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# Unfit for citizenship: fitness, ambiguity, and the problem of the physically (in)active child

Rafael Antonio Cervantes  
*University of Iowa*

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UNFIT FOR CITIZENSHIP:  
FITNESS, AMBIGUITY, AND THE PROBLEM OF THE PHYSICALLY  
(IN)ACTIVE CHILD

by  
Rafael Antonio Cervantes

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Communication Studies  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2006

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Bruce Gronbeck  
Associate Professor Meenakshi Gigi Durham

## ABSTRACT

This project looks half a century in the past to begin making sense of how and why the obese child has become visible as a significant public problem in the United States. The central argument of this dissertation is that the development of physical education as a discipline and its articulation to the physical fitness panic of the 1950s functioned rhetorically by framing physical fitness as a category necessary for performing one's citizenship. Indeed, I argue that the articulation of the fit body to American citizenship is a crucial component in the emergence of the obese child as a public problem. By examining the interrelated themes of physical education, public problems, materialist rhetoric, ambiguity, and history, I demonstrate that rhetorical practices not only function as mechanisms for disciplining the practices of citizens, but also create opportunities for re-imagining the body and its value in society.

In chapter two, I address these themes through an historicization of the disciplinary development of physical education as it changed over time. Chapter three explores the ways in which McCarthyism and increased instances of juvenile delinquency in the 1950s cultivated a politico-cultural environment that necessitated a method capable of managing the behavior of deviant individuals. This need for the management of deviance along with developments in physical education contributed to the emergence of the President's Council on Youth Fitness, an institution that drew national attention to the importance of physical fitness. Finally, chapter four examines the circulation of the ways in which physical fitness' status as a public problem was made possible by the ambiguous nature of the term fitness.

In making visible the contingent nature of the fitness problem, its implications, and the means by which it operates, this study provides a starting

point through which alternatives for current understandings of the body and its value can be conceived. The specific route through which such a re-conceptualization of the body could occur is found within moments where the persuasive force of language leaves room for (mis)interpretation, the liminal space created through rhetorical ambiguity.

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Graduate College  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To Dina



That is what life is, at its highest and best - a playing of the game, a pursuing of the ideal under the rules and limiting conditions necessary for this pursuit. The pursuit is an end in itself.

Luther Halsey Gulick  
A Philosophy of Play

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This project looks half a century in the past to begin making sense of how and why the obese child has become visible as a significant public problem in the United States. The central argument of this dissertation is that the development of physical education as a discipline and its articulation to the physical fitness panic of the 1950s functioned rhetorically by framing physical fitness as a category necessary for performing one's citizenship. Indeed, I argue that the articulation of the fit body to American citizenship is a crucial component in the emergence of the obese child as a public problem. By examining the interrelated themes of physical education, public problems, materialist rhetoric, ambiguity, and history, I demonstrate that rhetorical practices not only function as mechanisms for disciplining the practices of citizens, but also create opportunities for re-imagining the body and its value in society.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
The Question .....	2
The Obesity Problem .....	3
Theoretical Framework .....	5
Reading Strategy .....	19
Chapter Organization .....	22
CHAPTER 2 PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND THE LABOR OF LEISURE .....	28
Introduction .....	28
The Theory of Play and the Slum Problem .....	33
World War I and the Institution of PE .....	37
Recreation, Leisure, and the Great Depression .....	40
Democracy, Leisure, and Labor .....	45
Conclusion: Play and the Aesthetics of Existence .....	49
CHAPTER 3 DISCIPLINED CHILDREN AND DEVIANT BODIES .....	54
Deviant Bodies .....	58
Management .....	67
Conclusion .....	75
CHAPTER 4 AMBIGUITY AND THE FITNESS PROBLEM .....	79
The Ambiguous Value of Fitness .....	81
Health in Fitness .....	88
A Necessary Evil .....	93
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION .....	102
Rhetorical Practices and Public Problems .....	102
Genealogy and Ambiguity .....	105
The Need for Ambiguity .....	110
Obese Children .....	112
Rhetorical Ambiguity .....	115
Some Final Thoughts on Being a Rhetorician .....	121
REFERENCES .....	123

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Within the past year the obesity epidemic has been featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, *National Geographic*, and *Harvard* magazine, a feature length documentary, an ABC special report, several episodes of MTV's *True Life*, countless stories on *National Public Radio*, hundreds of newspaper articles, and an endless stream of books. One particularly visible body within this sea of problematic bodies is the unfit child. While the condition of obesity is the general topic of concern within the texts mentioned above, the effects of obesity on children in particular becomes the specific body to which they direct their attention. Fat in general is a significant problem in the United States, but it is the figure of the fat child that operates as the specific target for our obesity related concerns. The obese child, however, is not a new threat to our social order; the size, health, and fitness of the child's body have been loci of social attention for at least half a century.

The intent of this particular study, however, is not to explore the ways in which obesity and obese children function in the present. Instead, this project will look half a century in the past to begin making sense of how and why the obese child emerged as a central problem in the first place. Part of the argument made here is that the cultural, historical, economic, and political developments that occurred during this time period cultivated the emergence of the unfit body as a problem. Ultimately this study finds the current cultural, political, and medical problematization of the obese child to have negative consequences for both children (thin and fat) as well as parents and other social institutions. This project seeks to demonstrate the historically contingent nature of "the obesity problem" in general and the obese child problem in particular. *Unfit for Citizenship* illustrates that the ways in which discourse, functioning as a mediating force in the relationship

between individuals and their bodies, is complex and deeply implicated in political and economic interests. Through historical contextualization this study demonstrates that the interests linked to the imperatives of managing the physical activity of children do not simply function oppressively, though such a conclusion might be one's initial response. Instead, the pathologized unhealthy child functions productively, making possible an entire system of rules, practices, and individuals solely oriented to its management. To be sure, a system that pathologizes the unfit child can be interpreted as imposing constraints on behavior, but this single perspective is limiting. This study seeks to interpret the pathologization of the unfit child as a phenomenon that through its constraint also enables.

In making visible the contingent nature of the obesity problem, its implications, and the means by which it operates, this study begins to provide a starting point from which we may re-think the alternatives for how we choose to understand and instruct ourselves and our children about the body and its value. The specific route through which such a re-conceptualization of the body can occur is specifically found within the liminal space made possible within instances of rhetorical ambiguity – moments where the persuasive force of language leaves room for (mis)interpretation.

### The Question

In 1956 the President Dwight Eisenhower established the President's Council on Youth Fitness. Eisenhower attributed the Council's founding to the poor performance of American children in a series of physical fitness tests comparing the fitness of children in Europe to children in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Though the council's emergence is significant for many reasons that will be addressed later, its foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Prudden, *Is Your Child Really Fit?* (New York: Harper, 1956).



sparks deceptively simple questions: why this problem? Why this visibility? These questions lead to further questions regarding the role/primacy of the healthy child's body in the past and present. If the unfit and unhealthy child did not alert citizens to a new pathology, which has slowly begun to manifest itself in society, – the publicized problem of the unhealthy child's body has existed since at least 1956 - why this form of representation? Why keep the unfit/unhealthy child as a target of attention? Why is the obese child currently receiving such added visibility? To begin unraveling these questions we might first return to the initial question, why does an emphasis on the physically fit child emerge in 1956? What is it about the child, physical fitness, and the time period that caused the problem to present itself? Second, what does this problem do? More specifically, what does understanding this problem as a problem do? How does it function in society? Asking such questions necessitates an historical examination of the time period during which the physicality of the child's body came to be infused with value, a value that centers it as an object in need of discipline and management. Furthermore, the process of answering such questions will not only illustrate how the obese child has emerged, but will also highlight the function of rhetorical practices in creating public problems, creating solutions to those problems and underscoring possibilities of resistance to the imposition of the problem's solutions.

### The Obesity Problem

Obesity is not a unique topic for critique; in fact, the function of obesity in society in relation to women in particular has been visible for quite some time. The majority of critical engagements related to the topic read obesity as a stigmatized category of oppression. The critique of fatness as a pejorative emerged in 1970's discourse with the publishing of Susie Orbach's *Fat is a Feminist Issue*.<sup>2</sup> This book is,

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<sup>2</sup> Susie Orbach, *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* (1979: Hamlyn, 1979).

perhaps, the first work to critically address the status of obese women in society. Orbach, a feminist, argues that obesity is not a liability to women, but a means by which women empower themselves. Discussing compulsive eating as a cause of obesity, Orbach asserts that through over-eating women resist societal norms: "Getting fat can thus be understood as a definite and purposeful act; it is a directed, conscious or unconscious, challenge to sex role stereo-typing and culturally defined experience of womanhood" (18). In their reader entitled *Bodies Out of Bounds* Braziel and Lebesco similarly identify the potential for agency within the obese body and the possibility for alternative readings of the obese body.<sup>3</sup> Both authors consider fatness to be "under erasure," a contested site wrought with contradictions. While Orbach, Braziel, and Lebesco find some positive ways in which to read the fat person's role in society, many scholars do not. Marcia Milman, for example, demonstrates the ways in which obesity evokes intense feelings of fear, shock, contempt, outrage, and shame.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Kim Chernin seeks to evoke an understanding in readers of women's obsession with "weight, the size of [their] bodies, and [their] longing for food."<sup>5</sup>

Bordo and Saukko represent more recent academic works that engage obesity's function in society. In *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo devotes a chapter to the consequences of our current society's pathologization of the obese female body and the ways in which societal structures have "overdetermined slenderness as the

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<sup>3</sup> Jana & Kathleen LeBesco Braziel, *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Marcia Millman, *Such a Pretty Face: Being Fat in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (Cambridge: Harper and Row, 1981). 1

current ideal for women.”<sup>6</sup> Saukko, like Bordo, also places the anorectic into context and explains the social conditions that make such a figure possible as well as the implications for the values which make anorexia possible. While critical of the highly visible and pathological “nature” of the overweight body, a common theme within these critical explorations of obesity is a gender specific focus on the obese body.

Though the approaches have shifted, the female body has remained the center around which a variety of different arguments against obesity’s pejorative construction have been articulated. Left uninterrogated is the historicization and critique of the manner through which additional sites have been subjected to and marginalized by a pejorative understanding of obesity. While the critique of obesity as a public problem has been mobilized around the figure of the woman, it has not yet been taken up in response to the figure of the child.

### Theoretical Framework

#### Power

Given the critical nature of this project and the ways in which it focuses on illustrating the consequences that result from the convergence of institutions, individuals, and discourse, a theory of power becomes necessary. Specifically, in order to understand the connections that will be made regarding the materiality of rhetoric, it is not necessary to understand what power is, but how operates. Throughout this study, power will be understood not as a force that operates oppressively, nor as a force that deprives individuals of agency; instead, power will be conceptualized as a force that functions productively. In the words of Foucault:

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993). 267

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.<sup>7</sup>

The argument to be made in this work, however, is not that the discursive production of the obese child as problem is a positive phenomenon. Far from it. A utilization of this particular theory of power becomes useful because it allows the study to move beyond a discussion of the negativity experienced by children who are fat in our society. An understanding of power as productive opens the possibility for an examination of the societal consequences for labeling the obese child a public problem.

Working from a framework that regards power as productive we can read the fat child's body as a site that is making a particular form of reality possible; the obese child's body becomes a place capable of organizing the practices of individuals. These pathologized bodies operate as *lines of penetration* into family, home, school, and government.<sup>8</sup> The large population of obese children, for example, makes possible the establishment of fat camps, diet foods aimed towards children, and federal legislation organized around the health/welfare of the child. An understanding of the obese child as a public problem must be in place for such occurrences to emerge. As the unfit child is described as a problem in need of elimination, power will not only be conceived as that force which seeks their

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. 194

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1990). 45. Foucault specifically refers to the masturbating child as one particular figure that, "was not so much an enemy as a support, it may have been designated as the evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than to disappear for good." By acting as a body that perseveres and proliferates, the masturbating as well as the unfit child function as problems in need of solutions.

erasure, but as an imperative that guides individuals through a series of directives always aimed at the fat child's elimination. Significant about this distinction is a shift in focus away from the intent of the discourse (eliminating the unfit child) to the actions and knowledges made possible by the discourse's intentions.

### Governmentality and Citizenship

The cultivation of a productive population and one's status as a member of a particular population are central to a study focused on the highly patriotic post-World War II America, celebratory of U.S. democracy and fearful of communist invasion. Lauren Berlant and Toby Miller provide differing discussions of the significance of citizenship in relation to how it gets defined and the types of values represented through this relation. For both, citizenship relates to the ways in which private desires become shaped to fit the public good. The curing of the unfit child as it gets articulated to notions of the nation and citizenship functions as another way in which private desires/values become oriented to the public good and thus functions as a means of disciplining the population through an articulation of citizenship with fitness. This study argues that educational, federal, and medical institutional discourses specifically responsible for making the unfit child a publicly visible problem functioned as forms of materialist rhetoric. This is because the ways in which unfit children are framed in a variety of institutional discourses has material implications for how the practices of that child and a host of other entities related to those children are enabled/constrained.

### Materialist Rhetoric

A central argument of this study seeks to demonstrate that the unfit child, both in the present and in the past, has functioned rhetorically. More specifically, it argues that the fat child in society currently functions as a materialist rhetoric. The decision to make use of this particular theoretical approach is a deliberate result of

particular philosophical approaches to the ways in which meaning is created. Rather than interpreting what obese children mean, this study posits a method focused on making sense of the ways in which the obese children function in our society by illustrating of how and why they have emerged as public problems. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that this public problem is not “Truth,” but that it has emerged due to political and institutional interests. This goal will be realized through an historicization of the discourses and social conditions that facilitated obesity’s emergence as a public problem.

Because a poststructuralist reading strategy is oriented not so much to “Truth,” but to the production of “truths,” it will serve as the general theoretical framework through which this study will be undertaken. I draw upon poststructuralism to accomplish both because the priority in a poststructuralist reading strategy is not what something means, but how it is being used. How is the public problem of the unfit child being used in our society, and towards what end? How, in other words, does the unfit child function rhetorically?

The political climate during the 1950s set the conditions through which the unfit child begins to function rhetorically. Rhetoric will not be defined here as persuasion; instead, a text will be conceptualized as “rhetorical” based on the particular way in which it functions in society. One particularly effective way of highlighting how discourse comes to function rhetorically is through the phenomenon of the public problem. That is, discourse becomes rhetorical when it makes a problem publicly visible. Rhetorical practices, then, will be categorized as those which identify a problem in society, consequently organizing and centralizing a particular object, figure, or body of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> To function rhetorically, an object

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<sup>9</sup> Discourse will be defined here as the structured ways in which language is organized due to the articulation of politics, history, and culture, etc. Discourse for this project, for example, will be texts related to physical fitness and children read through a lens which pays attention to connections between issues of citizenship and nationalism as they

(or discourse) must work as a nodal point around which discourses begin to circulate and institutions or individuals begin to organize their practices. An invocation of the term “rhetorical materialism” implies an understanding of rhetoric and rhetorical practices as having material consequences in the world. Due to its poststructuralist stance, this study specifically makes use of the definition for materialist rhetoric used by Ronald Greene in his 1998 essay, “Another Materialist Rhetoric.”

The unfit child functions as materialist rhetoric through its ability to organize meaning making, a process with material consequences for how individuals manage their bodies and the bodies of their children. Greene’s version of materialist rhetoric was chosen in particular due to an approach to rhetorical criticism that acknowledges that the unfit child is a construct that emerged at a given moment of articulation. Greene’s approach conceives of reality as an effect of the articulation of objects and symbols to a particular way of making sense (structure of signification). In this scenario, rhetorical effectivity will be gauged based on a specific site’s (the unfit child) ability to incite, organize, and direct particular problems as priorities. Something begins to function as rhetoric, then, when it organizes discourses, individuals, and governments around itself and consequently begins to program and judge reality. The unfit child begins to function rhetorically upon Eisenhower’s establishment of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness; the Council’s establishment indicates the existence of a figure whose importance had not previously been recognized, the unfit child. Here we find the public problem of the unfit child acting as a node around which institutions structure themselves, views of the world, and public policies.

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relate to the unfit child. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

## Public Problems and Rhetorics of Controversy

Public problems are essential to this study; they act as a central place where discourses concerned with the management of truth emerged. The importance of studying public problems has been implicitly addressed by rhetoricians in discussions concerned with the topic of controversy. Olson and Goodnight's analysis of the arguments made by pro and anti-fur activists demonstrates how the controversy facilitated the usage of different rhetorical forms of expression.<sup>10</sup> In his essay, "A Rhetoric of Controversy," Kendall Phillips considers the controversy arising from the excavation of an African burial ground in New York City, demonstrating how the controversy spawns an emphasis in micro rhetorical forms.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Phillips claims that controversy produces disorienting, disrupting, displacing, and demarcating processes, a claim Goodnight disagrees with in a response article.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, Goodnight argues that controversies – the African burial ground controversy in particular – also functions as a means of creating stability. These scholars all agree that, in some fashion, controversies are important moments of discursive creation, whether it is through their ability to produce meaning(s), engender practices of resistance, or reinforce practices of domination. In general, controversies act as central communicative acts that organize rhetorical practices around them, much like public problems.

Furthermore, though public problems are not necessarily composed of different parties in conflict with each other, they still function in much the same

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<sup>10</sup> Kathryn M. Olson and G Thomas Goodnight, "Entanglements of Consumption, Cruelty, Privacy, and Fashion: The Social Controversy over Fur.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, no. 3 (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Kendall R. Phillips, "A Rhetoric of Controversy," *Western Journal of Communication* 63, no. 4 (1999).

<sup>12</sup> G. Thomas. Goodnight, "Messrs. Denkins, Rangel, and Savage in Colloquy on the African Burial Ground: A Companion Reading.," *Ibid.*



manner as controversies. Controversies can be considered as such when tension is created between a number of groups over a particular issue. Similarly, public problems introduce issues as necessitating concern to the public, thus creating a tension within a public's "normal" state of being. The tension created by the introduction of a controversial topic or a public health problem is what distinguishes both public problems and controversies as phenomena capable of doing rhetorical work. This sentiment is echoed by Greene, who claims that public problems are the sites at which societies are governed and that rhetorical practices through articulating "institutions, discourses, and populations onto a field of action" make public problems intelligible.<sup>13</sup> In fact, I would argue that studying problems lacking in controversy is ideal for scholars interested in critiquing hegemony. Indeed, problems whose status as such have been accepted are spaces where a situation's truth has been so thoroughly accepted that it generates no controversy. This does not mean that power is not at work.

Joseph Gusfield and Murray Edelman engage the notion of public problems by examining their function as an ideological supplement: "problems come into discourse and therefore into existence as reinforcements of ideologies, not simply because they are there or because they are important for wellbeing."<sup>14</sup> That is, public problems are not primordially attached to the welfare of the general population; situations are not "problems" until they are called as such. From this perspective the public problem works in the service of a larger set of political motivations. Such an approach highlights the circulation of public problems in

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald Walter Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15 (1998). 22

<sup>14</sup> Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1988). and Joseph R. Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1981).

society as connected to power, a connection explained by Michel Foucault's discussions of "governmentality" and "pastoral power."

Ronald Greene and Samantha J. King recently have made use of this connection in their own work. Greene's "Y Movies: Film and the Modernization of Pastoral Power" demonstrates that educational films played by YMCA secretaries to assist in the Americanization of immigrant workers function as a technology through which pastoral power could be modernized, exercised, and circulated in response to problems of class conflict and the civic education of the immigrant populations during the 1920s. Similarly, King's piece "Doing Good by Running Well" illustrates the means through which "The Race for the Cure" utilizes the problem of cancer as a technology for producing good citizens.<sup>15</sup> One significant connection between these pieces is the importance of public problems in opening up a space through which individuals and populations can be disciplined. For Greene and King respectively, the public problems of civic education among immigrants and fears attached to cancer provide the necessary social context for their Foucaultian analyses.

Framing public problems as such facilitates a potential means through which power can be exercised within society; this potential cannot be realized without a *line of penetration*. Discourses positioning individuals as subjects provide the necessary points of access through which the practices of a population can be calibrated: "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald Walter Greene, "Y Movies: Film and the Modernization of Pastoral Power," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2005), Samantha J. King, "Doing Good by Running Well: Breast Cancer, the Race for the Cure, and New Technologies of Ethical Citizenship," in *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality*, ed. Jeremy Packer Jack Z. Bratich, and Cameron McCarthy (Albany: State University of New York, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980). 98 See also, Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994).

An important effect of the emergence of a public problem, then, is the delegation of individuals as particular types of subjects responsible for the problem's elimination as Foucault writes: "one of the prime effects of power [is] that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals."<sup>17</sup> This essay examines the construction of the obesity problem and the implications for ways in which individuals are constituted as certain types of subjects. For Foucault, individuals emerge as subjects through

A form of power that...categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him.<sup>18</sup>

As subjects, individuals are placed within a particular identity through which they are recognized by society and through which they can recognize themselves. The occupation of a subjectivity, or a subject position, produces particular possibilities for action and completely negates others; through its imposition of a 'law of truth,' the subject maintains requirements for individual and society.

#### Genealogy, Rhetoric, and Articulation

To comprehend the unfit child as an apparatus that distributes and structures discourse (materialist rhetoric) is to recognize the role played by articulation. Operating within this particular framework makes possible a particular understanding of rhetorical effectivity as a result of an articulation between meaning and object. Laclau and Mouffe define articulation as a practice that "consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning."<sup>19</sup> The significance of

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. 98

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power." 331

<sup>19</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 113

articulation here lies in the word “partial” and its implications for the relationship between meaning and articulation. As DeLuca explains:

Though elements preexist articulation as floating signifiers, the act of linking in a particular discourse modifies their character such that they can be understood as being spoken anew....In short, an element is not a fixed identity and does not have an essential meaning.<sup>20</sup>

Within this logic, meaning is the result of linking a text to a particular structure of signification, or manner of making sense. For this project, the unfit child will be linked to issues of citizenship and physical fitness in the 1950s. Post-World War II citizenship formulated around issues of McCarthyism, nationalism, and xenophobia will be read as key components in a structure of signification built around the unfit child.

Materialist rhetoric within this paradigm can be analyzed by tracking how the unfit child functions as a technology of deliberation. This approach, in other words, examines the ways in which the unfit child’s visibility incites debate, discussion, and deliberation. The unfit child as a public problematic acts as a vehicle through which a governing apparatus programs and makes judgments about reality. Within this dynamic, rhetorical practices are those that articulate how the unfit child in society is to be understood. The concept of articulation, then, provides a useful complement to materialist rhetoric as that which organizes deliberation around particular issues. Materialist rhetoric provides a focus on how rhetorical practices have material effects by setting the conditions of deliberation; articulation maintains a focus on illustrating the historical convergences that contribute to a rhetorical practice’s material effects. In Storrer’s words,

Articulation is not about collapsing the distinction between materiality and meaning to advance a specific critical project; it

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<sup>20</sup> Kevin DeLuca, "Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32, no. 4 (1999). 335.

is about historicizing different configurations of materiality and meaning (collapsed, segregated, overlapping) as conditions for the coming into being of a given form of rhetoric.<sup>21</sup>

The articulation of the historical and the material, in other words, generates the conditions for a particular form of rhetoric to emerge. For this dissertation, the way in which the unfit child functions as a problem capable of organizing individuals into citizens, a contingency based upon the historical moment (post WWII, McCarthyism) within which the pathologized unfit child and good citizenship were deemed public priorities.

The examination of historical articulations, however, is not without a set of principles. Genealogy as taken up by Foucault will operate as the strategy through which historical articulations will be read:

Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.<sup>22</sup>

Through analysis of the power of true discourses and, more generally, of the relationship between truth and power, the genealogist is led to redefine the conditions of the acceptability of truth.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, the focus in this project is making visible the contingent nature of the unfit child as a public problem.

This approach to meaning making is tied to an assumption that the role of the rhetorical critic is not guided by a need to seek truth. By recognizing that rhetorical practices are effects of articulations, the rhetorical critic does not see him/herself as a truthseeker, intent on uncovering the "real" world or intent on the ways in which

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<sup>21</sup> Nathan Stormer, "Articulation: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Taxis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (2004). 261

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984). 83

<sup>23</sup> Beatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

rhetorical practices have been deployed as a means of obscuring individuals view of the world. Approaching texts as though they have latent truth is problematic because such an approach makes the underlying assumption that the critic is capable of perceiving a version of the world that everyone else cannot. A materialist utilizing a post-structural reading strategy will approach rhetoric as a technology of deliberation that “distributes different elements on a terrain of a governing apparatus” and therefore “allows a series of institutions to make judgments about the welfare of a population.”<sup>24</sup> The crucial difference between conceiving of rhetoric as an articulation of texts and institutions and conceiving of it as a singular text to be interpreted is that the former do not presume an ability to uncover reality. Rather, they attempt to demonstrate how rhetorical practices are deployed and mobilized by institutions in order to identify issues as problems and ultimately structure and manage a more productive population. The use of rhetorical practices to identify public problems operates as a strategy that shapes how issues are giving meaning and value. One consequence of this strategy is that because public problems are framed as negatively affecting a public, they receive added visibility, and ultimately limit the potential for alternative ways of imagining an issue. In order to more carefully consider the implications of public problems, my dissertation explores the concept of ambiguity and its relationship to rhetoric.

### Rhetorical Ambiguity

Though the affects of public problems are not a form that are inherently bad, the fears and panic they evoke limit the possibilities for a wider range of interpretation. As a way of considering the implications of meaning as a more fluid phenomenon, elements of this dissertation consider the relationship between

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<sup>24</sup> Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric." 39

rhetoric and ambiguity. In fact, ambiguity is a state implied by other, more specific terms, related to the study of textual analysis. Heteroglossia's reference to a state of multi-vocality and exchange implies a textual or impersonal interaction whose outcome remains perpetually uncertain.<sup>25</sup> Irony is also a device whose interpretation can never be guaranteed: "Irony, as a rhetorical device, is always polysemic and is always open to apparently 'perverse' readings because it necessarily works by simultaneously opposing meanings against each other."<sup>26</sup> Though they may be polysemic, ironic texts, because of their potential to always have new meanings, are also ambiguous. It is this notion of "uncertainty as potential" that is latent within the multitude of voices described by heteroglossia and also in the possibility of contradictory meanings in irony that has drawn me to the concept of ambiguity. Despite their shared interest in the possibilities of multiple meanings, polysemy and ambiguity are not identical and I do not use them interchangeably.

I have chosen to focus on ambiguity because of a small difference in emphasis between the two terms. Specifically, polysemy focuses on a wide variety of meaning and the ways in which texts are interpreted; ambiguity refers to the potential of a term to mean. Leah Ceccarelli's 1989 piece on polysemy illustrates my point. Ceccarelli's essay critiqued the ways in which the term polysemy has been put to use by rhetorical critics by demonstrating that different values and political commitments that have impacted the ways in which the polysemic nature of texts are seen to have value – or not. Ceccarelli encouraged rhetorical critics that using polysemy as a means of engaging texts to clearly delineate how they are using

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<sup>25</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: New York, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 86

polysemy before exploring the “polysemy of a text.”<sup>27</sup> The critical focus of Ceccarelli’s project was to emphasize the ways in which interpretation occurs. When referring to polysemic texts, Fiske also describes textual devices as opening “it [the text] up to textual readings.” Ceccarelli and Fiske both emphasize the practice of the reader in making sense of texts in new and innovative ways.

I do not believe there is anything wrong with studying polysemic interpretations of texts, but believe that the distinction between the polysemic interpretation of texts and ambiguity is crucial. Ambiguity is a state of uncertain textual existence; polysemic texts become so only after they have been engaged by multiple audiences and interpreted differently. Ambiguity, then, is the latent potential within texts to be polysemic, ironic, or heteroglossic. By referring to ambiguity I do not refer to interpretation, but to the importance that texts have an uncertain potential to mean differently, to the necessity that a text retains a certain degree of liminality. Such a commitment is important because ambiguous texts provide audiences with a certain degree of agency.

If we conceive of ambiguity within texts as important to agency, we can begin to make sense of the important of ambiguity to existence in general, a notion theorized by Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of ambiguity in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Specifically, Beauvoir believes that to exist is to perpetually to strive toward the fulfillment of a lack, while never quite being able to entirely fulfill that lack; such an existence is ambiguous because existence is not static, it is a process that can only be defined as the perpetual act of trying to attain what one desires.<sup>28</sup> Beauvoir envisions life as a process of perpetual redefinition according to the discovery of

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<sup>27</sup> Leah Ceccarelli, "Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, no. 4 (1998). 410

<sup>28</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Kensington, 1948).



new lacks - new opportunities for self-change, in one's life. She does not believe that constraints are necessarily negative, but instead argues that constraints enable individuals to change and grow. Still, Beauvoir does not find all constraints to be necessarily positive, but claims that radical change, even revolt, is necessary when the constraints of one's situation prevent opportunities for new lacks. Though Beauvoir does not address the role played by discourse in constructing ambiguous existence, she would not disagree that rhetorical practices play a role in shaping the ways in which individuals relate to the world and identify lacks within their lives. In the chapters that follow, I will detail how rhetorical practices are occasionally ambiguous and that when read from within the correct context function as opportunities for strategic intervention and resistance.

### Reading Strategy

While the actual methodology of this study strongly resembles textual analysis, it does not seek to interpret the unfit child, but to demonstrate how his/her position in society gets utilized as a means of organizing the practices of society and creating opportunities for ambiguity. Primary texts will be read for the purpose of understanding how they center the fat child as a significant problem, how the actions of the child and those with whom he/she has involvement are determined and disciplined, and how they open up spaces of ambiguity. The key here is the way in which federal, educational, and medical institutional discourses form the fitness problem, and how those notions inform individuals and institutions about their relationship to unfit children.

In order to illustrate the structural conditions of the unfit child's emergence, the primary texts to be examined will be those that circulate from medical, federal, and educational institutional discourses that engage the topics of physical education, fitness, and health. A central argument to be made by this study is that the

problematic of childhood obesity emerged as a result of the articulation of educational, federal, and medical discourses that made the unfit body a public problem. Specifically, I will be focusing on the ways in which the topic of the unfit child is negotiated in the medical discipline, federal and educational discourses about healthy children and physical fitness and in cultural discourses which describe unfit children as problematic.

To make sense of the role of unfit child in medical discourses I have searched extensively through *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, *The American Journal of Public Health*, and *Hygeia* (which later changed its name to *Today's Health*), *RN*, and *The American Journal of Nursing*. These texts will be read for the ways in which they describe childhood unfitnes as a problematic condition; the point here is to make sense of when and how a lack of fitness came to be understood by medicine as a problem. With the exception of *Today's Health/Hygeia*, a publication devoted to informing the general public about medical issues, these publications were chosen because of their significant status within the general medical profession. The journals were searched for discussions of childhood health related to the body; articles engaging this subject were then read for their treatment of the topic.

The medical discourse is significant because the unfit child's emergence as a topic worthy of national concern is not only contingent on the ways in which the consequences of obesity have developed through medical science, but also on the specific, professional ways in which childhood obesity gets interpreted as a problem. Despite the medical discipline's seemingly unbiased approach, the labeling of fitness as a medical issue has particular consequences for how it is understood and treated as a problem.

Federal discourses engaging this topic will be taken from the proceedings of the President's Council of Physical Fitness (which began in 1956), and national

committee proceedings dealing with the topic of public health, children, and juvenile delinquency. The rise of McCarthyism and the fear of the foreigner were significant issues in the political sphere that also converged with discourses involving the unfit child. Given the urgency they attached to political interests and the unfit child, the federal documents I will examine will be taken from the 1950's.<sup>29</sup> The 1950's were chosen, in particular, because of the decades close proximity to the end of World War II, the rise of McCarthyism, and the inaugurations of Eisenhower as President in 1952 and 1956. These occurrences all play significant roles in our understanding of the unfit child and this ten-year time period is sufficiently large enough to track the discussions of fitness prior to and preceding Eisenhower's creation of the President's Council for Youth Fitness.

The sites of educational discourse to be examined will be physical education journals and general journals on education. These texts are particularly appropriate for tracking changes in curriculum and the potential linkages between those changes and political interests. Specifically, the *Journal of Education*, *The Journal of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation* and *Research Quarterly* were examined. To make sense of how specifically the fitness problem is communicated to society, I examined the discussion of fitness as it is taken up in periodical articles containing the keywords *fitness*, *health*, *child*, and *education* as catalogued by *Readers' Guide for Periodical Literature*. In the selection of these texts, it is not my intent to imply that they represent the field of medicine, but that the well respected status of each journal allows them to be read as sites where medical

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<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that political/federal interests do not have power currently, rather I will argue that the position of political/federal interests in relation to the unhealthy body took on a certain degree of primacy at this time period. Currently, I would argue that political federal discourses on fitness get funneled through the school system. This funneling occurred in the 1950's, to be sure, but the key difference is that the obese child is not an object of federal attention like it was in the 1950's.

concerns are made visible and intelligible. Education was focused upon because the education system is a space where conceptual changes in physical fitness and health became curriculum changes with material effects.

This logic applies to my other texts as well. The President's Council on Physical Fitness proceedings will not be read as representing a pre-existing problem in society, but as working to introduce a public problem into American society. Likewise, educational and cultural texts will not be discussed as standing for an ideology, but as helping to implement one. Also important, these texts will not be discussed as unrelated, but as mutually constitutive of one another. In other words, discourses involving obesity and education intersect with political discourses of childhood obesity that also intersect with medical discourses of obesity. A reading of the intersections between discourses about the body and the consequences that emerge at these moments of convergence function as part of a genealogical reading strategy.

In order to track the significance of the unfit child in popular culture, the *Readers' Guide for Periodical Literature* and the *The New York Times* online databases were searched for articles pertaining to physical fitness, health, and children. Relevant articles found in *Readers' Guide* emerged in a variety of different periodicals including: *Ladies Home Journal*, *Life*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. The unfit child's presence in various types of popular periodicals operates as an additional space where the fitness problem was circulated as a problem for families and parents in particular.

## Chapter Organization

### Chapter 2

Chapter two examines the philosophical development of physical education as a practice. It traces the origins of physical education's emergence in the United

States to the playground movement and demonstrates the ways in which physical education constantly emerged during times of crisis (World War I and II, the Great Depression) as a means of cultivating proper habits of physical activity. Since this dissertation is focused on physical fitness, tracing the development of physical education as a discipline is crucial. One significant facet to physical education's development, for rhetoricians in particular, is the early theorization of play education, a term which ultimately mutated into physical education. Though play theory (a view of physical activity from the late 1800s) became a foundational principle upon which future physical educators became interested in using physical education as a way of cultivating morality, it also contained the ambiguous potential for transgression through self-care. This chapter ends with a consideration of play and ambiguity and the relationship between both to Michel Foucault's notion of an aesthetics of existence.

### Chapter 3

Chapter three specifically picks up the term fitness where chapter two ends and more fully considers the ways in which rhetorical practices and historical context centered fitness as a public problem and a national priority. Significant in chapter three are the ways in which fitness becomes intelligible within federal and educational texts about the management of delinquency and communism as a means of disciplining deviancy. The juvenile delinquent, like the unfit child, also illustrates the consequences for citizenship as they get played out on the body. The delinquent functions as both a bad citizen and an undisciplined body; it is this relationship between the disciplined/healthy body and the ways in which one cares for one's self that are taken up in chapter three. Through its examination of the deployment of fitness as a means of constructing citizenship, this chapter delves into the ways in which the unfit child works as a line of penetration into the family,

school, and other institutions related to the management of the child's lifestyle. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates a linkage between the importance of a physically fit, or disciplined, body with one's role as a citizen and illustrates that deviancy became conflated with a lack of physical fitness.

#### Chapter 4 Ambiguity and the Deployment of Fitness

Incorporating chapter two's discussion of play, ambiguity, and physical education and chapter three's discussion of citizenship and the body, chapter four explores the ambiguous nature of the term "fitness" itself. This chapter examines the ways in which the use of the specific term "fitness" allowed for physical education and physical activity to become visible as public priorities/problems. After demonstrating how the use of the term "fitness" to describe physical activity made the articulation of citizenship and the body possible, this chapter shows the ways that the ambiguous nature of the term fitness facilitated the emergence of obesity as a public problem. Unique about chapter four's engagement with the council is a shift in perspective that highlights the function of the term fitness. These sources were specifically used in order to demonstrate how the term fitness cut across a variety of institutional discourses (cultural, educational, and governmental). I next look at medical publications such as *The Journal of the American Medical Association* and *The American Journal of Public Health* as well as conference proceedings of The National Conference on Physicians and Schools. These are used in order to show the ways in which fitness emerged as problem/priority in the medical discipline and as an educational priority from a medical perspective. Intersecting these medical texts are political viewpoints that visualize fitness not so much as a means of preserving life, but as an enactment of one's responsibility to one's nation.

## Chapter 5: Rhetorical Ambiguity, Fitness, and the Obesity Epidemic

The final chapter will begin with a discussion of the status of the obese child in present culture, and move to an analysis of the ways in which the 1950s functioned as a significant moment for the development of the unfit child as a public problem. After discussing the contribution of the 1950s to current understandings of the obese child, the chapter argues that the obese child of today functions in much the same manner as the unfit child of the 1950s while, at the same time, embodying a crucial difference. This difference lies in the opportunities for ambiguity made possible by fitness. Though this dissertation has been critical of the function of the fitness problem in the 1950s, I conclude by recognizing the rhetorical value of the term “fitness.” Despite the consequences of deployment of the fitness problem - its use as a tool for population management – I find there to be productive possibilities for re-considering the ways in which individuals relate to their bodies, possibilities that are not made available by the term “obesity.” My central concern is that the use of obesity to describe a body problem limits the potential for new ways of thinking about the value of the body. Because obesity is a scientific and quantifiable bodily state, the potential for ambiguity is drastically limited.

Beauvoir identifies such a limitation as a problem because she believes that conditions that limit potential possibilities for self-growth and expansion are fundamentally opposed to the nature of existence.<sup>30</sup> I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this dissertation for considering ambiguity, rhetoric, and the body. More specifically, I consider the value of Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity* as it stands to assist in developing rhetorical agency. To make this claim, I argue that the strategic use of rhetorical ambiguity creates the conditions of possibility for material

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<sup>30</sup> Simone de. Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Kensington, 1948).

change. To be clear, I do not argue that making room for ambiguity will somehow make change happen; instead, I argue that ambiguity destabilizes knowledge and makes change possible. To illustrate this point, I consider the ways in which Michel Foucault's discussion of treating one's life as a work of art, an *Aesthetics of Existence*, connects with the ethical practice of ambiguity.<sup>31</sup>

By combining the compatible perspectives of Foucault and Beauvoir, I demonstrate the ways in which rhetorical ambiguity can have material consequences. In the process of doing so, I expand upon a recent theorization of rhetorical agency by Ronald Greene in "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor."<sup>32</sup> Greene's argument is that rhetorical studies should cease debating the "political merits and limitations of different models of communication" in order to explore "the role that rhetoric plays as a practice, process, and product of economic, political, ideological, and cultural value."<sup>33</sup> To this assessment, I add that in order to function as an "instrument, object, and medium for harnessing social cooperation and coordination"<sup>34</sup> rhetorical agency must always work toward the maintenance of ambiguity. Furthermore, rhetorical practices oriented toward the continual maintenance of ambiguity must be conceived as ethical gifts as opposed to political projects.<sup>35</sup> Such an approach is

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview," in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Ronald Walter Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>33</sup> Ron Walter Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37, no. 3 (2004). 202

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 204

<sup>35</sup> Debra Bergoffen, "Between the Ethical and the Political: The Difference of Ambiguity," in *The Existential Phenomenology of Simone De Beauvoir*, ed. W. O'Brien and L. Embree (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001).



valuable to rhetoricians because, by remaining committed to a project that conceives of rhetorical ambiguity as an ethical gift, committed to the achievement of freedom one prevents rhetoric from becoming used as a simple tool that can benefit any political project. I end with an example of the ways in which the body and practices of physical fitness/activity can be re-conceptualized to have value while remaining outside of the problematic invoked by the term obesity.

## CHAPTER 2

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND THE LABOR OF LEISURE

Introduction

Though not referencing practices of physical education directly, Louis Althusser did identify the institution of education as a significant site for the definition and dissemination of ideology. In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus"<sup>1</sup> Althusser defined *ideology* as a "'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," and claimed that ideology operated by "interpellat[ing] individuals as subjects."<sup>1</sup> For Althusser, ideology was an important term because he believed that it could be used to both explain how the reproduction of the relations of production were secured and also demonstrate that the act of securing was made possible through repressive and ideological state apparatus' (RSAs and ISAs) - institutions that work respectively through violence and ideology. Althusser labeled education to be a dominant ideological state apparatus (ISA) and justified such a claim because school systems both had access to children for six to seven hours per day and were represented as a "neutral environment purged of ideology."<sup>2</sup>

For Althusser, education was an especially effective ISA because of its access to a captive audience, and its ability to interpellate, or hail, individuals as subjects. This act of hailing, according to Althusser, occurs in both the domains of the practical, through rituals, and within the discursive, through the act of address. Althusser's famous example of interpellation describes an individual casually walking and turning around in response to a shouted "hey, you there."

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Mapping Ideology* (New York and London: Verso, 1994). 128

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 128

The performance of the subject embedded within ideology is then demonstrated through “actions inserted into practices,”<sup>3</sup> this is later refined by Foucault, who more strongly emphasizes the way in which the regulation of practices, especially within education, are utilized to position individuals as subjects.<sup>4</sup>

Un-theorized by Althusser, and perhaps unstated by Foucault, however, is an acknowledgement of education’s function as a site of discursive and pedagogical invention.<sup>5</sup> That is, education should be conceived to not only operate as a site where students are trained and disciplined, but also as a discursive space where different school subjects, like physical education, are theorized, developed, and later utilized by teachers to educate students. Given Foucault’s claim that “all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind),”<sup>6</sup> we might infer that had he identified education as a site of such an invention, he would have seen a space through which truth was produced through the “exteriority of accidents.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a genealogical interrogation of the “accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals- the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.127

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to the *Use of Pleasure* Foucault talks about his method and specifically identifies the importance of looking at handbooks and manuals, because they point to practices, but here he does not deal directly with the institution of education. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Penguin, 1992). 1-2

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 95

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 81

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

within physical education might initially yield a decidedly problematic understanding of its history and development – a conclusion that is quite justifiable. Despite the seemingly pessimistic view of the results produced through a genealogy – the implication that all knowledge derives from injustice, for example – the practice of seeking ruptures in the production of truth, simultaneously identified a site of truth production, and a potential space through which truth can be contested. Both the oppressive and transgressive consequences of physical education in the 1950s, for example, can emerge through a genealogical inquiry into the rhetorical construction of the value of play.

The attention to both the strategic use of language and the function of practice in Althusser and Foucault's theorizations of subject formation has been especially enriching to the discipline of rhetorical studies. For Althusser, strategic language use is essential in the formation of individuals as subjects. In the discussion of interpellation, identifying/addressing an individual as "you," a term used to identify a person as a subject being addressed, necessitates that, upon turning around, that person will acknowledge their status as such. Maurice Charland's 1987 discussion of the function of a formal policy statement issued in 1979 by the government of Quebec illustrates the way in which a strategic use of language positions individuals and, consequently, functions ideologically. Charland argues that the government of Quebec's decision to rename the citizens of Quebec the *peuple québécois* served as a constitutive rhetoric that, through description, positioned the people of Quebec as a group altogether separate from the rest of Canada, and thus capable of existing apart from Canada.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, this chapter examines the values inscribed onto texts

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<sup>9</sup> Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (1987).

by specifically looking at how practices of physical activity are assigned value in texts theorizing/developing the discipline of physical education.

The presupposition here is that rhetorical practices, like ISA's, determine the ways in which objects of knowledge can be intelligible. In particular, play, leisure time, and recreation during and prior to the 1950s were visible and valued in entirely different ways. Throughout this chapter, I will consider the ways in which rhetorical practices operate in order to determine the limits of how an object can be understood. In this chapter, for example, the discourses framing physical activity at different moments of public crisis represent very different approaches to thinking about the value and purpose of physical education. A view of physical education as a means of producing citizens is a manifestation of one such approach that I examine in this chapter and will continue to examine throughout the dissertation. While not entirely focused on using physical education as a means of actively producing citizens, leisure education complements this perspective by conceiving of the value of educating individuals in proper physical activity as a necessary means of keeping them out of trouble. In contrast, I consider the earliest institutionalized form of educating physical activity, play education, which frames play as an activity that brings individuals, particularly children, closer to the achievement of both individualized and community minded states of being.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s the concept of play emerged as a key concept among physical fitness educators in the United States. The term was utilized much earlier by the German Karl Groos, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it and its theoretical value eventually made their way into the vernacular of theorists of physical education. Through the definition and valuation of the term play we can begin to envision one space through which notions of physical education inspired by McCarthyism, a topic I address in chapter three, derived

their justifications. Interestingly, we also see an alternative way in which the value of physical activity of children was made intelligible. In the later emergences as “leisure” and “recreation,” then, we find some remainder of the early definition of play, several subtractions, and several additions. This chapter examines the significance of what was added to and subtracted from play in the 1950s and how its value in physical education literature shifted from the pursuit of an ideal self-construction to a process of democratic citizenship formation; how, in short, the value of pursuing play was deferred and substituted for values that emphasized physical activity as a labor of leisure and as an enforcement of efficiency.

In order to fully consider the consequences of physical education, this chapter traces the development and theorization of physical education as a discipline within teaching manuals and other texts by leading physical fitness educators. I engage these texts in order to understand the values and assumptions embedded within discourses of physical education and trace the way in which play – and its derivations - are continuously used in response to historic problems as a practice necessary for educating individuals in the proper management of their behavior and efficiency. Finally, by considering the ways in which the development of physical education highlights some elements of its intellectual past while ignoring others, I demonstrate the alternative possibilities for imagining the value and function of the physically active body that are latent within rhetorics of physical education. I specifically do this by illustrating the ways in which the production of history seeks to minimize ambiguity, while never completely eliminating it.

### The Theory of Play and the Slum Problem

Play, leisure, recreation, and physical education are four distinct yet interrelated terms that I will develop throughout this chapter. The terms in particular are associated to key historical moments in the development of educational discourses concerning physical fitness and their integration into the curriculum of public schooling. The development, function, and theorization of public physical education developed in response to several different social problems: slum life, World War I, and the Great Depression.

The theory of play emerged in the United States as a result of the playground movement, a social movement organized in response to the increasingly poor conditions of slum life in the late 1800s. The work of police reporter turned social reformer, Jacob Riis, chronicled the conditions of slum life in *How the Other Half Lives*, a book that combined stark photography and angry prose to protest the extreme conditions of New York slum life. Much of Riis' book was directed toward the making visible the abject conditions faced by slum children, in particular. One photograph, for example, depicts three adolescent boys sleeping on the ground in a New York alley. The startling conditions represented in Riis' first book struck a chord with many New Yorkers, including Theodore Roosevelt, who had been the police commissioner at the time. After reading Riis' book, Roosevelt worked with Riis to eventually build parks and open playgrounds and to begin making substantial reforms to tenement living.<sup>10</sup>

The Playground Movement in the United States began in the late 1880s within such a cultural climate. The observations of Dr. Marie Zahrezwska concerning "Berlin children in congested areas" are thought to be the earliest

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob A Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890).

origins of the playground movement in the United States.<sup>11</sup> While in Germany, Dr. Zahrezwska noticed children's "sand play, singing, and marching, directed by a neighborhood woman,<sup>12</sup>" and, thinking it would benefit less fortunate children, encouraged the construction of a sand pile for the Children's Mission in Boston. Made intelligible by the photography and anti-slum campaigning of Jacob Riis, the concern for less fortunate children expressed through Zahrezwska's actions, had become a significant value in the United States during the early 1900s.<sup>13</sup>

This concern arose out of a much larger public problem that was dominated by class conflict and labor strikes resulting from unsafe working conditions and exploitation.<sup>14</sup> The visibility of slum life alongside "laws prohibiting play in the streets, citizens complaining about children playing on their lawns, accidents and arrests from play in the streets showed how it was impossible to grow up in the cities."<sup>15</sup> This, in turn, positioned the playground movement as a means of attending to these frustrations. The movement's significance became part of political reform policies as evidenced in the re-election campaign of New York Mayor Seth Low, who wrote: "special

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<sup>11</sup> Norma Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1942).133

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Zinn, *The Twentieth Century: A People's History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Elmer D. and Bernard S. Mason Mitchell, *The Theory of Play* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1935).



consideration and attention, also, has been given to the development of children's playgrounds."<sup>16</sup>

Soon the value of the playground in city life became advocated by scholars and educators of physical education, a development that also resulted in the introduction of play as an object of inquiry within the field of physical education. Specifically, play theory in the early 1900s insisted on the importance of organizing where children played and teaching them how to play.<sup>17</sup> In describing the role of the play teacher, Luther Gulick associated value to the production of good character: "through play leaders such as these a transfer is made from generation to generation, not merely of games, but of character."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, play theorist Joseph Lee wrote, "play demands teaching, which thus becomes a part of the law of growth. Children, as a result of their own instinctive tendencies, are molded upon the traditions of their race."<sup>19</sup> Further emphasizing the function of training children how to play, Lee also argues:

What is necessary is that education from this time on shall have a future to it, shall be felt by the child as preparation for real life. Our first remedy then is to develop the child's nature to its natural breadth, and to train it during the period when it is still malleable, and when the gang instinct combines with the specializing tendency to set him upon fitting himself for grown-up work, that it may be turned so far as possible toward the channels that existing industry affords. This we shall do not for the sake of industry but for the sake of culture; not in order that the man shall make

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<sup>16</sup> Seth Low, "Mayor Low's Superb Administration," *The New York Times*, October 12 1903. 1

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *The Theory of Play*. 40

<sup>18</sup> Luther H. Gulick, *A Philosophy of Play* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920). 240

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Lee, *Play in Education* (Washington, D.C.: McGrath & National Recreation and Park Association, 1915).42

more goods, but that the making of the goods may better make the man.<sup>20</sup>

For Lee, the value of play education rests in its ability to prepare children for life as adults and to impart them with a strong work ethic, or to put it more aptly, a strong ethics for working well. Though left unwritten, ethics and morality are implied within Lee's characterization of play. The phrases "for the sake of culture" and "better make the man," for example, characterize the significance of play education as residing within its ability to improve the way in which children will develop as members of a community. Lee's description, then, attributes the ultimate goal of play education to be within its ability to shape individuals as members of a community.

Henry Curtis more specifically references play's moral function, but also makes specific reference to time utilization, a concern not addressed by Lee:

In the past the problem of idleness has been a great problem, perhaps the greatest problem of our city children. With the shortening of the hours of labor, which is everywhere going on, it becomes a great problem of the adults as well. If increased leisure is to mean increased dissipation, it will only be a curse...How very much better it will be for the community if we can inspire in the children such a healthy love for sport that this leisure time will be spent in vigorous games. If it is necessary for a free country to educate its citizens in order to protect the ballot, is it not equally necessary to provide for their amusement in order to protect their morals?<sup>21</sup>

Like Gulick and Lee, Curtis engages play as an activity more significant than mere amusement, but as something with implications on the character of the child as a whole. One statement made by Curtis is of particular significance because he, unlike Lee and Gulick, references play education to be significant in order to *protect* the morals of children. Here the management of play is

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.461

<sup>21</sup> Henry S. Curtis, *Education through Play* (New York: Macmillan, 1915). 61

intelligible in a slightly different form because rather than functioning as a tool for assisting in the development of individuals with no clear goal, it is identified as a tool that develops children according to an end that is focused less on the improvement of the individual and more on the community.

The work of Gulick, Lee, and Curtis serves two separate, but closely related functions. First, the practice of developing the necessity of play for human development is an early step in formulating how physical education as a discipline can be conceived. Second, the specific form taken by such a formulation also can be read rhetorically for the particular way in which play is represented as having value. For Gulick and Lee, play activities are processes through which individuals shape their future selves. Curtis echoes these beliefs, but also describes play as valuable due to its ability to instruct individuals in practices of morality. So far, play was made visible to physical educators as an activity for educating individuals in morality and in personality. Educating children in proper play as discussed in the scholarship of leading physical educators such as Gulick, Lee, and Curtis is, in part, significant because it highlights the importance of cultivating good behavior through physical activity and group play.

#### World War I and the Institution of PE

If the public slum problems of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries operated as the exigency for play to be valued for its educational qualities, then the period surrounding World War I can be marked by the institutionalization of physical education into American life. Though a certain kind of physical education was made valuable in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this is not to say that physical education did not have any presence in American schools or culture prior to this time; German gymnastics, for example, immigrated to the United

States and resulted in the formation of Turnverein, gymnasiums that provided “a place and opportunity for exercise and recreation for both sexes regardless of age.”<sup>22</sup> German gymnastics, or free-form natural gymnastics that made use of “natural skills,” like running, jumping, and swimming<sup>23</sup> were incorporated into the public school systems near communities with large German populations by the 1870s.<sup>24</sup> Swedish gymnastics – also known as medical gymnastics were based on “military, aesthetic, medical, and educational values”<sup>25</sup> and utilized apparatuses like rings, swinging ladders, and rope climbing, were incorporated into the curriculum of the Boston public school systems in 1890. The use of German and Swedish gymnastics to train students in PE manifested a larger issue at hand in the late 1800s: the lack of an agreed upon system through which students could be provided a physical education. In fact, many histories of physical education refer to the “battle of the systems” as a reference to the multitude of differing approaches to physical education.<sup>26</sup>

Many opposing of the positions within the “battle of the systems” were united by the similar belief that gymnastics were the proper form through which physical education should be taught, an approach contrasted by those that utilized the practices of play, games, and sport. The formation of the playground movement in response to the public problems of slum life and class dissent, and

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<sup>22</sup> Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States*. 34

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education* (New York: Meredith Publishing, 1962).

<sup>24</sup> Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States*.

<sup>25</sup> Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education*. 17

<sup>26</sup> Robert A. and Steven G. Estes Mechikoff, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education: From Ancient Civilizations to the Modern World* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States*, Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education*.

the importance it placed on providing children with opportunities to play, was one key catalyst in the adoption of play training, sports, and recreation as the nationally accepted means of teaching physical fitness.<sup>27</sup> The poor physical condition of draftees during World War I functioned as an additional problem that allowed for physical education to be assigned value as a method for enabling military-fitness, something that had not been yet implemented into the American armed forces. Additionally, the usage of sports as a means of boosting soldier morale and fostering the wholesome usage of time during WWI also positioned the regulation and training of physical activity as a of means of enabling individuals to use their time productively.<sup>28</sup> Along with the development of intramural sports in 1915 these developments catalyzed the fusion of physical education as play education in the United States. The presence of sports and importance of fitness, made visible as a result of World War I, also resulted in 36 states passing compulsory physical education laws and gained national recognition when the National Education Association included health, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character among its seven cardinal principles.<sup>29</sup> Eventually the advocacy of play by leading professionals in the field and the “visibility and popularity of intercollegiate and professional sport help[ed] propel, play, games, and sport to the forefront of physical education,”<sup>30</sup> and ultimately resulted in sports replacing formal gymnastics as “the medium of physical education.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, *The Theory of Play*.

<sup>28</sup> Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education*.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, *The Theory of Play*.

<sup>30</sup> Mechikoff, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education: From Ancient Civilizations to the Modern World*. 205

<sup>31</sup> Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education*. 83

The institutionalization of play as physical education into the U.S. public school system specifically involved the passage of state laws to require individuals to require a minimum amount of physical education. This institutionalization also eventually led to the establishment of a state director of physical education.<sup>32</sup> Though such a development seems quite natural, one value implied through both PE's use as a means of preparing the military and through PE's focus on educating individuals in sports is the need for the production of an efficient body. This theme of PE as a means for developing more efficient bodies/individuals remains consistent throughout the history of physical education. As physical education became structured into the educational system, its foundational principle, play, was further developed in the time following the great depression. This next section delves into the value given play as a means of educating children in the proper management of leisure time.

### Recreation, Leisure, and the Great Depression

Ten years following the end World War I, the stock market crash of 1929 resulted in an immense economic depression and, due to the massive decrease in employment, prompted a national emphasis on the importance of recreation. The years following the economic depression reflected a prioritization of physical activity as a means of managing leisure time. This emphasis on the importance of leisure time, and the necessity of utilizing recreation as a means of properly utilizing that leisure time, was largely due to the abundance of idle time, an effect of high unemployment rates brought on by the depression. Quite unlike the situation described in Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class*,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

the economically underprivileged were given extra leisure time by no choice of their own.<sup>33</sup> The proliferation of leisure time instigated the formation of the Works Progress Administration, a division of the Federal Works Agency that focused on the expansion of social, cultural, and physical forms of public recreation as means of keeping the population busy.<sup>34</sup>

The theorization of leisure's significance in the physical education and recreation disciplines shifted slightly from an emphasis on the importance of play as an exercise in character building to "time management," a characterization which, though present in earlier discussions of play and leisure, was given added visibility as a result of the 1928 stock market crash, the unemployment that ensued, and the formation of the WPA, a federally funded institution intent on the promotion of wholesome leisure activities. In fact, many books were published as a response to the necessity of proper leisure management; Overstreet's *Guide to Civilized Leisure* being one famous example.<sup>35</sup>

Mitchell and Mason's 1935 book, *The Theory of Play*, indicates that such a priority also manifested itself in the development of physical education as a discipline:

People unequipped for leisure often tend either to get into trouble or stagnate...Men are skill hungry individuals, and it is much better to educate them in skills so that they can become self-active in leisure hours than to attempt to amuse them in the leisure hours of later life.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In this book, Veblen differentiates between the leisure and the working classes, characterizing the leisure class as "the noble and the priestly classes," those for whom leisure was a luxury. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1912).

<sup>34</sup> Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States*.

<sup>35</sup> H A Overstreet, *Guide to Civilized Leisure* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1933).

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, *The Theory of Play*. 187

Much like Curtis, Mitchell and Mason framed play/leisure, not as a practice that would culminate in the formation of capable members of a community, but as an occupation, or even distraction, that prevents people from getting into trouble. This scholarly conceptualization of leisure as an opportunity in which individuals must be properly trained to engage is, with one addition, an extension of play scholarship that considered a child's play to be an indication of what the adult the child would become. Though early play theorists such as Gulick identified the necessity of the "proper use of this [leisure] time," leisure as an object of scholarly inquiry had not yet emerged within the field of physical education at the time of his writing.<sup>37</sup>

Leisure's continual representation as an activity necessary of management, repeatedly placed the education of individuals in proper leisure time use within the purview of physical education.<sup>38</sup> The need for ensuring that children in particular make proper use of leisure also emerges in physical education scholarship. In a report prepared for the American Youth Commission, a committee appointed by the American Council on Education, C. Gilbert Wrenn and D.L. Harley used the evidence of a study conducted in Maryland to lament "the poverty of the leisure of many young people."<sup>39</sup> The authors then advocate that youth desire "direction and the means of doing something for themselves," and, thus, require opportunities for proper leisure. Similarly, physical fitness pioneer, Jay Nash, articulated his fears over the

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<sup>37</sup> Gulick, *A Philosophy of Play*. 119

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Pearsall Jacks, *Education through Recreation* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1932). Martin H. Neumeyer, *Leisure and Recreation: A Study of Leisure and Recreation in Their Sociological Aspects* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1936).

<sup>39</sup> Gilbert C. and D.L. Harley Wrenn, *Time on Their Hands: A Report on Leisure, Recreation, and Young People* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941). 3



prevalence of *spectatoritis*, an affliction characterized by an inability to responsibly/properly use leisure that he believed was symptomatic of many Americans in the early 1930s. For Nash, training children to productively make use of their leisure time would eliminate the presence of boredom, *spectatoritis*, and crime, ultimately resulting in the formation of members of an ideal population.<sup>40</sup> Though Nash does not blatantly characterize worthy use of leisure as an activity beneficial to democracy, it most certainly is implied.

In 1956, physical fitness expert Bonnie Prudden also identified physical activity as a means of managing leisure time. Specifically, Prudden suggested that the improper usage of leisure time had caused children in the United States to become considerably less physically fit than children in Europe. According to Prudden, “school buses, cars, labor-saving devices, movies, radio, adequate play space, spectator sports, and television...have lowered the physical fitness of our children to a dangerous level.”<sup>41</sup> One cause made visible by Prudden was that American children were found to no longer engage in “muscle building chores.”<sup>42</sup> Bussing, for example, provided them with exertion-free transportation to and from school, consequently providing children with additional time for watching television – another factor attributed to children’s lack of fitness. Proponents of physical fitness partially blamed this excess in leisure time on the increasing cases of juvenile delinquency seen across the country.

Above we have seen one formulation of play as a means of providing children and adults with wholesome options for utilizing their leisure time. From this standpoint, play is visible as a means of education, resulting from of its

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<sup>40</sup> Jay B. Nash, *Spectatoritis* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1937).

<sup>41</sup> Bonnie Prudden, *Is Your Child Really Fit?* (New York: Harper, 1956). 34

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

ability to direct the way in which individuals spend their time. The WPA, for example, provided Americans with a wealth of leisure opportunities, while implicitly guiding them away from other, less ideal activities. Similarly, physical education activities, sports primarily, provide children with a wealth of examples that are meant to demonstrate proper methods of time usage. One notable component of physical education that was retained from play theory was a conceptualization of physical activity as a means of character education.

Jesse Feiring Williams, former president of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, referred to this function of play activity as “education through the physical” and describes its value as follows: “physical education seeks the education of man through physical activities as one aspect of the social effort for human enlightenment.”<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that education through the physical, much like play, remained fixed as a “social effort” for the achievement of an ideal. The ultimate goal of these efforts, as articulated in 1931 in *The White House Conference on Child Protection*, a document responsible for the initial standardization of PE curricula,<sup>44</sup> is the cultivation of both the individual and the democratic citizen. When put into practice these goals are meant to provide students with opportunities to perform democratic ideals:

Once every two months captains are elected in each class from the fourth through the sixth grades and these captains choose teams. It is decided by lot which team shall be red and which team shall be blue. In this way a child may be on the red team one time and the blue another, thus getting competition without rivalry...Individual differences are

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<sup>43</sup> Jesse Feiring Williams, "Education through the Physical," *The Journal of Higher Education* 1 (1930). 1

<sup>44</sup> Ray Lyman Wilbur, Harry Everett Barnard, and Katherine Glover, eds., *White House Conference, 1930; Addresses and Abstracts of Committee Reports, White House Conference on Child Health and Protection* (New York: Century Co., 1931).

considered in all activities and the child is taught than an activity that may be easy for one individual may be quite difficult for another.<sup>45</sup>

By respecting individual differences and participating in an activity that promotes the election of leaders, children enact democracy at the microlevel. Other scholars of physical education clearly articulate the value of proper physical activity, recreation, leisure as instruments for interpellating a populace as democratic citizens. Aside from positioning the utility of leisure, recreation, and play as wholesome activities capable of occupying the activities of youth in a beneficial way, academic scholarship in the field of physical education also highlighted such practices as activities for the cultivation of a democratic public. These values ultimately get materialized in a code of standards that were required for secondary school teachers.<sup>46</sup>

### Democracy, Leisure, and Labor

Rosalind Cassidy, a physical education educator and scholar partially responsible for the developing new physical education curriculum articulates the relationship between physical education and democracy in her 1954 book

*Curriculum Development in Physical Education:*

The primary job of the physical education teacher as differentiated from other teachers in the school is to educate for an understanding and acceptance of the body as a symbol of the self, for an understanding of the laws of its expression and use, and for an appreciation of the values of achieving and maintaining a responsive, well-directed, mature, responsible instrument for living democratically both with oneself and with others.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Nell Robins, "Character Education in Lincoln School," in *Interpretations of Physical Education: Character Education through Physical Education*, ed. Jay B. Nash (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1932).236-237

<sup>46</sup> Weston, *The Making of American Physical Education*. 76

<sup>47</sup> Rosalind Cassidy, *Curriculum Development in Physical Education* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954). 131-132

Cassidy's description of the function of the physical education teacher as responsible for inscribing the body with democracy illustrates that the practices of physical fitness and the function of physical education are both made intelligible, and are also framed as a laboring for the production of individuals into democratic subjects. Cassidy's theorization of physical education as a means of training students in the proper practices of democracy draws upon previous discourses that valued physical education as method for training citizens. Sharman Jackson is one of many academics envisioning such a relationship between democracy and physical education: "in physical education we should seek to develop intelligent cooperators and not train some individuals as docile followers and other as autocratic leaders. In a democratic society, a person prepared to be a good follower should also be a good leader."<sup>48</sup>

The National Council for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, for example, claimed that "the constructive use of leisure time is increasingly important in a democratic society which anticipates a future having greater leisure for all people." The value of disciplined leisure time in the 1950s, much like in the 1930s, is derived from its ability to serve the greater community. In the 1950s discourses concerning leisure time and its proper use represented a means of enacting democracy, a phenomena made intelligible by The National Council for the Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency as well:

We are concerned for a wholesome use of leisure time and we believe that physical education has an important function in preparing for this... we mean, through our physical education to develop robust, skilled, happy human

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<sup>48</sup> Jackson R. Sharman, *Modern Principles of Physical Education* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1937). 99

beings with impulses to behave generously and confidently in the best democratic tradition.<sup>49</sup>

Above, the Council articulates physical education as a means of teaching children the proper usage of leisure time, and also identifies the democratic tradition as the end goal achieved from using physical education to “develop robust, skilled, happy human beings with impulses to behave generously and confidently.”<sup>50</sup> Recreation and physical fitness are meant to discipline individuals, and therefore, teach the correct and moral means of managing their leisure time. The National Council for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency makes note of similar benefits noting that: “through recreation youth educates itself for adult living.”<sup>51</sup> Physical education’s importance as a tool for developing children in social settings also becomes a tool for developing children in political settings.

Miller and Whitcomb provide a further elaboration on the importance and value of physical education and democracy:

Through physical education, children have fine opportunities to develop socially and emotionally. Characteristics such as cooperation and competition, two opposing yet complementary terms, may be developed through games and sports; leadership may also be developed, as well as the ability to follow.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike federal discourses engaging with physical fitness, the physical education manuals written Miller and Whitcomb, Jackson, and Cassidy do not discuss the value of PE to be derived from its ability to produce a combat capable

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<sup>49</sup> National Conference on Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency, *Report on Recreation for Youth* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946). 34

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>52</sup> Arthur G. & Virginia Whitcomb Miller, *Physical Education in the Elementary School Curriculum* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1957). 4

population, but rather a population well-socialized in democratic practices. Physical education theorists concerned with democracy, then, envision PE as place to enact the democratic principles of “cooperation and competition,” through interacting with other individuals. The emergence of PE in federal discourses, however, is quite different.

During the Korean War, a 1951 physical education area report commissioned by the Federal Security Agency and the Office of Education titled the “Mobilization Conference for Health, Education, and Recreation” positions physical education in a slightly different manner:

In the secondary schools are the young men and young women of America who will become the workers and defenders of the nation tomorrow. The physical education program at this level must, therefore, embody the vigorous activities that contribute most to fitness, strength, agility, and endurance. It must not only make provision for the acquirement of skills but it must also develop interest in and positive attitudes toward activities that will be useful for recreation.<sup>53</sup>

Though recreation is indeed mentioned, the conference emphasizes the necessity of PE to reside within its abilities to train warriors, a value also implied by the use of “mobilization” within the conference title, a word often connoting the amassment of military forces. The emergence of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness highlights the federal governments approach to PE as a means of cultivating a productive populace. Though also making mention of recreation and health, the council’s introduction of military preparedness to PE discourse vastly diverg from the education and practice of play envisioned by Luther Gulick.

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<sup>53</sup> *Report of the National Conference for the Mobilization of Health, Education, Physical Education, and Recreation*, (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation and the Federal Security Agency, 1951).19

### Conclusion: Play and the Aesthetics of Existence

There are several different approaches we might take to making sense of the function of physical education and fitness in the United States. One conceptualization demonstrates the way that education, through the physical, serves an apparatus for disciplining citizens and producing populations. From this perspective, the development of play theory functions as a crucial theoretical development in such an endeavor. The playground movement could easily be read as a strategy to pacify laborers and slum-dwellers, who were protesting living conditions, by functioning as a demonstration of concern for underprivileged slum-children. The considerable development in parks and recreation in response to the Great Depression might also appear as another line of penetration into the practices of the public in attempting to more thoroughly produce docile citizens. Similarly, the incorporation of sports into military life during World War I could easily be read as an attempt to prevent soldiers from getting into trouble through an intervention into the body.

Absolutely essential to a reading of these three historical moments as examples of disciplinary power at work is the development of play within the discipline of physical education. Play, as a method for developing an individual's character through the body, makes a decisive move away from gymnastics, which were valued for their ability to develop strength and poise. This move to educating through the physical is first manifested in the Playground Movement, and later in the usage of sports in World War I, and after the Great Depression functioned as a pedagogical tool for instructing physical fitness educators in the value of physical education. From one perspective, then, play theory operates as the theoretical origin of physical education as a disciplinary apparatus.

Though play does function in this capacity, certain elements of its initial theorization are also ignored and substituted for values that coincide with the historical contexts in which it emerged and re-emerged. The most notable quality that did not make its way into later theorizations of leisure, recreation, and physical fitness was play's ability to assist children in shaping their own identities. What is fascinating about the theorization of play in the early 1900s is how it gets theorized as a necessary element of life. Play theorist Joseph Lee writes:

The playing animals are products of their own efficient will. Man especially is incarnate purpose. We are all in this most literal sense self-made. Play is thus the essential part of education. It is nature's prescribed course. School is invaluable in forming the child to meet actual social opportunities and conditions. Without the school he will not grow up to fit our institutions. Without play he will not grow up at all.<sup>54</sup>

The significance of the activity of play is derived from its function, play then, is the process through which children fashion themselves. "Play is to the boy what work is to the man - the fullest attainable expression of what he is and the effective means of becoming more."<sup>55</sup> Like Joseph Lee, Luther Gulick shares a similar orientation to the concept of play. For Gulick, "the individual is more completely revealed in play than in any one other way; and conversely, play has a greater shaping power over the character and nature of man than has any other activity."<sup>56</sup> Within PE manuals and handbooks following World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II, play respectively gets incorporated into sports, gets conflated with recreation, and, finally, gets subsumed by the focus on

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<sup>54</sup> Lee, *Play in Education*. 4

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* viii

<sup>56</sup> Gulick, *A Philosophy of Play*. 250



physical fitness for citizenship highlighted by the President's Council on Physical Fitness. While its trace remains within these discourses, recall that the values of education through the physical and leisure management associated to physical activity emerged from play theory, its function as a tool for individual self-development is simply ignored. This absence provides an alternate approach to the critique of physical education, one quite similar from its usage as a means of producing subjects, but slightly different.

This absence within the history of play's incorporation into the President's Council on Physical Fitness is especially important because it points to a disconnect within the federal government's supposed interest in cultivating democratic citizens, while simultaneously advocating a particularly undemocratic approach to doing so. An emphasis that identifies the value of physically fit children with proper citizenship prevents children from envisioning and utilizing physical activity in different capacities. If play, as Gulick initially theorized it, is meant to function as a means of self-expression, then the framing of physical education corresponds more closely to representations of the homogenizing nature of communism. It is quite ironic that physical activity's supposed value runs so contrary to its mobilization. In addition to marking a space of discursive rupture, and thus a space for genealogical critique, play as a means of individual self-creation also points toward a transgressive practice.

Much like Gulick's notion of play, Foucault views self stylization to be focused first on the proper development of the individual. This practice allows one to more clearly act as an ethical subject: "The control of one's self is absolutely based upon having the freedom to control one's self – a freedom to do

wrong, as well as right."<sup>57</sup> In this arena, play strongly resembles Foucault's notion of an aesthetics of existence that involves properly caring for one's self:

I.e., if you know ontologically what you are, if you also know of what you are capable, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen in a city...if you know what things you must fear and those that you should not fear, if you know what is suitable to hope for and what are the things on the contrary which should be completely indifferent for you...you cannot abuse your power over others...the one who cares for self, to the point of knowing exactly what are his duties as head of a household as husband or father, will find that he has relationships with his wife and children which are as they should be.<sup>58</sup>

Like Gulick, Foucault believes that learning proper practices of self care allows for the betterment of the individual. Though he does not specifically mention play, the implication is quite evident: learning to play is a way of learning to live ethically, a way of properly learning one's ethical place. Gulick puts it quite well: "the first conclusion to be drawn from these facts about human choice and free play is that life, self-activity, is an end in itself...The impulse to play is the impulse to express oneself, to function, to live."<sup>59</sup>

Despite the fact that the theory of play came to be used as a means of cultivating better more effective citizens, its intellectual history remains. The value and significance of play education, the precursor to physical education, is that its existence as an object of knowledge far exceeds how it came to be used. That is, play theory provides more than a theorization of how to instruct individuals with proper morals; its historical legacy also contains a vast

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 250

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview." 9

<sup>59</sup> Gulick, *A Philosophy of Play*. 277

remainder of unused knowledge. Play, then, can also function as an activity that allows one to continuously focus on reinvention and development.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DISCIPLINED CHILDREN AND DEVIANT BODIES

The nature of the Korean War conflict focused national attention on the struggle between democracy and communism. Following on the heels of World War II, and the terror inspired by, Stalin, the Soviets' eventual entrance into outer space via *Sputnik*, a discourse valorizing citizenship and the democratic tradition became particularly visible in the political-cultural milieu of the 1950's. Though the war was actually fought thousands of miles from the United States, fears of communists were aimed at the potential traitors lurking within the nation's borders. F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover articulated these in his book, *On Communism*:

America is face to face with an ideology – atheistic communism – which denies every ideal we uphold. The forces of this conspiracy have, in a relatively short time, expanded their rule....And with untiring efforts they continue to unleash their weapons of terrorism, subversion and vicious propaganda in an attempt to ensnare every nation in a giant communist web.<sup>1</sup>

In communism, Hoover located a system of beliefs antithetical to the American way of life and suggested a conspiracy that threatened the entire world. Crystallizing America's communist paranoia is the work of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Beginning in 1950, Senator McCarthy ignited fears that Communists were secretly running the government by claiming to have a list of sympathizers and members of the Communist Party employed by the State Department. McCarthy hinted at a Communist plot that was slowly gaining control over the U.S. government.<sup>2</sup> The formation of a Foreign Relations

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<sup>1</sup> J Edgar. Hoover, *On Communism* (New York: Random House, 1969). 12

<sup>2</sup> Lisle A. Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950* (Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

Subcommittee to investigate the allegations that Communists were in fact working within the State Department implied that the Senator's fears were potentially true, and institutionalized a need to identify the communist threat within the United States.<sup>3</sup> Comprising the paranoia that the United States was being infiltrated by Communists is a fear of the outsider or deviant lurking within the nation's borders. The presence/resonance of McCarthyism and the undemocratic practices it bemoaned during this time period positioned citizenship as a value in danger.

The institutionalization of McCarthyism and the discourses surrounding it are significant because they functioned as a site through which a public problem emerged. Ronald Greene's "Another Materialist Rhetoric" makes use of and clarifies Foucault's theorization of *governmentality* by identifying public problems as the central means through which society is governed. While Foucault defined governmentality as "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics..., which has as its target population"<sup>4</sup> and introduced *pastoral power*, "whose role is to constantly ensure, sustain and improve the lives of each and every one," as the form through which governmentality operates, he does not provide a clear discussion of how pastoral power gets exercised.<sup>5</sup> Greene does so through his definition of governmentality: "a governing apparatus exists as a complex field of practical reasoning that invents, circulates and regulates public problems."<sup>6</sup> This nuance

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3 Clayton Knowles, "Hearings Open Wednesday on Alleged Red Infiltration of State Department," *The New York Times*, May 6 1950.

4 Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994). 219

5 Foucault, "The Subject and Power."

6 Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric." 22

is crucial because it identifies a form through which pastoral power can be exercised. The formation and circulation of public problems creates opportunities for society to be managed because, by their very nature, public problems mandate solution.<sup>7</sup> As a problem whose existence and solution were framed as having public consequences, Communism, through its contact with McCarthyism, functioned as an opportunity for the management of society. The fears evoked by McCarthyism, that the United States was being secretly controlled by a communist conspiracy, position practices of good citizenship as the way in which individuals could help eliminate the communist threat.

J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, also articulated citizenship as a practice of utmost importance. Expressing his fears of the communist threat, Hoover writes:

America must devote the best of her efforts to make youth responsible, conscious of its obligations, and eager to be good citizens...Our young people, as well as adults need to be working members of our republic and citizens on duty at all times.<sup>8</sup>

When read as what Greene would call *materialist rhetoric* – an approach that assumes that rhetorical practices have material effects in the “real” world - statements such as the one above are especially significant.<sup>9</sup> An examination of public problems offers one approach to studying how the framing of an issue as a public problem has material repercussions. The particular form taken by these practices - how the problem is framed - determines the course of action through

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<sup>7</sup> Given his interest in the management through sexuality, it seems curious that Foucault would not articulate the public problem as a key tactic through which power gets exercised. Foucault, "Governmentality."; Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric."

<sup>8</sup> J Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958). 335-336

<sup>9</sup> Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric."

which the problem can be solved.<sup>10</sup> The identification of youth as a primary target of communist tactics is more than a public statement, then, it also points to a space through which communism could be regulated.

Paying particularly close attention to children, Hoover addressed the importance of eliminating Communism through the practices of young citizens. By identifying the nation's children as the target through which communism could be combated – he cautioned the public to “consider youth, a prime target of communist attack” - Hoover framed children as a means for ending communism.<sup>11</sup> Hoover's statement implied that Communism will be unable to take hold if children act as good citizens. Practices of good citizenship, then, are made visible as a sort of prophylactic, a preventative tool for protecting America from communism's infection.

A focus on the function of the youth in society coincides with academic scholarship attentive to youth cultures. Such scholarship acknowledges the importance of youth in society and remains focused on youth as an object of study. Dick Hebdige, for example, focuses his attention on analyzing a variety of youth subcultures as texts and points of intersection between youth and mainstream society.<sup>12</sup> Attention to the ways in which youth are identified as problems, and to the framing of public problems in general, allows for a combination of youth culture studies with rhetorical studies. Such an approach benefits from a focus on youth, while also remaining focused on the discursive practices that situate youth in particular kinds of cultural and political crises.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> J Edgar. *Hoover, Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1958). 198

<sup>12</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

Through a study of the framing of juvenile delinquency, then, it becomes possible to study how delinquency-as an object of study-gets taken up in psychology and sociology, but also how the framing of troubled/violent teenagers allowed delinquency to emerge as an object of study in the first place.<sup>13</sup> This chapter explores the ways in which the practices of juvenile delinquency and physically unfit youth in the 1950s were framed rhetorically as public problems and linked to a program of action through which those problems could be solved.

### Deviant Bodies

#### Unfit Children

Juvenile delinquency and physically unfit children were two deviant youth bodies that, through their visibility as public problems, became articulated to McCarthyism during the 1950s. Information on rising rates of juvenile delinquency suggesting that “over a million children a year were getting into trouble with the police,” and studies demonstrating that the nation’s children were considerably less physically fit than those in Europe, were used as evidence to illustrate the unruly nature of American youth.<sup>14</sup> The linkage of youth deviance to Communism perpetuated by anti-communist ideologies contributed to a cultural milieu that allowed for these studies on physical fitness and increasing juvenile delinquency to be used as evidence that the youth body was a

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<sup>13</sup> Here I am referencing Victoria Getis’ chapter “Experts and Juvenile Delinquency, 1900-1935 Joe Austin & Michael Willard, ed., *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures in Twentieth-Century America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade: America, 1945-1955* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956). and Prudden, *Is Your Child Really Fit?*



public problem in need of discipline.<sup>15</sup> More significantly, juvenile delinquency and youth unfitness became articulated as the same problem with the same solution. Specifically, rhetorical practices that framed both problems as crises in citizenship, also attached a common solution, physical fitness. The 1956 creation of the President's Council on Physical Fitness signals physical fitness as one means through which this occurred.

In 1956, Kraus and Prudden studied "the comparative strength and flexibility of more than four thousand children in America, and about three thousand in European countries."<sup>16</sup> Based on the criteria used for the study, European children were found to have a muscular strength and flexibility up to seven times higher than children in the United States.<sup>17</sup> The researchers attributed problems caused by youth fitness to the prevalence of technologies encouraging physical inactivity. Further exacerbating the impact of the study were reports from July 1, 1950, through the beginning of 1956, that the Army had found one-third of its draft registrants to be unfit for service.<sup>18</sup> After learning these "shocking" results, Eisenhower called for a conference focused on improving physical fitness in the United States, "it is certain that we can and should do more than we are now doing to help our young people become

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<sup>15</sup> Such a problem was also reinforced culturally in "Blackboard Jungle" and "Rebel Without a Cause" two popular films that dealt with the problem of deviant youth in the 1950s.

<sup>16</sup> Prudden, Bonnie. *Is Your Child Really Fit?* New York: Harper, 1956. 5

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, 57.9 percent of American children failed one or more of the tests versus 8.7 percent of European children. Harry Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?" *Cosmopolitan* 1954. 7

<sup>18</sup> "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower," *U.S. News & World Report*, August 2 1957.

physically fit and there better qualified, in all respects, to face the requirements of modern life.”<sup>19</sup>

The council’s function is not only significant because it drew federal attention to the issue of fitness, but also through the implications of the formation of such a council. Through its formation, the council highlighted the existence of a national problem and a group of individuals to which this problem was attached. Moreover, the value attributed to the importance of physical fitness delineated the criteria for normal youth and deviant youth. The existence of public concerns for such deviance emerges in both newspapers and periodicals.

An article in *Cosmopolitan* exhibited these concerns in “Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft” a 1954 article that utilized data that would later contribute to the formation of The President’s Council on Youth Fitness. Specific concerns addressed by the article included apprehension that the United States was training a generation of spectators, rather than athletes, and that U.S. children were considerably less fit than European children.<sup>20</sup> The 1954 *Cosmopolitan* article that identified the fitness of American youth was lacking, was later supplemented in 1957 by a *U.S. News & World Report* article that identified fitness as an issue under presidential scrutiny.<sup>21</sup>

A fear that U.S. citizens were somehow deficient as a result of their fitness was articulated through print coverage of the increase in the rejection of draft

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19 Eisenhower, Dwight. “To Participants of the Conference on Fitness of American Youth.” *Fitness of American Youth: A Report to the President of the United States on the Annapolis Conference*. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1956. 31

20 Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?"

21 "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower."

applicants for “physical and mental health reasons.” This served as another justification for the creation of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness. Specifically, 1.6 million out of 4.7 million applicants were rejected from July 1, 1950, to the beginning of 1956.<sup>22</sup> The utilization of such a statistic as evidence for the formation of the council connects physical fitness to citizenship and positions those that are unfit as individuals that negatively affect the nation’s security.

Problematic, however, is that these statistics are used to corroborate a link between individuals in poor athletic shape and draft rejection. They imply that draft rejections are a result of applicants being unathletic while, in fact, draft rejections rarely had anything to do with such a factor. Specific causes of rejection were health reasons like rheumatic heart disease, psychiatric disorders, eye and ear trouble, and of course, “total blindness, or deafness, arms or legs missing, chronic, or severe, physical or mental disorders.”<sup>23</sup> While misleading, these data are actually included in same 1956 *U.S. News & World Report* article. This deception points to a need to connect military unpreparedness and unfitness, despite evidence to the contrary. Implicit in a comparison between military capabilities and fitness is a conflation of physical fitness (athleticism) with one’s capabilities as a citizen. Draft rejections in other words, signified that U.S. citizens were not physically fit enough to defend their country – a priority at this time due to McCarthyism. Lurking within U.S. borders were not only communists, but also a citizenry incapable of defending their country against the communists:

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<sup>22</sup> Robert L. Heilbroner and Bonnie Prudden, "A Simple Physical Fitness Test for the Whole Family," *Cosmopolitan* 1956.

<sup>23</sup> "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower."

Such a value is expressed repeatedly in the proceedings of the President's Council on Physical Fitness.

The fitness of every American youth is vital to the future of our country and to his own well being. Each person makes his impact upon our way of life. Each must help maintain and protect our basic ideals of freedom. In a democracy every citizen has the right to realize the highest level of self-development his natural endowment permits.<sup>24</sup>

This statement assumes a mutual relationship between fitness and the country's future and implies that those who ignore practices of fitness have rejected the values of nationalism and democracy. The founding of the President's Council for Youth fitness did not, however, represent a radical shift in the conceptualization of fitness, health or their importance to children. Instead, the council's emergence centered the physically fit child as an ideal health figure/ideal citizen. In doing so, the council positioned a lack of fitness as a problem of concern for good citizens and implied that physical unfitness and deviancy were equivalent. Characterizing the fit body as valuable due to its ability to enable democracy is an important rhetorical move that illustrates Greene's view of rhetoric as "make[ing] visible a host of behaviors and populations."<sup>25</sup> Through making fit youth visible as an important and necessary element of democracy, the discourse of the President's Council positioned the fit body as a public priority.<sup>26</sup>

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24 "Why Fitness?" *Fitness of American Youth: A Report to the President of the United States*. Annapolis: President's Conference on Fitness of American Youth, 1956. 1

25 Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric." 31.

26 To be clear, I am not arguing that the discourses of the President's Council forced people to begin lifting weights and developing their bodies; it did not. What I am claiming is that the Council alerted the public and other institutions to the importance of fitness and that through making this issue visible, the fit body was then made available to regulation.

## Delinquency

The practices of the juvenile delinquent were synonymous with those of deviant or bad citizens. Much like the physically unfit child emerged as a national issue in the 1950s, so too did instances of juvenile delinquency. For example, from November of 1953 to January of 1955 youth law infractions increased by 45 percent.<sup>27</sup> Much like communist fear, over the proliferation of juvenile delinquency were institutionalized through the creation of a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee this one intent on eliminating juvenile delinquency. Much of the public interest in juvenile delinquency relates to its causes and solutions. One engagement with juvenile delinquency argued that certain educational methods led to delinquency by suggesting that, "pupils are urged to conform to the group rather than to think for themselves."<sup>28</sup> In this speech, delivered to educators, the way in which delinquency can be contained is attributed to not undertaking communist-like forms of pedagogy. Here, the description of delinquent behavior becomes conflated with those of communist behavior. Editorial columnist Dr. Ruth Alexander more directly connected delinquency to Communism. She states:

Both [communism and delinquency] are threats to our peace and security and both will bankrupt us if they continue unchecked...In the field of juvenile delinquency, we have not been warned...I am here to sound that alarm.<sup>29</sup>

This statement articulates a fear that if juvenile delinquents continued to remain unchecked, they would cause tragic results for society. Like Communists, the

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<sup>27</sup> Richard. Clendenen, "The Shame of America: The Post Reports on Juvenile Delinquency," *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 8 1955. 18

<sup>28</sup> Augustin G. Rudd, "Juvenile Delinquency: Our Public Schools," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, October 15 1957. 88

<sup>29</sup> Ruth Alexander, "What Price the Fatted Calf?" *Ibid.*, May 1 1956. 460

practices of delinquents are those of individuals incapable of acting as citizens within the norms of society. Alexander's subtle use of terminology seems to imply a similar relationship between delinquency and Communism: "I am here to sound the alarm," does not only imply a threat, but also seems to imply that Alexander is exposing the existence of a dark secret. The identification of an immanent problem is mirrored by Joseph McCarthy: "I have in my hand fifty-seven cases of individuals who would appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist party, but who are still helping to shape our foreign policy."<sup>30</sup> In both cases, a fear of a hidden threat is evoked.

Interestingly, the relationship between characterizations of Communism and delinquency run deeper. Within periodical descriptions, juvenile delinquency often gets written about as a problem capable of affecting all children:

We want to impress on every parent in America that it is time to face the facts: the delinquent may be any child you know, including your own – regardless of your social position, your economic status or your good intentions. Juvenile delinquency is everybody's problem.<sup>31</sup>

Like Communists, delinquents can only be identified through their actions. Such individuals inspired panic because they were not easily visible, and because any child contained the potential for acts of delinquency. More common than such overt statements regarding the potential delinquent are short case studies found in numerous periodicals featuring stories on juvenile delinquency. These stories describe once normal teenagers gone bad like "Jimmy," a 14-year old with anger

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<sup>30</sup> "Mccarthy Vs. The State," *The New York Times*, March 9 1950. E1

<sup>31</sup> Clendenen, "The Shame of America: The Post Reports on Juvenile Delinquency." 19

management problems, or Arnold, a youth regularly kicked out of public school for assault.<sup>32</sup>

The story of one group of delinquents in 1954 was continuously cited in national publications such as *Look*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, and *The Saturday Evening Post* and offers a pointed example of the way in which delinquency is framed as a lurking threat in American society.<sup>33</sup> On August 18, 1954, four Brooklyn youths were charged with several crimes including "beating and kicking a man to death, horsewhipping young women and burning the soles of a vagrant's feet, beating him, and throwing his body into the river".<sup>34</sup> Mundane descriptions are one way in which the practices of the delinquents resonate with concerns over communist infiltration:

Jack Koslow boasted that he was the leader of the group, the idea man. A thin, 6-foot youth with a strong nose and tapering jaw, he sported a razor-thin red moustache... his chief lieutenant being muscular 210 pound 17-year old Melvin Mittman... Jerome Lieberman, 17 years old, a slight, dark-haired youth who liked to play piano to his father's fiddling was described by police as a tag-along, as was 15-year-old Robert Trachtenberg... a voracious reader of public-library books.<sup>35</sup>

The unremarkable description, similar to Ruth Alexander's description mentioned earlier, evokes a fear of the familiar enemy, the enemy lurking within

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32 Dorothy Cameron. Disney, "Can This Child Be Saved?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1955, Stacy V. Jones, "The Cougars: Life with a Brooklyn Gang," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1954.

33 "4 Teen-Agers Seized in Death by Kicking," *New York Times*, Aug 18, 1954 1954, Clendenen, "The Shame of America: The Post Reports on Juvenile Delinquency.", Chester Morrison, "The Case of Brooklyn's Thrill Killers: Could This Happen to Your Boy," *Look*, November 2 1954, T.E. Murphy, "The Face of Violence," *Readers Digest* 1954, "Quet Boys.And Horror," *Life*, August 30 1954, "These Terrible Young," *Newsweek*, no. August 30 (1954).

34 "4 Teen-Agers Seized in Death by Kicking." 1

35 "These Terrible Young," *Newsweek*, August 30, 1954 1954. 23

the borders of the state. The conceptualization of the delinquent functions much like that of the Communist; they exist within the community, but cannot be identified.<sup>36</sup>

Descriptions of the juvenile delinquent illustrated that any potential child could be a delinquent and, thus, that proper steps should be taken in order to prevent the continued proliferation of delinquency. Unlike their physical descriptions, Koslow, Mittman, Lieberman, and Trachtenberg seem to have violent temperaments resting just below the surface:

The boys were quieter than average, brighter than average, sons of low-income, apparently happy Jewish couples in crowded dank decaying area near Williamsburg bridge....To explain the vicious beatings, Jack Koslow, who had briefly attended college, said, 'I have an abstract hatred of bums and vagrants.' His family doctor came forward to reveal that Jack had for four years shown increasing signs of mental disturbance.<sup>37</sup>

Upon comparing both descriptions of the juvenile delinquency we find a contradiction between the description of appearance and action. While seemingly "normal," delinquents, much like communists, engaged in behaviors that were far from normal.

This focus on utilizing deviant figures as an opportunity for societal management also emerges within discussions of child deviancy in the 1950s. Within juvenile delinquency we see the identification of a public problem and the positioning of potential spaces through which that problem must be remedied. Quite similar to depictions of physically unfit individuals as deviants,

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<sup>36</sup> Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950*. The end of the 1940's and beginning of the 1950's experienced a newfound fear of communism, a fear of traitors lurking within our borders. This fear was perpetuated by senator Joseph McCarthy following Alger Hiss' 1948 conviction of perjury.

<sup>37</sup> Morrison, "The Case of Brooklyn's Thrill Killers: Could This Happen to Your Boy." 106



the representation of delinquents worked rhetorically to assist in reinforcing normality. Depicting the actions of delinquents as deviant, erratic, and unexpected isolates their behaviors as unique and alien, not anything to be expected from those of a “normal” citizen. They operate as what Stuart Hall would call “the margin,” and in doing so, give coherence to the dominant notions of normality.<sup>38</sup>

### Management

While the 1950s was not the first time period that experienced delinquency, the end of World War II and the subsequent spread of McCarthyism at the time contributed to making the 1950’s a space where insurrection within the populace was received in an especially negative light. The framing of the delinquent as a public problem opened up a space through which he/she must be managed and disciplined. Citizenship became one quality reified through the marking of deviance:

The well-being of a democratic society is dependent upon a mature and well-educated electorate. A primary objective of the public schools is to foster the maximum development of each individual, secure in the knowledge that the greater the sum total of the development of individuals the better for society.<sup>39</sup>

The abnormal behaviors of the juvenile delinquent reasserted the need for a controlled population, delineating the good citizen from the bad citizen through the assumption that the practices of good citizenship are those of discipline and

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<sup>38</sup> Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity, Identity, and Difference," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff and Ronald Grigor Suny Eley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Ralph J Garry, John Gawrys Jr, and Carole Lee Phillips, "Character Education: Methods and Materials," *Journal of Education* 142, no. 3 (1960). 18

control. The value assigned to discipline and control also highlights the importance of the body as a place where deviance could be eliminated.

Notions of the “normal citizen,” in other words, are not only assumed through the pathological characterization of delinquency; also valued within this construction is the body under control, the docile body. For Foucault, exercise – “that technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated”<sup>40</sup> - operated as a crucial activity in the production of docile bodies. He writes: “By bending behavior towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary.”<sup>41</sup> The prescription of exercise, in other words, necessitates the achievement of a goal; it also allows for a comparison, an evaluation of the individuals taking part. Exercise functions as a means for producing an ideal youth citizenry, then, because it is a practice that allows for the perpetual reassessment of child deviants and management of their time. Through continuously controlling practices, exercise works as an indefinite form of progressive training; an apparatus for training unruly bodies to act properly.<sup>42</sup>

This is not to say that the docile body has not always composed conceptions of good citizenship, noteworthy about the mobilization of delinquency is its function as a site which highlights and emphasizes the values of control and discipline, thus rendering visible those particular values as most significant to one’s role as citizen. Still needed, however, is a means of prevention. Physical fitness offers one way through which the deviant behaviors

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<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. 161

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

of the delinquent and the unfit child can be sculpted into those of a normal citizen

The President's Council on Physical Fitness argued for the importance of regular physical activity among American youth as future leaders of the nation, "the strength of our Nation tomorrow is the fitness of its youth today."<sup>43</sup> The council officially agreed upon several courses of action as means of centering the importance of physical fitness. Specifically, it recognized physical inactivity as a problem among American youth; agreed to communicate the problem's existence to the American public; and agreed upon the need for research into its remedy. The council, furthermore, recommended the implementation of several programs aimed at the improvement of physical fitness: "programs should be designed to motivate fitness of youth for normal peacetime living."<sup>44</sup>

As an issue of presidential scrutiny, fitness came to be implicated in issues of citizenship. The anti-Communist milieu of the 1950' as well as the poor performances of United States children as compared to European children in the United States served as catalysts through which citizenship and fitness could be conflated:

The uncomfortable standard of living, the governmental aims of world ownership, and the mode of existence of the Communist orbit are more conducive to the fitness and endurance of their youth than the greatly increasing conveniences and effortless form of life we and our children are experiencing right now. A modern and high standard of living detracts – as you well know – from vigorous youth fitness. It just makes life too easy!<sup>45</sup>

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43 "Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations " (paper presented at the President's Conference on the Fitness of American Youth, Annapolis, 1956). 3

44 Ibid. 5

45 Burgess, Carter. "The Role of the President's Citizens Advisory Committee on the Fitness of American Youth". *In Fitness of American Youth: A Report to the President of the United States on The West Point Conference*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957. 34

Through its comparison, the above quote's invocation of Communism operated as a call to action and, simultaneously made reference to the red scare prevalent at the time. In order to not be overrun by "the Reds," American citizens had to deprive themselves of the leisure technologies that caused youth unfitness, and raise young American citizens to live fit and healthy lifestyles. Above we can take note of the ways in which the presence of communism in 1950s America is mobilized by the federal government and connected to physical fitness. Implied is an understanding of fitness as a necessary criterion for citizenship - good citizens are those individuals willing to be fit and vigorous.

A need for control manifests itself as an improvement on the means by which the child can more efficiently control their body. Learning control over the body, however, did not intend to produce happier individuals, but docile members of society. An ideal physical education program, then, "helps to equip children physically, mentally, socially, morally, and emotionally; and to prepare them for clean, wholesome, and useful lives in the service of God and man".<sup>46</sup> Physical education here functions as a necessary aspect of an individual is emerging as a recognizable citizen subject.

Most significant about the council is not that it introduced health fitness into society, but that it nationally sanctioned the importance of fitness. Eisenhower's closing letter to the council manifests this newfound relationship between fitness and the nation: "The demands of this age put great emphasis on the preparation of the youth of America in body, mind and spirit. I can think of no more important subject to merit the attention of our government and all

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<sup>46</sup> Elmer Seefeld, A. *Physical Education for Elementary Grades*. (St Louis.: Concordia, 1944). 2

citizens of our land.”<sup>47</sup> This ideology is also undertaken by subsequent councils, “youth fitness is designed to provide a nation with mental, moral, and physical endurance and a healthier sounder life-time, whether the national destiny is opportunity or danger – peace or war.”<sup>48</sup> This quotation demonstrates the way in which the conflation between fitness and citizenship became the motivation for good physical fitness. Physical fitness was framed as a device not to provide for individuals, but to provide a nation *with* a certain type of individuals with particular types of mental, moral, and physical endurance. Fit children, then, become intelligible as ideal citizens, whose bodies manifested those qualities necessary of a proper United States citizen.

This valorized representation of citizenship and fitness implicitly recognized a certain type of individual that one must not become. The unfit child represents such an individual. The unfit child, however, is not only one who is in poor physical condition, but also in a poor moral condition. Based on its deployment as an apparatus directed toward the production of citizens, fitness emerges as a physical enactment of a particular type of moral code, a code which contains self-discipline at its center. Its guiding principles continuously oriented upon maintaining the dominance of the nation state:

This nation has entered into the most critical period in its history. Total mobilization may be called at any moment to save the very existence of the nation and the democratic way of life. One essential need for national preparedness is physical fitness among the youth of the country approaching induction into the ease and prosperity of this machine age which democracy has created. A high level of physical fitness among American youth will not only provide a better

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<sup>47</sup> Eisenhower, Dwight. “The Fitness of American Youth.” *In Fitness of American Youth: A Report to the President of the United States on The West Point Conference*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957. 1

<sup>48</sup> “Report of the National Conference for the Mobilization of Health, Education, Physical Education, and Recreation.” 34

defense but it may lead to the very survival of many who might otherwise succumb during combat situations.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, we rarely find discussions or references to the importance of fitness to health. Its effects were discussed as primarily social, political, and mental contexts and not as a significant aspect of increasing the healthiness of an individual's body. Consequently, a healthy body becomes much less significant than a *useful* body. The passage above, for example, does not represent fitness in a manner that stresses its value for health maintenance, but as a tool, a device employed purely because of its utility to another.

As an activity through which good citizenship practices could be performed, fitness also functioned as the specific means through which the delinquent could be controlled and transformed into a more ideal citizen. The practices of exercise and fitness functioned as one approach capable of implementing the proper practices of citizenship. As a means for the disciplining of the deviant body, exercise links the delinquent and unhealthy bodies:

In a word, it just stands to reason that if you crowd a youngster's time (or an adult's) with inviting decent things to do there will be no room left for the cheap, tawdry, the indecent, the viscous....Rather than antidote, recreation is preventative medicine.<sup>50</sup>

This statement issued by one of the members of the council for the prevention of juvenile delinquency conceives of the body as a means of regulating delinquents

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<sup>49</sup> "Physical Fitness Achievement Standards for Youth". *Report of the National Conference for the Mobilization of Health, Education, Physical Education, and Recreation*. Washington D.C.: American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, 1951. 31

<sup>50</sup> National Conference on Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency, "Report on Recreation for Youth" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946). 20

and cultivating citizens. Exercise becomes visible, in other words, as a method through which deviant behavior can be controlled.<sup>51</sup>

Physical education, then, became an entry point into regulating future adults as well as juvenile delinquency in the present. The Citizen's Participation Panel reporting to the National Conference on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency connected recreation to juvenile delinquency, and, also labeled it as a need of all youth:

For some it will be the alternative to associations that may lead to delinquency. For boys and girls who have got into difficulty, recreation offers a means of developing constructive associations with others. No one claims that recreation is a cure-all for delinquency but recreation is recognized as a basic need of all youth.<sup>52</sup>

This statement centers recreation as a need of youth and consequently justifying its necessity to society. The President's Council on Physical Fitness made a similar claim in which it argued for the importance of constructively using recreation and other programs as a means of aiding children in "becoming well adjusted, useful citizens."<sup>53</sup> Vice-President Nixon also asserted the value of recreation as a means of eliminating delinquency, "a program of total fitness

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<sup>51</sup> Exercise is that technique by which one imposes on the body tasks that are both repetitive and different, but always graduated. By bending behavior towards a terminal state, exercise makes possible a perpetual characterization of the individual either in relation to this term, in relation to other individuals, or in relation to a type of itinerary. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). 161

<sup>52</sup> *In National Conference on Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency: "Report on Citizen Participation."* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946. 9

<sup>53</sup> Benson, Ezra Taft. "Address of Secretary of Agriculture." *In Fitness of American Youth: A Report to the President of the United States on the Fort Ritchie Meeting.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958. 43

would effect the cure for this problem [delinquency] confronting the nation today.”<sup>54</sup>

President Eisenhower also framed physical fitness as an activity capable of eliminating delinquency in a letter sent to *Field and Stream* magazine.<sup>55</sup> The short message begins with a caption that explained the way that “we are able to remain a strong nation of clear thinking, courageous men and women, drawing our strength and inspiration from the resources God has given us.”<sup>56</sup>

Eisenhower’s message then goes on to state:

The problems of juvenile delinquency decreases in direct proportion to the opportunities decrease in direct proportion to the opportunities of our young people to enjoy outlets for their energies in sports. Repeatedly, I have observed the resourcefulness and stability of young men who have had an opportunity to learn how to take care of themselves as campers, hunters and fishermen. I firmly believe that in this fast-paced atomic age in which we live there is no better balance wheel to clear thinking and healthy emotions than the enjoyment and appreciation of the out-of-doors.<sup>57</sup>

While not directly referencing citizenship and recreation, Eisenhower articulated the practices of physical activity as a means of remedying the problem of delinquency, illustrating once again the usage of physical fitness and activity as tools for managing deviancy and producing good citizens. This connection is significant because the emergence of fitness as a citizenship issue and the framing of fitness as a delinquency issue center the disciplining of the body as a

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<sup>54</sup> Homer Bigart, "Eisenhower Talk on Fitness Asked," *The New York Times*, Sept 11 1957. 17

<sup>55</sup> Recreation and fitness are significant because they both describe a means of disciplining/occupying the body. So, while their may be some specific differences between them, I believe that the practices of engaging in each – or both – are ultimately the same.

<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower, Dwight. “A message from the President.” *Field and Stream*. 12 Sept. 1955: 80-81

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 82



national priority. The articulation of unfitness to juvenile delinquency through the common solution of physical fitness, positions the ideal of the fit body and works as a *line of penetration*, a point of convergence, a point of entrance, and a point of intervention into the management of deviance through the fit body.

### Conclusion

The discourses of the President's Council on Youth Fitness, juvenile delinquency, physically unfit children, McCarthyism, and citizenship discussed in this chapter centered physical fitness as an ideal means for managing deviancy. If practices of physical fitness were implemented into the lives of children on a daily basis, audiences were led to assume that the United States would be more prepared for future wars and that children would be less likely to engage in practices of juvenile delinquency. Discursively the articulation of juvenile delinquency and physical fitness opened up a *line of penetration*, an entry point through which government could regulate the practices of the population. Foucault's masturbating child operated as a subject position whose elimination necessitated the intervention of numerous authorities; when made visible as a public problem, the practices of child onanism in the 16<sup>th</sup> created an opportunity through which not only children, but parents, educators, and other individuals affiliated with children could be regulated. The idea of childhood masturbation as problematic is significant because it provides a necessary justification for power to be exercised over parents and other adults through their children.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the framing of delinquency and unfitness as publicly visible problems sets the conditions for political/governmental intervention into families through children. What is strange about the opportunities for familial regulation

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<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*.

afforded by unfit children and made visible by the President's Council on Physical Fitness is that while the council involved itself in a discussion about physical fitness, it did not attempt to implement a federal physical fitness program.

While fitness gets labeled as an issue of concern for citizens and of concern for the President, little work gets done to introduce policies focused on actually improving physical fitness from the federal level. Nixon, for example, stated that the local and state governments should be primarily responsible for implementing physical education programs, and that additional federal funds should not be expected.<sup>59</sup> One way this claim gets justified is through the contrasting of U.S. tactics for implementing physical education and Communist tactics of implementing physical education, which Nixon claimed "stress the mass and ignore the individual."<sup>60</sup> Still, the implications of the federal government's non-intervention are also significant.

This minimal involvement on the part of the federal government in the implementation of a national fitness program, despite its claims lauding the benefits of physical fitness in eliminating delinquency and promoting democracy, points toward a tension in the stated utility of physical fitness and how it actually functions. As discussed above, physical fitness' value is derived from its ability to act as a prophylactic. As a prophylactic, it does not function as a punishment where a crime is followed by action, but instead fitness is framed as a procedure that when implemented will prevent future problems. *If* implemented, a national physical fitness program would prevent delinquency

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<sup>59</sup> Bigart, "Eisenhower Talk on Fitness Asked.", Homer Bigart, "Youth Fitness Aid Favored by Nixon," *The New York Times*, September 10 1957.

<sup>60</sup> Bigart, "Youth Fitness Aid Favored by Nixon." 66

and draft recruitment problems from occurring in the future. *If* implemented, a national physical fitness program would render deviant individuals into docile citizens through the “individual and collective coercion of bodies.”<sup>61</sup> Yet, the federal government’s failure to execute such a procedure at the time implies, at the very least, a lack of interest in doing so. While Foucault describes the production of docile bodies as associated to the implementation of discipline on the national level, physical fitness, a tool perfect for the production of docile bodies, did not become nationally required.

Through its framing as an individual issue to be funded through state projects, physical fitness is positioned as a public problem to be remedied by individuals at the private level. As a problem that must be solved at the private level, the responsibility for failing to get in shape lies in the hands of individual citizens. By remaining uninvolved, the federal government still contributed to the exertion of power over citizens in 1950’s America. Self-management in this dynamic is framed as a priority; those individuals that fail to follow the guidelines for proper physical fitness can be blamed for their failure. Through its lack of intervention, the council allowed for deviancy to exist. Indeed, by framing fitness as a national priority and not requiring its incorporation into a curriculum, the federal government’s non-intervention worked as an apparatus capable of encouraging practices of self-discipline and self-policing. As problematic bodies the deviant and unfit child provided a productive service; both open up a space where the control of the youth body could be legislated as a national priority. Delinquency and fitness as public problems shape the boundaries of a discourse that necessitates the disciplining of the youthful body into the complacent body of an ideal citizen. Through their continued visibility

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61 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. 169.

as problems, both allowed for the perpetual reassertion of citizenship/democratic values, while directing responsibility for all problems/failures concerning citizenship away from the federal government.

## CHAPTER 4

### AMBIGUITY AND THE FITNESS PROBLEM

With its primary recommendation that “cognizance be taken of the fact that our adult citizens and our youth have little appreciation of the existence of a problem pertaining to the fitness of American Youth,”<sup>1</sup> Eisenhower’s first Conference on the Fitness of American Youth marked the presence of an institutional discourse that contributed to the formation of a public fitness problem with deeply material implications.<sup>2</sup> Owing much thanks to the President’s Council, physical fitness became an increasingly visible public problem that eventually attained an eleven-page cover story in *U.S. News and World Report* and contributed to increased changes in physical education.<sup>3</sup> In previous chapters I have demonstrated the way in which the identification of a lack in physical fitness among American youth functioned as a rhetorical practice that, for Ronald Greene, placed populations within the purview of a governing apparatus.<sup>4</sup> That is, the practice of naming physical fitness as a problem acted as a strategy that worked as a *line of penetration* by making state and other institutional interventions into the population possible.

My previous chapters addressed the material effects of the physical fitness public problem and the way in which physical education became theorized as a means of demonstrating the value of muscular/total fitness. These chapters, then, demonstrated two different ways that fitness became a part of educational

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<sup>1</sup> "Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations". 3

<sup>2</sup> Hans Kraus and Ruth P. Hirschland, "Minimum Muscular Fitness Tests in School Children," *Research Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1953).

<sup>3</sup> "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower."

<sup>4</sup> Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric."

and federal institutional discourses. Aside from the historical and political context, one crucial question that remains, however, is what facilitated the distribution of these discourses. Ronald Greene argues that rhetorical materialism should attend to how rhetorical practices create conditions through which “governing apparatus’ can judge and program reality” and thus focuses on how rhetorical practices circulate and make public problems visible.<sup>5</sup> Though the historical and political context of the time played a large role in the making visible of the fitness problem, the specific use of the term “fitness” was essential to the construction of the weak body as an object of public concern. That is, the ambiguous meaning of fitness was the pivot upon which the distribution of discourses regarding the fitness panic in education and government rested. Fitness’ vagueness was essential to its mobilization within the President’s Council on Youth Fitness; its ambiguous nature is also what allowed it to be co-opted by physical educators.

This chapter begins with an examination of the importance of ambiguity to the construction of the physical fitness problem. After demonstrating that the ambiguity of fitness assisted in its attachment to different institutions, I move to a discussion of the limits of ambiguity and fitness. I do so through engaging the relative absence of discussions that articulated the value of physical fitness to health, while also showing that descriptions of the fitness problem continuously relied upon references to health to give validity to its status as a problem. Because it begins to engage medicine and science, such reliance on health strays away from vague notions of fitness, towards one that necessitates quantifiable evidence to demonstrate fitness’ ability to improve health. This desire for a more clear definitive means of describing the fitness problem, I argue, ultimately

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

culminates in a reorientation of the fitness problem that will come to focus on obesity, while still allowing for the disciplinary demands of ideal fitness.

### The Ambiguous Value of Fitness

A common theme common within federal and educational discourses during the 1950s was the need for managing the unruly and the unfit body for the production of a more efficient and less deviant subject. The deviant body of the juvenile delinquent, a topic that I referred to in chapter 2, illustrates this quite well. The common fears expressed in both descriptions of communism and juvenile delinquency mandated the need for the management of deviancy:

We want to impress on every parent in America that it is time to face the facts: the delinquent may be any child you know, including your own – regardless of your social position, your economic status or your good intentions. Juvenile delinquency is everybody's problem.<sup>6</sup>

The problem described above was not problem localized to one specific sector of the population, instead, the quote indicates that problems of delinquency could have been found within all elements of American life. This statement made by a federal commission intent on studying and eliminating juvenile delinquency bears a striking resemblance to statements made about Communism by F.B.I director, J. Edgar Hoover:

America is face to face with an ideology – atheistic communism – which denies every ideal we uphold. The forces of this conspiracy have, in a relatively short time, expanded their rule....And with untiring efforts they continue to unleash their weapons of terrorism, subversion and vicious propaganda in an attempt to ensnare every nation in a giant communist web.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Clendenen, "The Shame of America: The Post Reports on Juvenile Delinquency." 78

<sup>7</sup> Hoover, *On Communism*. 12

The concerns for managing deviance expressed by both Hoover and by the Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency shared an explicitly stated fear of deviant practices performed by unruly individuals, and they also implicitly valued the importance of creating a more manageable and ideal population of citizens. To be sure, this desire is by no means unique to the 1950s or the U.S. government. Making better citizens had often been a goal of governing institutions. The use of a physical fitness panic to push an agenda of good citizenship, however, was unique.

Concerns that an overabundance of leisure time (made possible by the development of time saving devices) contributed to youth delinquency and positioned the proper use of leisure time as a solution to the management of unruly bodies and practices. Specifically, the solution to the leisure problem, and thus, to deviant problems that resulted from too much leisure time, was to correctly instruct individuals in how to *properly* use their leisure time: “what we must do is take time and convert it into proper kinds of leisure. Time by itself is not leisure...What we must do is re-evaluate this social structure on how to live life.”<sup>8</sup> With much thanks to The President’s Council on Youth Fitness, physical education was identified as a means of managing the leisure problem and was consequently identified as an approach for producing ideal citizens:

The primary job of the physical education teacher as differentiated from other teachers in the school is to educate for an understanding and acceptance of the body as a symbol of the self, for an understanding of the laws of its expression and use, and for an appreciation of the values of achieving and maintaining a responsive, well-directed, mature, responsible instrument for living democratically both with oneself and with others.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shane McCarthy, "Leisure and Fitness" (paper presented at the The Community Approach to the Leisure Problem: The National Conference on Education for Leisure -- The Role of the Public School, Washington D.C., 1957). 2

<sup>9</sup> Cassidy, *Curriculum Development in Physical Education*. 131-132



The above statement, made in one of physical education's canonical texts, positions physical education as a means of producing a normal body of citizens, thus, merging the practice of learning to be fit with the underlying importance of efficiency.

The desire for maximizing the efficient body and the efficient citizen was continuously expressed through the deployment of the term fitness, in a multitude of different ways. The priority and value of efficiency implied by physical fitness' emergence as a means of producing a more perfect population were taken up and circulated within a multitude of discourses due, in part, to the ambiguous way in which fitness was defined.

The move to describe the importance of increased physical fitness as one component in the realization of "total fitness" - an ideal used by The President's Council and physical fitness educators to describe "over-all" well being and its physical, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional components - illustrates a notion of fitness that exceeds its purely physical components.<sup>10</sup> When used in this manner, fitness did not simply reference the process of engaging in exercise in order to cultivate a stronger body, but as a means for individuals to produce themselves as whole citizens. Describing the goal of the President's Council, council chair Shane MacCarthy wrote: "Our purpose in being is to get you convinced of the necessity for physical activity, not just for physical fitness, but

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<sup>10</sup> D Barclay, "How Fit Are Our Youth?" *Journal of the National Education Association*, March 1959. 34 The following specifically make reference to the importance of "total fitness." A.F. Byrnes, "Physical Fitness, Health and the Returning Servicemen," *Hygeia* 24 (1946), T.K. Cureton, "Physical Fitness," *Hygeia* 23 (1945), Morris Fishbein, "Health and Fitness," *Hygeia* 24 (1946), F.S. Lloyd, "Physical Fitness in War and Peace," *Hygeia* 23 (1945). Shane MacCarthy, "Symposium on Youth Fitness" (paper presented at the National Conference on Physicians and Schools, Highland Park, IL, 1957). R. O. Dundan, "Editorial: Fitness for What?" *Today's Health* 35 (1957). Karl W. and Carolyn W. Bookwalter Bookwalter, ed., *Fitness for Secondary School Youth* (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation., 1956).

physical activity for total fitness.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the proceedings of the first President’s Council on Youth Fitness articulated the importance of ensuring that young citizens were “fully fit,” thus stressing that physical fitness was only one element in a larger project that assists in developing better individuals.<sup>12</sup> Echoing the sentiments of the President’s Council, the delegates of the 1956 AAHPER conference conflated “fitness” with the same values embodied by total fitness in a mission statement: “fitness is that state which characterizes the degree to which the person is able to function...ability to function depends upon the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual components of fitness.”<sup>13</sup> In the institutional discourses of education and government, there are both references to strength and the importance of developing the whole individual.

Circulating coextensively with discourses concerned with “total fitness” were those concerned with muscular and health fitness. For example, an eleven-page cover article *U.S. News and World Report*, “Is American Youth Physically Fit? – The Findings that Shocked Eisenhower,” constructs physical fitness as an alarming issue, a public problem desperately in need of a cure. The article notes that “there is deep concern in high places over the fitness of American youth.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> MacCarthy, "Symposium on Youth Fitness". 82

<sup>12</sup> "Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations ". AAHPER, *American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation: Youth Fitness Test Manual* (Washington, D.C.: AAHPER, 1958), AAHPER, "Physical Fitness Achievement Standards for Youth," *The Journal of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation* (1951), Barclay, "How Fit Are Our Youth?", Byrnes, "Physical Fitness, Health and the Returning Servicemen.", Cureton, "Physical Fitness.", Dundan, "Editorial: Fitness for What?", Fishbein, "Health and Fitness.", L.K Frank, "Physical Fitness and Health Problems of the Adolescent," *American Journal of Public Health* 35 (1945), F.V. Hein, "Your Child's Health and Fitness," *National Education Association Journal* 51 (1962), Lloyd, "Physical Fitness in War and Peace."

<sup>13</sup> Bookwalter, ed., *Fitness for Secondary School Youth*. 72

<sup>14</sup> "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower."

In order to demonstrate that fitness was indeed a problem, the article drew on several pieces of evidence, including the rates of Selective Service rejection. Rejection due to physiological problems was often used as evidence to suggest a lack of fitness during both World War II and the Korean War.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, not only did a selective service report find that rejections were not due to the physical fitness issues, but that “the conditions found indicate a medical need, rather than a lack of physical training.”<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, the results of the Krause-Weber tests also were used as evidence that American youth were lacking in muscular fitness as compared to children in Europe. These rates of rejection and the evaluations made by the Krause-Weber tests also worked their way into the President’s Council on Physical Fitness, which when describing the “the [fitness] problem” stated, “with more leisure time available to youth, profitable methods must be adopted as a pattern of current life to achieve physical fitness...The strength of our Nation tomorrow is the fitness of its youth today.”<sup>17</sup> Adding to the strategically ambiguous nature of fitness were the many occasions when physical fitness, and total fitness become conflated.

“Youth Fitness: A Community Project,” a publication of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness distributed to communities as a way of advancing

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<sup>15</sup> AAHPER, *American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation: Youth Fitness Test Manual*. 1, Robert W. and Alan W. Sexton McCammon, "Implications of Longitudinal Research in Fitness Programs," *J.A.M.A* 168, no. 11 (1958)., AAHPER, "Physical Fitness Achievement Standards for Youth." 1, W.W. Bauer, "Past, Present and Future in Fitness" (paper presented at the National Conference on Physicians and Schools, Highland Park, IL, 1957). "What's Wrong with Our Youth?" *U.S. News and World Report*, March 19 1954.

<sup>16</sup> Frank, "Physical Fitness and Health Problems of the Adolescent." 575

<sup>17</sup> "Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations ". 3

physical fitness goals, illustrates this point. In the pamphlet all members of the community were encouraged to “tell the youth fitness story” because:

Not only does the telling provide ongoing incentives to many persons, it also creates opportunity for recognition – a basic human need – for civic responsibility which will result in the improvement and enhancement of the fitness of the community’s – and America’s – YOUTH.<sup>18</sup>

This particular passage, and the pamphlet, best illustrate the ambiguous and multifunctional character of fitness. They communicate the importance of educating others that fitness is an important ideal that all children should achieve, but do more than just that. Because telling the tale of fitness is not just identified as a form of education, but as a means of gaining civic value in one’s community, total fitness is implied. Individuals were fit to be citizens when they can responsibly educate their communities about fitness. This deployment of a fitness panic necessitating total citizenship and an increase in muscular strength marked the fluidity of fitness’ meaning and its flexibility as a rhetorical device.

We might think of fitness as an umbrella term that was infused with different meanings ultimately working toward the same purpose: the production of an efficient citizenry. The rhetorical value of the term fitness resided in the way in which it was deployed in the ‘50s under multiple definitions while still maintaining a cohesive focus on efficiency. This cohesive focus inserted physical fitness as a priority into the American cultural consciousness and, through the conflation of physical fitness with total fitness and citizenship, identified fitness as a means of “fitting in.” Such a cohesive focus was possible because discourses about fitness had primarily emerged from federal and educational institutions, which had invested interests in producing

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<sup>18</sup> President's Council on Youth Fitness, "A Community Project - Youth Fitness.," (Washington D.C.: The President's Council on Youth Fitness., 1959). 16

model citizens. Both institutions positioned fitness in this way because of a shared belief that citizens with increased physical strength contain the “sufficient coordination, strength and vitality to meet emergencies,” was fit to function and “contribute his share to the welfare of society.”<sup>19</sup> From a rhetorical perspective, the way in which this problem was constructed and the dissemination of the ambiguous term fitness seemed like a successful means of disciplining society and, to a certain degree, it was. Ambiguity, however, did not completely assist the cause of those interested in fixing the fitness problem.

Though the ambiguous nature of fitness allowed it to address different types of national priorities and values, fitness also lacked a quantifiable value that offered nothing but abstract benefits to the American public. In many cases, such as “Youth Fitness: A Community Project,” the importance of fitness is mostly assumed, while the benefits are only vaguely implied. In general, the panic caused by the Kraus-Weber tests and the subsequent use of those tests as evidence that American children were too weak promoted an agenda focused on the creation of a stronger nation. The association made between a need for fitness and the need for a stronger nation filtered its way from the President’s Council into American culture via periodicals. An article in *Cosmopolitan*, “Are we and Our Children Getting Too *Soft*?” stressed that the “nation will suffer” due to poor fitness, a point echoed in *The New York Times*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bookwalter, ed., *Fitness for Secondary School Youth*. 73

<sup>20</sup> Henderson, “Are We and Our Children Getting Too *Soft*?” 16 D Barclay, “Accenting the Physical in Fitness,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 25 1959, Bigart, “Eisenhower Talk on Fitness Asked.”, Bigart, “Youth Fitness Aid Favored by Nixon.”, Dundan, “Editorial: Fitness for What?”, Fishbein, “Health and Fitness.”, Hein, “Your Child’s Health and Fitness.”, “Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower,” *U.S. News & World Report*, August 2 1957.

As the memories of war moved further away, the imminent threat that had initially galvanized the nation into prioritizing physical and total fitness also dissipated, thus requiring additional ways in that fitness could still be shown to be necessary. Health was the logical answer. As a term that signified the need for bodily readiness for war and willingness to fight, fitness worked quite well. Fitness' ambiguity, however, did not function with the same measure of success when framed in terms of health because discussions engaging fitness from the perspective of health did not adequately convey the material consequences of being unfit. The next section describes the way in which the ambiguity of fitness conflicted with attempts to maintain it as a public priority.

### Health in Fitness

In the 1950s, health had been discussed as an important outcome of fitness, but improving health had not been stressed as the primary goal of the President's Council. As time passed, however, the relationship between fitness and health grew more important. At the 1957 Conference for Physicians and Schools, Shane MacCarthy, director of the President's Council for Physical Fitness, asked the assistance of the medical community in documenting the importance that physical fitness played in health:

It is necessary indeed that youth fitness be programmed, not on opinions but on facts, based on data obtained in a scientific manner. Hence the clinical, physiological research on fitness is that which must be conducted by the doctors of our nation. It's a long-range and indefinite project.<sup>21</sup>

A request of this nature is telling because it indicated a need on the part of the Council to substantiate their project with medical/scientific evidence. But why this need for evidence? Quantifiable scientific data on the benefits of fitness to

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<sup>21</sup> MacCarthy, "Symposium on Youth Fitness". 85

the body would provide legitimacy to the mission of the President's Council. This move to legitimate the fitness problem through the use of draft rejection statistics, as evidence for the existence of the fitness problem, is an example of the employment of scientific data. Both *US News & World Report* and *Cosmopolitan* claimed draft rejections as evidence for the lack of fitness, though draft rejections had little to do with muscular strength problems.<sup>22</sup> Their use as evidence signals the need to prove that fitness was important.

Though this example is drawn from a situation that relied heavily on a panic to promote fitness, it represents the vagueness of the term "fitness" and its ability to be drained of its meaning. An imperative for a stronger nation and the fear it invoked could only last for so long, and, additionally, representations of the achievement of fitness offered minimal and vague incentives. Mostly these claimed that individuals would "feel better" and "have more energy."<sup>23</sup>

In wartime, and shortly after, the fear of attack and the need for strong, able bodied men were a compelling motivation's for promoting fitness. The implication of not having fit citizens was the very real possibility that our nation would be unable to defend itself against attack; this was a powerful tool for promoting fitness. As the threat of attack dwindled, the need for strong soldiers was replaced by the need for healthy bodies. The incentives and implications for being unfit did not, however, provide the same imperative. A *Cosmopolitan* article, for example, noted backache to be one negative consequence of a lack of physical fitness and also promoted physical activity as a way of helping children

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<sup>22</sup> Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?", "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower."

<sup>23</sup> Kraus and Hirschland, "Minimum Muscular Fitness Tests in School Children.", "They Grow up So Fast," (U.S.A: Dallas-Jones Productions, 1956).

release unnecessary tension.<sup>24</sup> Literature that engaged the fitness problem from a non-military perspective frequently focused on the social and strength-related elements of physical fitness, while paying less attention to the value and importance of health fitness.<sup>25</sup>

A film produced by the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER) titled *They Grow Up So Fast*, for example, depicted the negative effects of poor physical education as low motivation, a poor self-image, and an inability to work with others. With the introduction of a proper physical education program, the film's dejected star, Jimmy, learns poise, social interaction, and motivation.<sup>26</sup> Jimmy does not, however, learn the importance of physical education and activity to health. Another film, *Exercise and Health*, made the similar point that physical activity relieves tensions and makes individuals less susceptible to infection.<sup>27</sup> The statements claiming that fitness would improve poise, provide individuals with more energy, and make them less susceptible to illness are both vague and uninspiring.

In *Muscular Fitness in Children*, an article in *Research Quarterly* (where the results of the Kraus-Weber tests appeared), Weber and Hirschland attach the importance of physical fitness and education to *posture*, a specification that does not appear in subsequent work that cites the tests as evidence for a need for

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<sup>24</sup> Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?"

<sup>25</sup> Bigart, "Eisenhower Talk on Fitness Asked.", Bigart, "Youth Fitness Aid Favored by Nixon.", Dundan, "Editorial: Fitness for What?", Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?", "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower.", "What's Wrong with Our Youth?"

<sup>26</sup> "They Grow up So Fast."

<sup>27</sup> Erwin Frank Beyer, Films collaboration. Corp Author: Coronet Instructional, and production, *Exercise and Health* (United States: Coronet Instructional Films, 1949), Visual Material.



improved fitness.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, in their discussion of the Kraus-Weber tests, the authors state:

The Kraus-Weber tests for muscular fitness are not designed to determine optimum levels of muscular fitness, but rather to determine whether or not the individual has sufficient strength and flexibility in the parts of the body upon which demands are made in normal daily living...Furthermore, patients whose physical level fell below these *minimum requirements* appeared to be "sick people," individuals who bore all the earmarks of constant strain, and who frequently manifested signs of emotional instability.<sup>29</sup>

Though the Kraus-Weber tests indeed did prove that children in the U.S. were drastically less physically fit than those in Europe, they do not demonstrate that improved physical fitness was a health imperative. A claim that American children were lacking in strength and flexibility, and thus in possession of a body incapable of meeting the demands of everyday living, implies only vague consequences for a seemingly serious problem. Similarly, a characterization of patients incapable of meeting the previously stated minimum requirements as sick offered no medical evidence that a lack of fitness actually caused illness. Finally, in the above quotation and later in their conclusion, Hirschland and Kraus characterized increased exercise (an activity that leads to fitness) as a means of staving off nervous tension, a hypothesis that they have the "impression" "may" be accurate.<sup>30</sup> This absence of certainty fails to demonstrate

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<sup>28</sup> Bigart, "Eisenhower Talk on Fitness Asked.", Bigart, "Youth Fitness Aid Favored by Nixon.", Bookwalter, ed., *Fitness for Secondary School Youth*, Dundan, "Editorial: Fitness for What?", Hein, "Your Child's Health and Fitness.", Henderson, "Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?", "Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations", Kraus Hans M.D. and Ruth P. Hirschland, "Is American Youth Physically Fit? The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower.", McCarthy, "Leisure and Fitness", Homer C. Wadsworth, "The Aims and Objectives of the Youth Fitness Movement" (paper presented at the National Conference on Physicians and Schools, Highland Park, IL, 1959).

<sup>29</sup> Kraus and Hirschland, "Minimum Muscular Fitness Tests in School Children." 178 and 182

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 187

that the results of the Kraus-Weber tests proved physical fitness to be a physiological/biological necessity. That is, the tests' vague justification for the necessity of fitness frames it as an ideal whose material consequences are unclear and unnecessary.

Physical fitness as beneficial to circulation was a more developed approach to medicalizing the importance of health fitness. From a health standpoint, the evidence that fitness improved muscle capacity and increased blood circulation illustrated specific physiologic phenomena that could be improved through exercise. Unfortunately, this approach negates its own persuasive force by describing fitness as increased efficiency and endurance. This is evidenced within the AAHPER publication *Health in Schools*, in a section detailing the "Health Aspects" of physical education:

Physical activity stimulates the circulation of blood, increases the appetite, and improves the functional capacity of muscles including the heart....From the health point of view the physiological effects of exercise are an increase in functional efficiency and organic power. In other words, the body becomes more efficient in performing physical activity and withstanding strain and exertion.<sup>31</sup>

Though such evidence begins to create an understanding of fitness from a biological perspective, it also strays from explaining the ways in which physical activity is necessary to good health. Specifically, the indication that physical activity's value resides in its ability to improve "efficiency" and allow for greater measures of "strain and exertion" implies that fitness creates a more productive body, but does not explain the value of having this body.

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<sup>31</sup>*Health in Schools.*, (Washington D.C.: American Association of School Administrators, 1951). 183

In fact, The *Journal of the American Medical Association* made a similar statement that exercise increased the physiological efficiency of the individual.<sup>32</sup> What neither JAMA nor the AAHPER publications addressed was the value of physiological efficiency. For fitness to remain a problem, a lack of fitness must have consequences that individuals wish to avoid. As health became more of an issue in fitness, fitness could not be visible as a public problem because it was not thought of as a health threat with consequences that could potentially destroy America. Constructions of fitness seemed to always invoke health, but were never quite able to attach health to physical fitness. Those invested in solving the physical fitness problem sought a medical explanation of the value of physical fitness, having recognized that doing so would provide an unambiguous clarification of the value of fitness.

### A Necessary Evil

The articulation of fitness to the physical setbacks of American teenagers and educational and political agendas was, in part, made possible due to the multiple meanings and values assigned to the ambiguous term “fitness.” In section one, *The Ambiguous Value of Fitness*, I specifically discuss how the definition of fitness was used to refer to both muscular strength and one’s “fit” as a citizen. My second section, *The Ambiguity of Health in Fitness*, considered how health was an important issue in the fitness panic, but was never effectively used to demonstrate the importance of physical fitness. These varied meanings and values give fitness a fluid status that allowed it to be valued for different reasons in different discursive worlds. Fitness’ embodiment of different definitions in different types of discourses, however, still allowed its use to

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Darling et al., "Physical Fitness: Report of the Subcommittee of the Barch Committee on Physical Medicine," *J.A.M.A* (1948).

effectively disseminate a cohesive statement that conflated the efficient citizen with the fit body. Ambiguity, however, was not a quality that allowed for fitness to be either an intelligible threat or a rewarding bodily state. In order to meet the demands of the federal government and education, medical science needed to research why physical fitness was beneficial to health.<sup>33</sup> The identification of physical fitness as a practice capable of preventing obesity positioned fitness as a value that will eventually allow for its articulation with medicine and would consequently allow for the medical interests in maintaining a healthy body and the political interests in maintaining a fit body to coincide.

During the 1940s and '50s, weight loss, or reducing as it was called then, was seen as a necessary health value, but it had not yet been fully articulated to physical fitness. Perhaps one of the most important ways in which weight loss grew visible as a problem was not through medical, educational, or federal discourses, but through insurance.<sup>34</sup> In 1952 the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) released the results of a thirty-year study that found obese individuals to be at greater risk for heart attack than those of normal weight.<sup>35</sup> This study was meant to expand upon and perfect a previous study conducted between 1909 and 1912 that concluded that "the mortality of overweights was excessive" and "that to some degree overweights had been treated generously

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<sup>33</sup> Bauer, "Past, Present and Future in Fitness".

<sup>34</sup> MetLife's involvement in framing obesity, illustrates the involvement of political-economic interests in obesity's emergence as a public problem. This is an important facet within the fitness/obesity problem not covered in my dissertation because it did not fit within the scope of my project. The MetLife study, however, demonstrates the involvement of other institutions in contributing to current notions of the slim/fit body as an ideal.

<sup>35</sup> Louis I. Dublin and Herbert H. Marks, "Mortality among Insured Overweights in Recent Years" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Life Insurance Medical Directors of America, New York, NY., October 11-12 1952).

insurance-wise.”<sup>36</sup> Though quite subtle in its language, the report alluded to the importance of identifying obese individuals as increased health risks. This, in turn, was to serve as a means of lowering life insurance premiums and lessening insurance payouts: “our detailed results will be useful in reappraising our practices with regard to rating of overweights.”<sup>37</sup> The economic interests of insurance companies, such as Metropolitan Life inquiry promoted obesity and provided the evidence necessary for obesity to emerge as a public health problem. Despite current preconceptions that obesity was a medical problem, MetLife’s involvement demonstrates how economic interests assisted in making medical problems intelligible as such. After announcing his company’s support of “public health propaganda for weight control,”<sup>38</sup> MetLife’s second Vice-President, and the author of the above report, circulated the information using *Today’s Health*, a publication of the American Medical Association.

*Today’s Health* was specifically used to secure the public’s cooperation in ending public health problems<sup>39</sup> and, through Dublin, identified the necessity of weight loss to the American public:

Overweight is America’s number one public health problem. It affects more people than any other impairment or disease. No group in the community is immune to it. Overweight handicaps men as well as women; children as well as adults. Altogether, about 25 million people in our country are overweight to some degree and at least five million adults are seriously obese.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Medico-Actuarial Mortality Investigation: Volume 2, Influence of Build on Mortality among Men," (New York: The Association of Life Insurance Medical Directors and the Actuarial Society of America, 1913). 2

<sup>37</sup> Dublin and Marks, "Mortality among Insured Overweights in Recent Years".

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>39</sup> "Plain Facts About Health and Disease," *Hygeia* 1, no. 1 (1923).

<sup>40</sup> L.I Dublin, "Overweight, America's No 1 Health Problem," *Today’s Health* 30 (1952). 18

The dangers associated with obesity were also echoed by articles in *The American Journal of Nursing*, *JAMA*, *The American Journal of Public Health*, and *RN*.<sup>41</sup> What's more, obesity and weight reduction had long been a primary objective of the American Heart Association.<sup>42</sup> Despite the presence these concerns, no mention of obesity or weight loss is made in the proceedings to the President's Council of Physical Fitness. The "problem" identified by the Council was that scientific and technological advances prevented youth from engaging in physical activity and that "with more leisure time available to youth, profitable methods must be adopted as a pattern of current life to achieve physical fitness, which is an integral part of total health."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, *Fitness for Secondary School Youth*, a publication of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), maintained a focus on developing "total fitness" in students. Though it does mention the specific importance of cardiovascular and respiratory fitness, two conditions negatively impacted by obesity, increased physical activity is not discussed in conjunction with cardiovascular health. Given the lack of concerns expressed by physicians regarding obesity, the absence of obesity as a top-priority for both the AAHPER and the Council makes more sense. In short, obesity had not yet been articulated to physical fitness.

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<sup>41</sup> R. H. Barnes, "Weight Control; a Practical Office Approach," *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 166, no. 8 (1958), L. Breslow, "Public Health Aspects of Weight Control," *American Journal of Public Health* 42 (1952), S.H. Carleton, "Classes for Overweight Cardiacs," *RN* 18 (1955), J Mayer, "Obesity: Cause and Treatment," *American Journal of Nursing* 59 (1959), M. Plotz, "Modern Management of Obesity; the Social Diet," *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 170, no. 13 (1959), S. L. Simpson, "Obesity," *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 158, no. 5 (1955), G. L. Thorpe, "Treating Overweight Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 165, no. 11 (1957).

<sup>42</sup> Darling et al., "Physical Fitness: Report of the Subcommittee of the Barch Committee on Physical Medicine."

<sup>43</sup>"Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations". 5

Equally striking is the minimal discussion of increased physical activity as a means of ending obesity. Though in 1959 exercise was identified in medical publications as a potential means of weight reduction – “exercise on the treadmill also cut down considerably rate of weight gain of mice with a traumatic or hereditary tendency to obesity”<sup>44</sup> – dieting was often touted as the standard practice for those interested in losing weight. In *Today's Health*, the AMA's publication for communicating with the general public, exercise was regarded as a means of weight loss, but was subsequently described as impractical: “everybody agrees that physical exercise can cause weight loss, but how much?”<sup>45</sup> Through its subscriptions, which reached at least 200,000, *Today's Health* consistently argued the dangers of obesity/overweight and positioned dieting as the most practical cure: “the cause of overweight is not obscure. It is due to overeating and nothing else. Since overeating is a matter of habit, the cure for obesity is not easy, but it is simple. The obese person must adjust his eating habits, eat less.”<sup>46</sup> Similar sentiments are echoed in numerous popular periodicals and advertisements. Dieting was the preferred way of losing weight, and, more importantly, exercise was only beginning to be seen as a way of controlling weight.<sup>47</sup> Given an orientation that locates the cause of obesity with overeating above, and the fledgling research on exercise and obesity, the value of

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<sup>44</sup> Mayer, "Obesity: Cause and Treatment." 1734

<sup>45</sup> M. Millman, "Exercise and Reducing," *Today's Health* 29 (1951). 14

<sup>46</sup> F.B. Ramsey, "Overweight," *Ibid.* 31 (1953). 13

<sup>47</sup> *Today's Health* continuously echoes the sentiments in both preceding and proceeding publications: Victoria Hathaway, "Overweight? Don't Blame Your Glands!" *Ibid.*, June, Millman, "Exercise and Reducing.", M. Millman, "How Safe Are Reducing Diets?" *Today's Health*, October 1953, M. Millman, "Why We Overeat," *Today's Health*, August 1950, M. Millman, "Weight, Heart and Blood Pressure," *Today's Health* 30 (1952). H. Schreier, "Obesity, a Health Hazard," *Hygeia* 24 (1946).

physical fitness for weight management could not yet be a publicly intelligible problem.

Medical and scientific research problematizing obesity circulated at the same time as educational research advocating the importance of physical fitness through exercise, but because of minimal research that attended to both physical fitness and obesity, they circulated as different problems with different priorities. The scientific developments and experiments that ultimately demonstrated that increased exercise assisted in weight loss and prevented arteriosclerosis laid the groundwork for the articulation between the two public problems. We need only look at current discourses that position obesity as a public problem to recognize this connection. Numerous discourses from a multitude of institutions identify the need for increased physical activity – not dieting alone - as a necessary step in maintaining a healthy body and achieving weight loss.<sup>48</sup>

The way in which increased fitness is currently understood as a method for treating obesity illustrates the current connection between the two conditions. In the 1950s, however, fitness and obesity had coexisted but not been associated

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<sup>48</sup> Marian Burros, "New Approach to Childhood Obesity Is Urged," *The New York Times*, October 1 2004, Center for Disease Control, *Overweight and Obesity* [Webpage] (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2004 [cited April 11 2005]); available from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>, "Fat Like Me: How to Win the Weight War," in *Special Report* (U.S.A: ABC News, 2003), Office of the Surgeon General, "Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," (Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), Craig Lambert, "The Way We Eat Now," *Harvard Magazine*, May/June 2004, Cathy Newman, "Why Are We So Fat?" *National Geographic*, August 2004 2004, President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, *Exercise and Weight Control* [Web Page] (The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2005 [cited April 15 2005]); available from <http://www.fitness.gov/exerciseweight.htm>, Committee on Prevention of Obesity in Children and Youth, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*, ed. Jeffrey P. Koplan, T. Liverman, and Vivica L. Kraak (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2004). "America's Obesity Crisis. (Cover Story)," *Time* 163, no. 23 (2004), "Exercise: What a Little Can Do," *Time* 162, no. 12 (2003), "Get Moving! (Cover Story)," *Time* 165, no. 23 (2005), "How We Grew So Big. (Cover Story)," *Time* 163, no. 23 (2004), "Junk Food Nation. (Cover Story)," *Nation* 281, no. 6 (2005), "Not Too Rich or Too Thin," *Time* 163, no. 23 (2004), "The Walking Cure," *Time* 163, no. 23 (2004).



to one another. To be clear, I am not claiming that the current obesity epidemic occurred because of medical developments that identified physical fitness as a way of losing weight. What I am claiming is that the highly visible public problem of physical fitness, a problem that was positioned as such through educational and federal discourses, and obesity, a health problem identified through medical and actuarial discourses, had existed in two relatively separate discursive worlds that were not yet linked through a structure of signification. Based on how obesity is described as a problem and how solutions to obesity are currently characterized, the separation between these sets of discourses is no longer in effect. Thus, the visibility of physical fitness as a form of weight loss, a development only just beginning in the late 1950s, laid the groundwork for these differing sets of discourses to eventually become articulated through a common cause, the crusade to end obesity.<sup>49</sup>

The realization that increased fitness prevented obesity and assisted in weight loss provided a quantifiable and concrete demonstration of the value of physical fitness.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, because research eventually illustrated that physical fitness was a health necessity, the medical community's need to support good health initiatives coincided with the mission of the fitness project. Though not occurring directly in the 1950s, the priority to increase physical fitness is mutated into the obesity epidemic. This is not to say that current national concerns for obesity stem from a need to produce a stronger citizenry, but that

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<sup>49</sup> My logic for conceiving of the fitness and obesity in these ways is derived from the notion of articulation that considers meaning to be latent not within texts, institutions, and practices, but within their interactions. See Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), Stuart Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986).

<sup>50</sup> Barclay, "Accenting the Physical in Fitness." 70

the President's Council on Youth Fitness' identification of fitness as a national priority rendered the fit body intelligible as a national value.

At the same time, medical and insurance research had found obesity to be a serious public health issue and, due to pressure from the President's Council, also had begun to do research on the physiological benefits of increased exercise and fitness. Based on current health literature, we can see that exercise as a means of weight loss and health improvement is now quite common.<sup>51</sup> The current presence of an articulation between medical health and physical fitness illustrates that the two problems that had previously existed separately, have currently merged.<sup>52</sup>

The obese individual, unlike the unfit individual, embodies the problem from which they suffer. They are an easily identifiable visual marker of what unfitness looks like. More important, obesity's emergence as a highly visible problem of epidemic proportions also occurred due to the scientifically proven evidence that obese individuals faced serious health consequences. Prior to physical fitness' articulation with obesity, the consequences of a lack of physical fitness were abstract losses, such as a loss of energy or the likelihood that one might be so unfortunate as to not be conscripted into the armed forces. The connection between fitness and weight loss illustrated that the consequences for not exercising and weight gain were much more dire. Obesity had serious health consequences that provided both the medical discipline its access into improving

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<sup>51</sup> Greg Critser, *Fat Land: How Americans Became the Fattest People in the World* (Houghton Mifflin, 2003), "Fat Like Me: How to Win the Weight War.", Lambert, "The Way We Eat Now.", Newman, "Why Are We So Fat?", Janet Reitman, "Fat Boy': Supersizing the American Teenager.," *Rolling Stone* 935 (2003), Morgan Spurlock, "Super Size Me," (U.S.A: Roadside Attractions, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Such a concern can be noted at the Council's website. See *President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports*, ([http://www.fitness.gov/resources\\_factsheet.htm](http://www.fitness.gov/resources_factsheet.htm): Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

the physiological health of the population, while also maintaining a value that fell deeply in line with the citizenship-cultivation and total fitness priorities of the federal government and the AAHPER. The roots of the obesity epidemic occurred at the articulation of two separate public problems: the fitness problem and the obesity problem. Currently, obesity has exploded into a public problem that cuts through a multitude of different institutional discourses and has taken on a discursive presence that exceeds its visibility in medical, federal, educational and cultural fields.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As a whole, this dissertation has argued that the development of physical education as a discipline, the physical fitness panic of the 1950s, and the circulation of the term fitness in the 1950s played significant roles in the discursive/rhetorical regulation and construction of the American citizen via a focus on childhood and the emergence of obesity as a public problem. In order to demonstrate how rhetorical practices cannot only function as an apparatus for disciplining the practices of citizens, but can also create opportunities for re-imagining the body and its value in society, it has examined several interrelated themes: physical education, the public problem, rhetoric, ambiguity, and history. In chapter two, these themes were addressed through an historicization of physical education as it changed in response to World War I and the Great Depression. Chapter three explored these themes in relation to how McCarthyism and increased problems with juvenile delinquency in the 1950s contributed specifically to the emergence of the President's Council on Youth Fitness. Finally, chapter four engaged these themes by examining how the circulation of the physical fitness problem was made possible by the ambiguous nature of the term fitness.

#### Rhetorical Practices and Public Problems

The central theme studied in this project was the ways in which rhetorical practices constituted and framed public problems. Because they operate as sites where tensions between problematic notions of the present and visions of an ideal future are negotiated, public problems are unique and rich sites for rhetorical inquiry. As I mentioned in my introduction, the study of tension has long been a theme in rhetorical studies. Though not necessarily concerned with public problems, I.A. Richards identified the importance of studying rhetoric in order to

make sense of “misunderstandings and its remedies”<sup>1</sup> implied that studying how to manage the tension between what one intends to mean and how that meaning is actually interpreted. More contemporary scholarship has shifted away from considering the tension between a statement and its interpretation to questioning how controversies, or tensions between groups, function as sites of rhetorical invention and resistance.<sup>2</sup> By thinking about the discursive creation of tension as an opportunity through which the practices of individuals are managed, the study of public problems continues along this trajectory.

By approaching public problems as moments of tensions that were, in part, made possible through rhetorical practices, I was able to make use of Foucault’s interest in population regulation and remain committed to my own interests in the study of rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> In order to gain a full understanding of the fitness problem as it was positioned through rhetorical practices, each chapter of my dissertation approached fitness from a slightly different angle. Chapter two traced the development of physical education as a discipline by looking specifically at how physical education, play and recreation were framed as important and necessary practices in response to turn-of-the-century slums, World War I, and the Great Depression. Chapters three and four focused on physical fitness’ problematic nature in the 1950s. Specifically, chapter three addressed how, given the context, physical fitness emerged as a problem that was afforded such public significance, while chapter four examined how the term fitness itself played a role in assisting fitness’ problematic status.

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<sup>1</sup> I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).  
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<sup>2</sup> See my short literature of rhetoric and controversy in Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> I do not necessarily mean to say that Foucault is not attentive to how rhetorical practices work, but that his focus is broader.

Aside from analyzing the fitness problem, chapters two and three also demonstrated the consequences that resulted from the emergence of the fitness problem. Chapter three explored the ways in which rhetorical practices worked in conjunction with the 1950s cold war climate, to allow for the emergence of physical fitness as a public problem. This illustrated how the visibility of other youth related public problems - juvenile delinquency and communism - allowed for a discourse of increased physical fitness to operate as a way of managing behaviors of youth deviance in general. Chapter four, however, showed that despite their function as potential tools for population management, public problems were also limited based on the specific ways in which they were represented. The emphasis on fitness, for example, made the possibilities of quantifying it more difficult, thus making its visibility as a problem more unclear. Because the implications of public problems on the disciplining of individuals is a phenomena that has already been demonstrated by other scholars,<sup>4</sup> I grew more interested in thinking about how the study of public problems could be used by rhetoricians as a step in actually facilitating human agency. For me, the answer to this question involves the tension created by public problems.

In addition to acting as a line of penetration into public practices, the tension that constitutes public problems introduces uncertainty into public discourse. In fact, it is this level of uncertainty (or ambiguity) that assisted in making federal directives oriented on fitness seem reasonable. Though public problems have often been used as a means of further managing public practices, their function exceeds these limitations. Indeed, public problems and the moments of ambiguity that they introduce are instances where some type of material change might ensue, they

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<sup>4</sup> Greene, "Y Movies: Film and the Modernization of Pastoral Power." King, "Doing Good by Running Well: Breast Cancer, the Race for the Cure, and New Technologies of Ethical Citizenship."

signify the potential for new opportunities. But how does the rhetorician make use of this knowledge? The section that follows answers this question in relation to the interrelated topics of ambiguity and genealogy.

### Genealogy and Ambiguity

#### Genealogy

In addition to examining public problems an important component of my dissertation involved historical research. My interests, however, were not in writing a history of physical fitness, but in thinking about the function of historical documents. After learning about genealogy and articulation, I opted to use these approaches to history because they both acknowledge that meaning and truth are produced through the articulation of different discourses, individuals, or events at different times. Thinking about history in this way was important to me because it does not assume a valid version of history, but recognizes that history is a product of power relations and contexts.

We can consider the practice of doing a genealogy to be much like someone picking apart the threads in an article of clothing. While initially the clothing appears seamless, upon closer inspection we notice that what at once appeared to be singular is actually composed of hundreds of tiny threads. Genealogy uses historical research to make visible the hundreds of interconnecting threads that make "Truth" possible. Central to an understanding of genealogy, then, is an inherent skepticism in all "Truths":

If the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms...What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable

identity of their origin, it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault's insight is useful in making sense of how the lack of jobs created by the Great Depression, for example, necessitated the need for theorizing and encouraging leisure activities, a topic that had been of less importance prior to the depression. Foucault would argue that the priorities and problems emphasized as a result of the Great Depression functioned as a discontinuity, a rupture in PE's disciplinary development. This discontinuity was made invisible because the new focus on leisure and physical activities were assumed to be public priorities and this assumption was validated institutionally by agencies such as the WPA. Similar uncertainties were also identified in chapter four's argument that the obesity public problem would not be visible as such were it not for the political pressures from the President's Council on Youth Fitness and also in chapter three's examination of the President's Council's emergence as it related to communist fears.

If genealogy disrupts foundations by demonstrating that there is nothing inherently natural in Truth; if it demonstrates that Truths are assembled that "truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history."<sup>6</sup> What is the value in knowing this? What is valuable in knowing about the existence of contingency? Learning the unstable past of physical education is valuable because it demonstrates that the history of physical education was not a progression, but has radically shifted priorities away from the individual over time. This shows that a gap between past understandings of PE and past notions of fitness existed within the discipline itself, an insight that then implies the uncertain and arbitrary way in which some priorities were focused on while others were not. It shows that history

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." 78-79

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 79



is uncertain and that it will develop ambiguously not logically. The acquisition of this knowledge is an opportunity, a point of departure for demonstrating how the body can be assigned new forms of value.

### Ambiguity

Such a question helps us to make evident the mutual commitment to ambiguity shared between Simone de Beauvoir and Foucault. Recall that Beauvoir argues that ambiguity is essential to individual growth. Specifically, she notes that our existence as humans can be characterized by three ideas: lack, an ideal, and movement. She writes:

My contemplation is an excruciation only because it is also a joy...but I take delight in this very effort toward an impossible possession. I experience it as a triumph, not as a defeat. This means that man, in his vain attempt to be God, makes himself exist as man, and if he is satisfied with this existence, he coincides exactly with himself.<sup>7</sup>

Our existence emerges from a desire, an ideal understanding of what we wish to be, the simultaneous lack we experience from our ever-present desire to be something more than we are and a perpetual movement toward whatever it is that we wish to be. For Beauvoir our means of existence is both ambiguous – because if being is always in motion we will never know quite what being is – and paradoxical, because the only way in which we can exist is by trying to be that which eludes us. The constraints of our material situations, then, can help us grow as individuals:

Yet, it is because there are real dangers, real failures and real earthly damnation that words like victory, wisdom, or joy have meaning. Nothing is decided in advance, and it is because man has something to lose that he can also win.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. 12

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 34

The constraints that cause pain, in other words, also set the conditions through which pleasure can be experienced. Failures provide a reason to continue trying and constraints provide individuals with pleasure and a renewed desire to accomplish. Foucaultian genealogy (as an intervention meant to disrupt how we traditionally conceive of history) is a first step in the preservation of ambiguity because it identifies moments where opportunities for individual growth have been eliminated. Because they function disruptively, sites of contingency (public problems for my dissertation in particular) can initially facilitate ambiguity.

I examined manifestations of such contingencies differently in each chapter. In chapter two, I questioned the significance of instances in the disciplinary development of physical education where the importance of physical fitness as an individual practice was valued as equally significant to the importance of physical fitness to one's standing in a community. By doing so, I argued that such moments of contingency demonstrate alternatives for considering different ways of thinking about physical activity, the body and its value. Most importantly, because these alternatives are not separate from the discipline of physical education, but entirely connected to its history, they function as evidence of what PE had been in the past and of what it could be again in the future. The specific site that I identified in chapter two that illustrates such a remainder is the theorization of play theory by physical fitness pioneer and founder of the playground movement, Luther Halsey Gulick. While Gulick did delve into the possibilities for using play instruction as a means of managing physical activity and, thus, viewed play education as a way of shaping behavior/morality, he also found play to be significant for reasons beyond the educational. Indeed, he viewed the activity of play to be a metaphor for life:

That is what life is, at its highest and best - a playing of the game, a pursuing of the ideal under the rules and limiting conditions necessary for this pursuit. The pursuit is an end in itself...Choice is not to be regarded as existing for the sake of any definite content of pleasure, nor for the end to be attained.

We want something and get it, and at once it is behind us. So long as we have it not, we long for it, and our hearts go after it. We use every feeling of earnestness and passion for its attainment, and then when we get it, it is gone from our desire and we strive for some other thing. The essence of choice is not in the end, but in the choosing. In the doing is the result. Happiness is not in the attainment, but in the attaining. "Life is in the quest."<sup>9</sup>

For Gulick the importance of play is not in what it ultimately achieves, play is valuable because of its existence as a process. As a process bent on the continual act of trying, rather the actual achievement of a goal, play is the material performance of the ambiguous nature of existence articulated by Beauvoir. Beauvoir believed that human existence is made possible through the individual's identification of a lack and the commitment to strive toward that lack, and the inevitable possibility of its attainment. According to Beauvoir, "man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it. He rejoins himself only to the extent that he agrees to remain at a distance from himself."<sup>10</sup> Gulick's conception of play's value, as a process, coincides with such a viewpoint.

While the function of ambiguity in chapter two was located in the remainder of knowledge left behind, chapter four considered the ways in which the meaning of fitness changed, thus approaching the creation of ambiguity from a definitional perspective. In this instance, we can see the value of strategically ambiguous language in opening up a space for change. The deployment of the term "fitness," while partially responsible for the growth of the fitness problem, was too ambiguous to remain visible as a public problem. Though the mutation of fitness into the obesity epidemic has decidedly negative consequences, the ambiguity within the definition of fitness, illustrates the possibilities for new developments and change.

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<sup>9</sup> Gulick, *A Philosophy of Play*. 274-276.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 13

Gulick's early theorization of play as an ambiguous process could have transgressive potential if it were read as a means of performing Michel Foucault's *Aesthetics of Existence*, the practice of viewing one's life as a work of art.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. As we saw in chapter two, this view of physical education shifted away from educating the individual to take pleasure in the practice of physical activity, to views of physical activity less focused on allowing practices of play to be unstructured and encouraging of individual autonomy. Chapter three explored the public problem of physical fitness and the ways in which rhetorical practices and the historical context limited alternative conceptions of the body's value.<sup>12</sup>

### The Need for Ambiguity

As I researched the value of fitness in the fifties and earlier, a theme that grew out of the federal and educational texts that consistently described the value of fitness and physical education was to improve efficiency. Oftentimes, these texts would specifically refer to the importance of a strong, physically efficient body (especially during and after times of war) but also used fitness as a descriptor that involved more than physical capacity. Total fitness, for example, referenced an ideal state of being that involved a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual capacity to

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<sup>11</sup> One potential problem with looking at Foucault's aesthetic of existence and considering Gulick's thoughts on play is that it would be quite easy to simply look at weight loss as that lack that one wishes to perpetually dedicate one's practices of self-stylization to. This is what draws me to de Beauvoir's conception of an ethics of ambiguity. The problem with the obesity epidemic is that its status as a problem is too widespread, it prevents alternative ways of thinking about the body. It's not that I think that thinking about health is unimportant, but I do think that people need to have alternative ways of thinking about the body outside of health. AMBIGUITY SETS THE STAGE FOR ACTION

<sup>12</sup> Though my discussions of Foucault and Beauvoir might seem to ignore the involvement of rhetorical practices in the construction of ambiguity, this is not the case. I want to emphasize that I am viewing the texts themselves as rhetorical; ambiguity and genealogy provide vocabularies that I can use to talk about the implications of these rhetorical texts.

be a good citizen. Though the fitness panic was not entirely successful in creating a subservient populace of heavily-muscled titans, the way in which physical fitness was identified as a solution to managing a deviant populace remained problematic. The reason for this is that it attached a value to the fit body and made the possibility for more ambiguous interpretations of that body less possible. As we saw in chapter three, the public problems of physical fitness, juvenile delinquency, and McCarthyism were articulated to one another in the 1950s by the President's Council on Youth Fitness.

The ways that juvenile delinquency and physically inactive children in the 1950s were framed as problems that could be dealt with by disciplining the body demonstrates how rhetorical practices (statements made by the President's Council, proceedings from federal hearings on juvenile delinquency, articles in popular periodicals) that position the attainment of physical fitness as a necessary way of being a good citizen, limited the possibilities for more ambiguous interpretations of the value of fitness. Alternatively, chapter four's focus on how the deployment of fitness was facilitated by the ambiguous nature of the term "fitness" demonstrates that despite their distribution, problems could still be transformed through language. Despite the constraints it placed on opportunities for visualizing the body, the often ambiguous descriptions of fitness allowed flexibility in interpretation and thus, allowed, the existence of individuals to also remain ambiguous. Unfortunately, the extreme visibility of the obesity problem has become so widespread that it now functions oppressively. Though Beauvoir describes oppression as a material condition that occurs when new potentials for viewing lack within one's own life grow impossible, the pervasiveness of current discourses describing obesity indicates a situation that I would describe as "discursive

constraint.”<sup>13</sup> By this I mean to say rhetorical practices currently positioning obesity as a problematic condition, that the possibilities for considering one’s body outside the framework of weight are severely limited. Below I briefly describe the problem of the obese child and the implications for the ways in which it has been framed.

### Obese Children

The institution of healthier lunch programs as a result of the current controversy over the serving of junk food in school, the recently implemented mandatory weighing of children in Arkansas, and *The Learning Channel’s* newest show about parents overfeeding their children, “Honey We’re Killing the Kids,” illustrate the way in which the figure of the obese child functions as an apparatus capable of regulating the institution of education. The obesity epidemic, and the concerns it has raised for the child, have engendered the production of new forms of education and new practices through which students will incorporate healthful living into their routines in an attempt to help end the problem of obesity. The *Houston Press* captures how such sentiments are implemented via a new directive of the Texas Education Agency: “Texas public schools need to make sure that no ‘foods of minimal nutritional value’ [will] be available in any areas students sit down to eat.”<sup>14</sup> The Texas Education Agency’s directive institutionally obligates school systems as responsible for the physical health of their students.

When articulated to the already publicly visible obesity problem, the child subject comes to embody societal concerns for the consequences of being obese. This

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<sup>13</sup> For an explanation of the negative consequences of injurious speech and also the ways in which discourse can facilitate agency. See: Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Downing, "The Big Deal: Vending Machines Are Leaving Texas School Cafeterias. But the Mother Lode of 'Minimal Nutritional Value' Has Hardly Gone Away.," *Houston Press*, June 6 2002.H5

embodiment is continuously implied through national solutions directed at combating obesity when it is conceived as an epidemic. An article of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) scientifically legitimates this characterization by pointing toward the consequences of an unhealthy childhood:

Like adolescent smoking, teen pregnancy, and youth violence, childhood overweight is prevalent because it arises from deeply rooted behaviors and from social practices that are hardly confined to children. Given the profound consequences of childhood inactivity, poor nutrition, and overweight throughout the lifespan, urgency is warranted in responding to this epidemic.<sup>15</sup>

As bodies that will eventually become unhealthy adults, obese children demand “urgency” and immediate attention. The concern for children as idealized agents of the nation’s future naturalizes a conceptualization of children as a signifier for America’s concerns with obesity. They are the means through which obesity can be solved and, as such, signify societal fears about the obesity epidemic and ideals for a healthier population.

Practices aimed at solving the obesity problem in the United States, as proposed by the National Academies’ Institute of Medicine and numerous health officials, stress the importance of increasing health education and regulating food industry advertisements directed at children. Notably, however, these suggested measures lack any current regulation of the food industry. The emphasis on child management in the family and the cultivation of healthy eating and exercise habits in school, ultimately places the responsibility for regulating obesity in the hands of individual citizens within the U.S.. Foucault’s discussion of visibility clearly explains the consequences of such a positioning:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes

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<sup>15</sup> Richard S. Pollack MD and Harold Strauss A. PhD, "Epidemic Increase in Childhood Overweight, 1986-1998," *Journal of American Medicine* 286, no. 22 (2001). 2845

them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.<sup>16</sup>

The nature of the relationship between parents/educational institutions and children – one composed of an underlying assumption that parents and educators are always already responsible for children – places both within seemingly inescapable positions of blame. Framing the solution to obesity at the level of the family and schools is particularly significant because it leaves no room for critiques that implicate economically institutionalized inequities. It does not recognize the possibility that individuals from working class families, for example, are predisposed to being overweight because their economic position makes healthier lifestyles less accessible. Suggestions tend to focus on self-management and self-control, rather than societal solutions. This is evident in the weight loss suggestion offered by David Zinczenko, editor of *Men's Health* magazine:

the best thing to do is to look at being overweight as something that is an obstacle that is keeping you from getting the most out of your life. See it as something that needs to be managed and overcome, it's the enemy.<sup>17</sup>

His suggestion assumes that obesity can somehow be ended through a series of individual wars waged on one's body without acknowledging that all individuals do not have equal access to the means necessary for living a healthier life.

By failing to mention class-based obstacles, these discourses assume the middle class family as a norm, a family where concerned parents actually have time in the evening to prepare a healthy meal. The problem with doing so, as noted by Wendy Brown, is that it “not only preserves capitalism from critique, but sustains

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<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. 202-203

<sup>17</sup> "Fat Like Me: How to Win the Weight War."



the invisibility and inarticulateness of class."<sup>18</sup> Visualizing the problem in this manner elides institutional critiques, leaving no space for it to be engaged on the civic level as a problem of concern to the United States public as citizens, rather than as families. When conceived as a publicly visible problem pertaining to civic rights and civil inequalities, the elimination of obesity moves beyond simply training individuals and moves to an acknowledgement of a condition overdetermined (structured into the rule/value systems by the society in which we live).

### Rhetorical Ambiguity

The way in which obesity has currently been constructed, as a problem in public discourses, forecloses the possibility for ambiguous interpretations of the body and practices of bodily care. The need to eliminate obesity is a prevalent theme in medical, political, popular, and legal discourses. Public representations of obesity as an epidemic and as a state that negatively affects an individual's quality of life, in particular, have become assumptions implicit as to why weight loss and exercise are seen as valuable activities. A shift away from more ambiguous interpretations of the body and its value is embodied by the term obesity itself. Obesity is a quantifiable state-of-body that is determined by comparing one's height, weight and body type to a body mass index (BMI) chart. Those that are unlucky enough to find their weight in the "obese" section immediately know that they are at risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and other health problems. This is how we think of obesity and it is a major point of reference in how we think of the body. Our obsession with losing weight or attaining the perfect body have

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<sup>18</sup> Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments: Late Modern Oppositional Political Formations," in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York and London: Routledge, 1995). 208

overdetermined a perspective on the body that fails to account for the importance of taking pleasure in, or out, of one's body.

The severity of obesity's current status as a problem limits how individuals are capable of relating to their bodies, thus constraining the potential for ambiguity and existence itself. If the ways in which individuals are capable of viewing their bodies is limited to a fit/unfit, or fat/not fat dichotomy, the opportunities for thinking about the body outside of these boundaries are severely minimized. From the perspective forwarded by Beauvoir, this is a problem because there would be little discussion made in medical, federal, and popular discourses that encourage thinking about the body outside its potential to become unhealthy. Being, then, as Beauvoir would describe it, is simply maintaining itself and "living is only not dying." In moments such as these, Beauvoir finds the acceptance of constraint inadequate and calls for "revolt." Unfortunately, she does not offer a more specific method through which this situation can be disrupted.<sup>19</sup> I would posit the practice of identifying the emergence of public problems, through historical research, and the strategic intervention of *rhetorical ambiguity* as specific means of carrying out such a disruption.

The work I have done so far in my dissertation has identified that rhetorical practices positioning obesity as a public problem have become overly dominant in representing the value of the body. Through a genealogically informed historical inquiry into the past of this problem, I learned: (1) the early history of physical education was equally focused on developing the individual and the community member, (2) that the emergence of the President's Council on Youth Fitness in 1956 rendered the public problem of youth fitness visible, (3) that the use of the term fitness operated as one vehicle through which the problem was disseminated and

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<sup>19</sup> Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. 82

more importantly,(4) that the fitness public problem contributed to the emergence of obesity's visibility as a problem. Ultimately, my goal has been to use this study to consider how rhetorical practices form problems and assign particular values to the body, so that I could ultimately consider how rhetorical practices and genealogy could be used as forms of strategic intervention that, through cultivating ambiguity, would allow individuals to re-prioritize how they relate to their bodies.

The obesity problem cannot be erased from our consciousness, nor can the ways in which it has been federally, educationally, and medically defined as a problem be erased from discourse. As Judith Butler writes: "we are vulnerable in language because we are constituted within its terms,"<sup>20</sup> The labeling of obesity as such subjects individuals to the negativity associated with being obese and prevents alternative conceptions of the body's value from arising. I believe the rhetorical critic is uniquely capable of intervening in society through practices that re-frame the ways in which the body can have value. Butler and LeBesco would agree and suggest that moments of injurious speech can actually be conceived of as opportunities to address the problem and resignify its identification as problematic.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein Deem writes that minor rhetorics "use the language of the majority in such a way as to make that language stutter; they slow down, interrupt, or halt the movement of language" and goes on to claim that indecorous rhetorics, are performances that use norms of decorum as a means of leveling critique.<sup>22</sup> Butler and LeBesco's conception of injurious speech as opportunities for resignification and Deem's descriptions of minor rhetorics as valuable due to their

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<sup>20</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. 2

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Melissa Deem, "Stranger Sociability, Public Hope, and the Limits of Political Transformation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002). 447

ability to disrupt language all adhere to a notion of resistance that respects the value of ambiguity. The need for resignification and the ways in which minor rhetorics “halt the movement of language” implies that (a) resistance can occur at the discursive level and, more importantly (b) to use discourse as a form of resistance necessitates involves ambiguity. By strategically using rhetorical practices as a form of intervention that destabilizes meaning and facilitates ambiguity, the strategies adopted by LeBesco, Butler, and Deem use tactics that can assist individuals in re-learning the ambiguous potential of the body and of language. By re-framing the body in order to facilitate interpretations of its value that extend beyond the constraints of weight, we can see how the rhetorical critic, in particular, can play a role in cultural change. Rhetoricians, that is, can use ambiguity as a form of strategic intervention that can create opportunities for the individuals to re-interpret the value of their bodies.

At the end of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault expresses a similar commitment to disrupting a particular set of values and practices imposed upon the body (sexuality) by identifying the possibilities for resistance as existing within “the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point...ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.”<sup>23</sup> Part of the argument made by Foucault is that in order to undermine an oppressive regime, one cannot work within the logic of that regime, the negative consequences of sex and sexuality cannot be re-constructed if one has still attributed value to sex-desire. Foucault calls for a turn away from sex as something we desire, to the more ambiguous bodies and pleasures. Bodies and pleasures exist outside the scope of sexuality; they are undefined territories that have not been inscribed with cultural/political interests. Bodies and pleasures are

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<sup>23</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. 157

concepts whose meanings exceed the constraints of definition because they have yet to be defined. How we actually go about turning to bodies and pleasures marks Foucault's attempts at defining agency. Initially, engaging in the process of turning away from one set of norms imposed on the body seems quite difficult. How does one ignore a problem and remake one's relationship to one's body.

Ideally, the obesity problem would be undermined through an approach that opened up the possibilities of the body through language. It could be reframed in order to disrupt the visibility of obesity and encourage a new approach to conceiving of the body. This approach, heeding Beauvoir's commitments to ambiguity and to Foucault's aesthetics of existence, would not associate pleasure with the size, shape, or weight of an individual's body. Instead, language would be used strategically to resignify pleasure as an experience achieved through the body. From this ideal approach, the strategic use of language would be employed in order to reset the body's potential and value in culture. Identified as pleasurable through the ambiguous practices of play, the combination of pleasure through play would encourage individuals to value their bodies while never limiting exactly what it is that their bodies should be.

What's more, by stressing a relationship to the body that is open-ended in nature, individuals would learn to value their bodies while not being trapped within a cultural framework that forces them to conform to one particular physical standard. A move toward bodies and pleasures, then, seeks to structure a life where normal and abnormal remain in flux and a commitment to the continual maintenance of liminality is enforced. Foucault's discussion of the procedure through which an individual evaluates their bodily practices further illustrates the ways in which an emphasis on the body and pleasure can function as a means of conceiving of one's relationship to one's body:

The main question appears to be much less on the acts' conformity with a natural structure or with a positive regulation, than on what might be called the subject's 'style of activity' and on the relation he establishes between sexual activity and the other aspects of his familial, social and economic existence. The movement of analysis and the procedures of valuation do not go from the act to a domain such as sexuality or the flesh, a domain whose divine, civil, or natural laws would delineate the permitted forms; they go from the subjects as a sexual actor to the other areas of life in which he pursues activity. And it is in the relationship between these different forms of activity that the principles of evaluation of a sexual behavior are essentially, but not exclusively, situated.<sup>24</sup>

This notion of a style of activity (he calls it an aesthetic of existence later) legitimates a different form of judgment that does not operate through comparisons against a standard, but through comparisons of an individual's behaviors within other scenarios. Self-maintenance compares one's individual actions or styles of activity against one another and judges those actions based on how well one particular style of activity fits with the rest. This mode of self management adheres to a commitment to ambiguity because, through the re-assessment of one's behaviors, it allows for change and growth and, because it requires a continual assessment of one's behaviors, it does not force one's actions to conform to a singular and immovable standard. Through this adherence to the value of ambiguity, styles of activity allow individuals to conceive of their bodies as sites of expression.

What I am suggesting is that the possibilities for resistance and agency are closely tied to the maintenance/disruption of ambiguity. As an ontological state, ambiguity is the condition that allows individuals to locate problems within their own lives and strive toward actualizing some form of change. As we have seen in the cases of fitness and obesity, ambiguity can be severely minimized, leaving individuals with few possibilities for conceiving of the body's value outside the scope of institutionally constructed discourses. In order to begin thinking of the

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 1st Vintage Books ed., vol. 3, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). 35

ways in which rhetoricians could play a role in preserving and cultivating the existential state of ambiguity, I have offered rhetorical ambiguity, as a means of strategically using discourse to disrupt the ways that individuals relate to the world. I offer this with the hope that practices that make use of rhetoric ambiguously will return individuals to a more ambiguous state of existence, a state that gives them pause to reconsider their own assumptions about what counts as truth. I would personally go about enacting practices of rhetorical ambiguity by framing the body in a way that acknowledges the body's value to exist through the practices of play, rather than through weight loss and exercise. In this way, I would encourage individuals to perform an aesthetics of existence, a form of self-stylization that embodies ambiguity's ontological nature.

#### Some Final Thoughts on Being a Rhetorician

Though I had intended to remain focused on governmentality and how fitness and physical education worked as lines of penetration to aid the management of the population, I moved away from this approach. Part of the reason I did this is because I have always been preoccupied with understanding the role of the rhetorical critic in society and believe that there is room for the rhetorician to somehow make the world a better place. My problem with governmentality is that this approach is not conducive to thinking about how the rhetorical critic can play a role in social transformation. I'm specifically interested in thinking about how rhetoricians can engage the world and improve it.

Developing a way of recreating the value of the body without implying that one's body is a problem is one form of intervention for which rhetoricians are well suited. The ways in which rhetorical practices are responsible for framing the body in terms of a public problem also can be put to use in restoring a more positive approach to the body. Given the centrality of rhetorical practices in creating public

problems, they can also be put to use as a means of re-creating such problems. I specifically believe that making objects of knowledge more ambiguous would be a way that rhetoricians could facilitate agency. For Greene, rhetorical agency makes visible the value of living labor, a force which can challenge capitalism.<sup>25</sup>

To this assessment, I add that in order to function as an “instrument, object, and medium for harnessing social cooperation and coordination”<sup>26</sup> rhetorical agency must always work toward the maintenance of *rhetorical ambiguity*. *Rhetorical ambiguity* is a strategic and ethical intervention into discourse that is specifically focused on attempting to free-up language, to re-describe how we relate to objects of knowledge, like our bodies. My hope is that rhetoricians can facilitate ambiguity, create new lacks in how people see their bodies, and ultimately facilitate new ways of valuing the body.

Furthermore, rhetorical practices oriented toward the continual maintenance of *rhetorical ambiguity* should be approached as ethical gifts as opposed to political projects.<sup>27</sup> Debra Bergoffen defines the “gift” to be “situated beyond/outside the political field of exchange, debt, and accountability”<sup>28</sup> beneficial about approaching ambiguity from this perspective is that it does not put the rhetorician in the position of a moral entrepreneur. Instead, rhetorical ambiguity is a form of intervention that does not attempt to directly force its politics on anyone; it simply provides individuals with new possibilities, while not guiding them in a particular direction.

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<sup>25</sup> Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 204

<sup>27</sup> Bergoffen, "Between the Ethical and the Political: The Difference of Ambiguity."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 194



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