would improve the lives of everyone who lived in a given Community. Physical Activity was initially used as an instrument for self-improvement and as a way to better society and improve the quality of life for all. Over time this concept has changed drastically. Instead of focusing on the improvement of attributes like morals and character, and focusing on the betterment of society, exercise and fitness are being used as a way to improve an individual’s outward physical appearance and as a way to gain acceptance in a society that puts an extreme amount of value on one’s physical appearance.

The professionals that are working in the fitness industry today are forced to deal with these changing values, which has caused many issues. Exercise professionals are working in an environment which relies heavily on the public’s obsession with physical prowess, good looks and youth. This obsession and the consumer mindset has put the exercise professional in such a position that their livelihood depends on selling equipment, memberships and most importantly the conception that what they have to offer is better then everything else out there.

In addition the fitness industry has become so focused on looks and appearance. Individuals are bombarded with images of what they should look like and advertisements for
various products that claim to help one achieve these physical ideals. For many individuals these goals are not realistic or even possible. This has can put a strain on the relationship that the exercise professional has with their clients because they are advertising that they can help one achieve certain results but some will never see the desired results. In addition, this outward focus of many consumers found in the fitness industry makes it difficult for fitness experts to truly make a difference in someone’s life at times. There is so much comparing that happens in this industry that if someone does not see results immediately or if they do not see the results that they expect they get, they often blame the exercise professional and look for another option. It is very difficult for one to do their job and when the very people that they are trying to help are leaving and going elsewhere because they don’t look like the models or athletes that they are being shown every day.

Even though there are many challenges facing exercise professionals today due to the increasing role of commercialization and consumerism, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Through the use of personal and professional ethics, those who work in the fitness industry can develop and utilize a moral compass that can be used to aid them in making decisions when faced with morally ambiguous situations. No matter what, tough decisions have to be made in the fitness industry just like in life. It is best for everyone involved if those who face these situations everyday use reason and reflection to truly remember what is important and make the best decision possible when faced with circumstances that make a clear-cut answer impossible.
Works Cited


