



From the Ancient Greek Gymnasium to The Fit Stop: A Genealogy of Fitness Discourses in the Philippines

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Abstract: This article traces the genealogy of fitness culture in the Philippines by examining how discourses of physical training have traveled, changed, and taken root over space and time. It follows these ideas from their early articulation in ancient Greece, through their reinterpretation in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, into modern forms shaped by colonial and postcolonial conditions. Rather than moving in a linear fashion, discourses on exercise and bodily cultivation were repeatedly translated, adapted, and contested as they circulated across historical periods and geographical spaces. The case of The Fit Stop, a pseudonym for a contemporary gym in the Philippines, provides a concrete illustration of this process. Its practices and promotional language reflect the local uptake of global fitness ideals, showing how long-standing discourses of health, strength, and bodily improvement are reworked within a specific social context. Read genealogically, The Fit Stop can be understood as a localized globalism, rooted in earlier traditions of physical training while shaped by local histories and conditions.

Keywords: Fitness Culture, Genealogy, Philippines, Globalization

1. Introduction

On its social media page, The Fit Stop, a gym in the Philippines referred to here by a pseudonym, shared a promotional post featuring smiling exercisers accompanied by the message: "Transform your body, elevate your life. Get stronger, healthier, and more confident with us." The language of the post links physical training not only to bodily improvement but also to health and a broader sense of personal flourishing. While such messaging is common within contemporary fitness marketing, the assumptions it rests upon are far from new. Ideas connecting exercise, appearance, and well-being can be traced across a long intellectual history, from classical writers such as Aristotle and Hippocrates, through Renaissance humanist thought, and into the modern fitness movements associated with figures like Eugen Sandow. In this sense, the promotional language of The Fit Stop draws upon discourses that have persisted, shifted, and been reworked across different historical contexts.

The growth of fitness culture in the Philippines is often understood as a relatively recent development, shaped by the global spread of gyms, wellness studios,

and commercial fitness brands (c.f. Enverga, 2016, 2025; Habig *et al.*, 2025; Ong *et al.*, 2021). This perspective tends to frame Philippine fitness practices as imported or imitative. Closer examination, however, suggests a more complex process. Rather than simply reproducing Western models, the Philippine fitness industry reflects a localized configuration of transnational discourses about exercise and the body (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018a). Making sense of this configuration requires situating contemporary fitness practices within longer histories of bodily cultivation, health, and discipline (Fabian, 2023; Guttmann, 2004; Liokaftos, 2017).

This article approaches that task through a genealogical analysis of fitness culture in the Philippines. It argues that the development of contemporary fitness practices can be understood as a form of globalized localism, in which ideas that emerged in particular historical and cultural settings travel outward and are rearticulated elsewhere (De Sousa Santos, 2006; Stazio, 2021; Yadav, 2023). The case of The Fit Stop illustrates how global discourses of fitness are taken up and made meaningful in local practice. Its organization, activities, and promotional language

reflect influences shaped by colonial encounters (Antolihao, 2015; Hubner, 2016a) and commercial fitness markets (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018a), producing hybrid forms that cannot be reduced to either straightforward importation or claims of cultural authenticity.

Tracing the movement of fitness discourses from ancient Greece, through European modernity, to the contemporary Philippine context allows for a closer examination of how global ideas about the body are both reproduced and transformed (Evrard, 2017). The discussion that follows begins by outlining the theoretical literature that informs the analysis, particularly work on discourse, context, and contestation. It then turns to the methodological approach, drawing on Foucauldian genealogy and the discourse-historical tradition to examine how articulations of physical training emerge, circulate, and change over time. The core of the paper presents a historical genealogy of fitness discourses, before returning to The Fit Stop as a contemporary site where these longer trajectories intersect. Through this structure, the article seeks to show that fitness culture in the Philippines is not marginal to global histories of the body, but offers a revealing case for understanding how such histories are localized and continually reworked.

1.1 Literature Review: Discourse, Context, and Contestation

This study draws on Foucault's genealogical approach, which is concerned less with identifying linear origins than with tracing how particular discourses emerge, shift, and acquire authority under specific historical conditions (Foucault, 1972, 1977). Rather than treating discourses as transparent reflections of reality, this perspective understands them as historically situated ways of speaking about and making sense of the world (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Genealogy is especially useful for examining physical training because practices of bodily cultivation are closely entangled with ideas about health, morality, and proper conduct, as well as with broader relations of power (Foucault, 1983). In the context of this study, a genealogical lens allows for attention to how meanings attached to exercise are produced, challenged, and reworked as they move across time and space. What follows is shaped by two closely related theoretical concerns.

A recurring theme throughout this study is the relationship between discourse and context. Articulations of physical training take shape within particular social, political, and cultural settings, yet they also contribute to shaping the conditions in which they circulate (Flowerdew, 2017). This dynamic is already visible in ancient Greece, where the valorization of physical training both reflected prevailing ideals of citizenship and played a role in defining what it meant to be a citizen (Aristotle, 2019; Duploux, 2023). In the nineteenth century, Muscular Christianity reflected Protestant anxieties about modernity while reshaping educational and religious practices (Bezzant, 2021; Luger, 2024). In the Philippines, U.S. colonial promotion of physical education reflected imperial strategies of discipline (Antolihao, 2015) but also generated new cultural meanings around modernity and health. In each case, discourse and context were mutually constitutive (Reisigl, 2017).

Second, discourses are contested, gaining and losing prominence over time. Genealogical analysis highlights that discourses are unstable, emerging, declining, and sometimes reappearing in altered forms depending on shifting configurations of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1977). Physical training was significant in classical antiquity, waned during the Middle Ages (Gleason, 2017), revived in the Renaissance (Arcangeli, 2022a, 2022b), and was massified in modernity (Guttmann, 2004). In the Philippines, fitness discourses were introduced under colonial rule (Antolihao, 2019) and expanded with the growth of the commercial fitness industry (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018a). Viewed in this manner, contestation can be understood as part of broader struggles among social groups over how bodily practices are interpreted and valued (Stengel & Nabers, 2019).

Together, these two propositions shape how the analysis proceeds. In this study, a genealogical perspective makes it difficult to treat Philippine fitness culture as an isolated or marginal case, since its contemporary forms are tied to longer and wider histories of bodily training. Attention to genealogy also draws focus to the ways in which global fitness discourses are taken up unevenly, as local actors adapt, resist, or rework them in practice (De Sousa Santos, 2006). Approached in this way, the genealogy of fitness culture in the Philippines foregrounds the instability of discourses and highlights the importance of situating them within their changing historical and cultural settings.

2. Methodology: Genealogy as Discourse Analysis

Drawing on Foucault's work on genealogy (1977, 1983), this study examines discursive traces from the past that continue to shape contemporary understandings of physical training. The materials considered include texts from Ancient Greece and Rome, the Medieval and Renaissance periods, and modern Europe. The emphasis on European sources reflects the fact that contemporary fitness culture has been shaped largely by Western traditions that spread globally through processes of colonialism and commercialization, a point Foucault himself acknowledged in relation to the archive (c.f. Foucault, 1972). Rather than attempting to reproduce historical scholarship, the focus here is on how earlier articulations of physical exercise continue to resonate within present-day practices in the Philippines.

Any such genealogy is necessarily shaped by the limits of the historical record. Many surviving texts from the Greek, Medieval, and Renaissance periods reflect the perspectives of social elites, particularly high-status men. Broader representation only becomes more visible in the modern period, when sources begin to include women, different social classes, and non-European contexts. These constraints are not incidental to the analysis. Renaissance writers, for instance, engaged with the same works of Aristotle and Galen that remain influential today. Attending to both continuity and rupture in this way allows the genealogy to trace how discourses of exercise are transmitted, reworked, and transformed across time. It also provides the basis for examining how these longer trajectories converge in the Philippine context, with *The Fit Stop* serving as a contemporary point of reference.

The specific approach taken to conduct the genealogy of physical training in the Philippines is the discourse-historical approach (DHA) (Reisigl, 2017; Wodak & Reisigl 2016). This method was designed to trace the intertextual history of phrases and arguments across time, attending to both textual features and their embedding in social contexts. As Reisigl & Wodak (2016) explain, DHA examines macro- and micro-phenomena, including intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, along with broader social factors related to the articulations. Like other discourse-analytic approaches, it is concerned with how discourses both reflect and shape social contexts.

A distinctive feature of DHA, however, is its delineation of four levels of analysis: (1) the immediate

language; (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive; (3) the situational context; and (4) the broader sociopolitical and historical context. The first two are text-internal, focusing on the articulations themselves, while the latter two are text-external, requiring contextualization through historical knowledge beyond the texts.

In examining discourses of physical training, this study places emphasis on three interrelated levels of analysis. Attention is given to the immediate language of texts, to their intertextual and interdiscursive connections, and to the broader sociopolitical and historical settings in which they were produced. These levels are illustrated clearly in surviving sources from Ancient Greece. References to physical training appear in a range of texts, including Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Hippocratic medical writings, both of which affirm the value of exercise, though in different ways. Aristotle addressed physical training in relation to *eudaimonia*, or the pursuit of a good life, while Hippocrates emphasized its role in maintaining health. Read together, these works demonstrate interdiscursivity, as philosophical and medical arguments about exercise drew on distinct but established bodies of knowledge within the same historical milieu (König, 2016; Pisk, 2017).

At the same time, such texts cannot be read in isolation from their historical circumstances. Secondary historical scholarship was therefore essential in situating these articulations. Historians have noted that Ancient Greek society was both patriarchal and deeply religious, and that bodily training was closely tied to citizenship, military readiness, and participation in sacred athletic festivals (c.f. Vamplew, 2022). Considered in this context, Aristotle and Hippocrates were not offering abstract reflections on exercise. Their discussions were intelligible responses to the institutional arrangements and social expectations of their time.

This approach informed the genealogy as a whole. Primary texts, consulted in English translation or through excerpts preserved in secondary literature, were analyzed for how they articulated physical training, while historical studies were used to situate those articulations within wider social and political conditions. Rather than attempting to reconstruct historical events, the genealogy focuses on how discourses of physical training were formulated in particular contexts and how elements of those formulations continue to resonate in the contemporary Philippine setting.

With respect to data handling, the study relied exclusively on publicly available textual materials, including historical sources, published scholarship, and openly accessible media. No classified, confidential, or private documents were used. This ensured that the analysis rested on transparent and verifiable sources, in keeping with established ethical standards for research involving textual data.

Although the topic does not involve reputationally sensitive material, the gym examined in this study is referred to by the pseudonym The Fit Stop. This decision reflects standard ethical practice in social science research, which emphasizes protecting the identities of institutions even when the risk of harm is minimal. Pseudonymizing the gym allows the case to function analytically while safeguarding the anonymity of the organization.

With these methodological and ethical considerations in place, the discussion now turns to the genealogy of fitness discourses, beginning with their articulation in ancient Greece.

2.1 Physical Training Discourses: From Ancient Greece to the Fit Stop

This genealogy follows how ideas about physical training have taken shape, changed, and been taken up again across different historical moments. Attending to both continuity and rupture makes it possible to see how understandings of exercise have shifted over time, eventually contributing to forms of fitness that underpin the contemporary global industry (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018b). The discussion starts in ancient Greece, where links between bodily training, health, and civic life were articulated in particularly influential ways.

2.1.1 Ancient Greece and Rome

Ancient Greece was patriarchal in nature, and as such, society was dominated by men. They made political decisions, participated in wars, and were considered citizens of the *polis*, or city-state (Atack & Cartledge, 2022; Blok, 2017). Men were also the ones who engaged in physical exercise, which was considered part of their education and socialization into society. Much of their training took place in the *gymnasium* (Lygouri-Tolia, 2020). The goal of a young man's education was to achieve the virtue of *areté*, sometimes translated as excellence, but the concept referred to the harmonious co-existence of ethics,

physical, and mental virtue (Twietmeyer & Johnson, 2022). As such, physical training was not just an educational imperative for Ancient Greek men, it was also key to living a virtuous life based on the standards of the time.

Related to the concept of *areté* is *eudaimonia*. This refers to a state of being that is often translated into English as happiness, but is associated with living a virtuous and rational life (Moran, 2018; Paul, 2022). Training one's body was considered an important element to achieve virtue. In the *Memorabilia* by Xenophon (1994), the text narrates an exchange between Epigenes and Socrates, where the latter remarked that exercise is not only for athletes or soldiers. A good condition of the body is needed for a healthy mind as well. The conceptual relationship between exercise and *eudaimonia* is further evidenced in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Therein, Aristotle (2019) defined the concept as a life of consistently excellent activity, or living well. To achieve this, a person must necessarily cultivate the "goods of the body" (health, looks, physical strength, athletic ability).

Apart from education and virtue, exercise was also integrated into the medical knowledge of the period. Ancient Greek philosophers, physicians, and gymnasts, the equivalent of athletic coaches and personal trainers today, recognized the relationship between exercising and being healthy. Plato referred to a gymnastic trainer called Herodicus of Selymbria, who prescribed long walks and runs for one's health. He wrote of "therapeutic gymnastics", and described exercise as a form of medicine (Berryman, 2010; Panegyres, 2024). Although Herodicus' ideas were not fully accepted by physicians of his time, they resonated with Hippocrates, traditionally regarded as the father of medicine, who promoted exercising for one's health. According to him, both food and exercise were important components of healthy living (Hippocrates, 1923; Toscano, 2018). Hippocratic medical knowledge continued to be influential in Imperial Rome and the Italian Renaissance, with writers of that period emphasizing the value of bodily exercise in leading a healthy life (c.f. Demirel and Yildiran, 2013; Galen, 2002).

2.1.2 The Medieval Period

One broad and erroneous characterization of exercise in the Medieval Period, dated roughly between the 6th and 16th centuries C.E., is that it is where "sports went to die" (Gleason, 2017: p.1). The seeming

disappearance can be explained by the fact that most surviving sources from the time were produced by the ruling class, who were not particularly interested in writing about physical training. Although there were documents from the time that provide evidence of members of the peasant class swimming, racing, wrestling, and playing ball sports (Carter, 1988; Fallows, 2022; Gleason, 2017), there was no evidence that participants trained for these activities. This suggests that they were done spontaneously, rather than for organized competition.

The invisibility of bodily exercise in the Medieval Period is most evident in its absence from knights' training regimes. Although they were expected to be physically prepared for war, Le Goff (1977) described aristocratic warriors as holding a disdain for physical work. Rather than subjecting their bodies to systematic conditioning, knights often engaged in activities that conveyed refinement and elite status, most notably hunting and falconry (Funes-Pérez et al., 2016; Oggins, 2019). This orientation is echoed in manuals of chivalry. In *Libro de los Estados*, Don Juan Manuel emphasized the cultivation of spiritual virtues, treating bodily development as secondary (Pedraz, 1997). Petrus Alfonsi's discussion of the "Seven Knightly Skills" and Geoffroi de Charny's *Livre de chevalerie* likewise addressed martial and moral ideals without outlining sustained regimes of physical training. Even jousting and mock combat, often assumed to prepare knights for war, appear to have functioned less as conditioning practices than as ceremonial displays staged within tournaments, resembling festive exhibitions more than structured training programs (Gleason, 2017; McGlynn, 2016).

The limited attention given to exercise in surviving medieval sources suggests that bodily training was not regarded as a matter requiring sustained documentation. While it would be misleading to suggest that physical activity disappeared altogether during the Middle Ages, the available records offer little indication that fitness occupied a central place in elite discourse. Where references do appear, they tend to be incidental rather than programmatic. This relative marginality stands in contrast to later periods, when writers would once again return to classical ideas of the trained body and invest them with renewed significance.

2.1.3 The Renaissance

The Renaissance, conventionally dated from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, is often described

as a period of renewed engagement with classical learning and a gradual departure from medieval modes of thought (Kaye, 2024; Trinkaus, 2024). In discussions of physical training, writers of the period frequently turned to Ancient Greek and Roman sources, treating them as authoritative points of reference. Exercise was most commonly addressed in relation to health and medical practice, as well as within emerging humanist approaches to education.

In medical writing, Hippocrates' theory of the four humors, first articulated in Ancient Greece and later developed by Galen in Roman times, continued to shape Renaissance understandings of the body (Singer, 2021; Tieleman, 2025). Physicians drew on this framework to explain illness as a disturbance of balance, which could be corrected through the regulation of the so called six non naturals (Giglioni, 2018). Motion and exercise occupied a place within this schema, alongside diet and sleep, as means of maintaining bodily equilibrium. Their inclusion indicates that physical activity was once again understood as relevant to health, even if it was not always prescribed in systematic or standardized ways.

This renewed interest is especially visible in Gerolamo Mercuriale's *De Arte Gymnastica*, a work often identified as an early text in sports medicine (Terrin et al., 2019). Mercuriale argued that exercise played a vital role in preserving health and grounded his claims in ancient medical authorities, particularly Hippocrates (Kavvadia, 2021). He distinguished between different forms of exercise, including those undertaken for health, for military readiness, and for competition or spectacle. Among these, he placed particular emphasis on exercise oriented toward health, reinforcing a view of bodily training as a legitimate medical concern rather than merely a martial or athletic pursuit.

Alongside medical discourse, physical training also featured in Renaissance humanist education. Humanist writers promoted an ideal of formation that encompassed intellectual, moral, and bodily development, drawing inspiration from classical models of education (Casalini, 2021). Educational treatises frequently cited ancient authors who argued that care for the body was inseparable from the cultivation of the mind (Demirel & Yildiran, 2013; Zovko & Dillon, 2018). The phrase *mens sana in corpore sano*, first articulated by the Roman poet Juvenal, was repeatedly invoked in this context. Understood as an affirmation of the interdependence of mental and physical well being, it provided a familiar justification for incorporating exercise into humanist curricula (Lacouture, 2019).

Renaissance refashionings would echo into modern pedagogies and mass culture, with publications produced during the period influencing succeeding generations of writers. As a case in point, Demirel and Yildiran (2013) discussed that works like *De Arte Gymnastica* would inform writers in the Modern period, which is the focus of the succeeding section.

2.1.4 The Modern Period

Modern Europe, roughly dated to between 1750 C.E. to 1900 C.E., consolidated two distinct projects of bodily training: (1) competitive sport, oriented to codified competition and records, and (2) fitness, oriented to health and aesthetics. Their emergence is discussed in the first part of this section. The second part discusses the spread of Modern ideas about physical training outside of Europe.

2.1.5 Modern Discourses on Fitness in Europe

Guttman (2004) argued that the Modern Period was a watershed in the history of sport, because athletics took on modern traits, such as rationalization, codification, and record-seeking (c.f. Riesebrodt, 2016). Physical training was also shaped by the technological and scientific advancements of the time, with doctors using scientific data in their advocacy that physical exercise was beneficial for one's health (Van Hilvroode, 2008).

A key development in modern discourse on physical training was the emergence of a division between competitive sport and fitness. At the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris, two figures embodied these contrasting approaches: Pierre de Coubertin and Eugen Sandow (van Hilvoorde, 2008). Coubertin, later the founder of the Modern Olympic Games, championed amateur competitive sports modeled on those of British public schools (De Coubertin, 2000). He was explicit in his rejection of the forms of training practiced by gymnasts and strongmen, and argued that physical training should be oriented toward competition and athletic victory rather than toward the deliberate shaping of the body for aesthetic ends (van Hilvoorde, 2008). This position reflected his broader commitment to amateur sport and informed the ideals that would later underpin the modern Olympic movement.

A different but related emphasis on competitive sport emerged through the movement commonly referred to as Muscular Christianity. Originating in English public schools, where games such as rugby were

central to student life, it linked physical training to Christian moral instruction (Bezzant, 2021; Meyer *et al.*, 2020). Proponents argued that sport cultivated discipline, character, and spiritual virtue alongside physical strength (Putz, 2022). These ideas circulated beyond Britain. In Germany, education officials debating the place of sport in school curricula referred to what they described as the English games movement (Hardman & Naul, 2002). Muscular Christianity also informed the founding of the Young Men's Christian Association in England and later the United States, which would play a significant role in transmitting modern sports and European approaches to physical training across national borders (Hubner, 2016a).

Alongside these sport oriented traditions, other figures advanced a different understanding of physical training. Fitness, as it came to be articulated toward the end of the nineteenth century, placed less emphasis on competition and more on health, bodily appearance, and personal improvement. Eugen Sandow, who also appeared at the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris, exemplified this shift. Having begun his career as a circus strongman, Sandow increasingly presented himself as an advocate of a system of exercise that could be practiced by ordinary people (Sandow, 2022; Wood, 2021). His physique was displayed not as a curiosity but as evidence of what disciplined training could achieve, challenging the prevailing assumption that bodily form was largely determined by heredity.

Sandow's ideas resonated with those of his contemporary Bernarr McFadden, who similarly promoted the notion that individuals could and should take responsibility for shaping their bodies. Together, they contributed to the emergence of what would later become the modern fitness industry. Their work intersected with the expanding self-help movement, which promised health, strength, and wellbeing through the consumption of books, dietary advice, exercise equipment, and instructional manuals (van Hilvoorde, 2008). By the end of the nineteenth century, specialist periodicals and advertising had begun to frame fitness as a lifestyle that could be cultivated through market participation.

The Physical Culture movement developed within this broader context and shared many of Sandow's assumptions about the value of bodily development for its own sake. It popularized gymnastics and weight training among wider publics and differed from sport centered traditions in practical ways. Whereas games promoted by Muscular Christianity often required large outdoor spaces, Physical Culture

emphasized forms of exercise that could be practiced indoors and with limited equipment (Heffernan, 2024; Miller, 2018).

At the same time, physical training was increasingly incorporated into systems of mass education. An influential early contribution was Johann Christoph Friedrich GutsMuths' *Gymnastik für die Jugend* or *Gymnastics for Youth*. Often described as a foundational text in modern gymnastics, the work inspired the establishment of gymnastic schools in countries such as Sweden and Denmark, where physical education became a formal part of schooling (Cleophas, 2024; Hardman & Naul, 2002; Virág, 2019).

Taken together, these developments illustrate how modern European discourses on physical training coalesced around two broad orientations. One emphasized competition and athletic performance, while the other framed exercise as a means to health, self-cultivation, and bodily improvement. Although these developments originated in Europe, many of them would later spread globally, a process that is explored in the next subsection.

2.1.5 The Spread of Modern Ideas of Sport and Fitness Outside of Europe

Although competitive sport and fitness both originated in Europe, it is the former that made a greater impact in spreading Modern ideas of fitness throughout the world. Muscular Christianity was significant in this regard, since it was transmitted through the mechanisms of imperialist expansion. In Asian territories, such as China, India, Japan, and the Philippines, missions and YMCAs reframed local practices, elevating Western team sports and recasting indigenous movement traditions within health and civic frames (c.f. Gems, 2016; Hubner, 2016a).

In the Philippines, the U.S. colonial state and the YMCA embedded sport and physical education in schools, casting bodily exercise as a route to civic modernity. The YMCA was introduced to the country by the American colonial government, which took power after the Spanish relinquished control over the archipelago in 1898 (Gems, 2004). The YMCA was a tool to propagate sport, with the goal of modernizing and civilizing the Philippines, which was perceived as regressive (Hubner, 2016a). There were two actors that were key in the spread of sports in the archipelago. The first was the colonial government itself, which established a public education system with a curriculum

that included physical education, where students were taught to play sports, such as baseball and basketball (Antolihao, 2015). The second actor was the YMCA, which used sport to spread the values of Muscular Christianity that were popular in the U.K. and the U.S.A. at the time (Hubner, 2016a).

By encouraging Filipinos to play sports, the colonial government believed they could counteract what they saw as "Catholic vices," including drunkenness, indolence, laziness, and gambling (Francisco, 2010). These behaviors were associated with the Spanish, the previous colonizers of the Philippines. The vices were mainly attributed with the *ilustrado* (learned or enlightened) class of Filipinos (Hubner, 2016b), who were described as sufferers of neurasthenia, or physical and mental exhaustion (Hubner, 2016a). The use of sports to "modernize" Filipinos is further evidenced in YMCA publications, where sports were depicted as activities that could civilize the backward population of the archipelago. Images of naked Igorots ("wild men") and headhunters engaged in footraces or ball games were used as evidence of the capability of sports to civilize populations (Antolihao, 2019; Hubner, 2016a).

Even after the colonial era, these legacies endured and intersected with new global fitness trends, setting the stage for the commercialized gym cultures that emerged from the 1970s onward.

2.1.6 The Global Spread of Commercialized Gym and Fitness Culture from the 1970s to the Present

The spread of Modern European ideas about physical training throughout the world established the conditions by which the global fitness industry would develop. Andreasson & Johansson (2018a) argued that contemporary exercise culture had its roots in the late 19th century, highlighting the activities of Eugene Sandow and Charles Atlas who travelled around the world promoting bodybuilding as a pastime. Even after colonies were liberated, territories were susceptible to 20th century global fitness trends, such as bodybuilding and the spread of gyms.

From the 1970s, fitness became a mass market (Gazzola, 2024; Scheerder, 2020). Media icons promoted new ideals of exercise and appearance, while franchised chains introduced standardized equipment, programs, and gym layouts. Together, these developments turned the gym into a portable template that could be reproduced and adapted across the world.

Today it is possible to find branches of American fitness companies, such as Gold's Gym and Anytime Fitness, in many different countries (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018a).

Fitness pursuits, such as bodybuilding, gained more popularity in the 1980s through movies, such as *Pumping Iron*, and the popularity of Arnold Schwarzenegger, a once Mr. Universe champion later-turned actor and U.S. governor (Andreasson & Johansson, 2019; Martschukat, 2021). This period saw the increase in the number of gyms throughout the world, along with the large-scale production of ancillary materials, (Addolorato *et al.*, 2020; Sakwit, 2022). It is during the 1990s, however, that one sees the globalization of fitness culture, wherein common standards and norms of exercise become widely practiced throughout the world.

A useful framework for understanding globalization in this genealogy is offered by De Sousa Santos (2006), who described it as a set of unequal exchanges that produce two main processes. The first is the worldwide spread of local practices, usually originating in developed countries, which he calls "globalized localisms." The second is the requirement for localities, often in developing contexts, to adapt to transnational practices and norms, which he terms "localized globalisms." The previous section on the diffusion of modern European ideas about sport and fitness illustrates a globalized localism. It shows how the belief that bodies should be trained either for Olympic competition or for aesthetic strength has been embraced worldwide. This dynamic, in turn, gives rise to localized globalisms such as the Philippines' passion for basketball (Enverga, 2018; Fabian, 2017) or India's enthusiasm for cricket (Khondker & Robertson, 2018). The Fit Stop belongs to this lineage. Its social media post promising strength, health, and confidence articulates the global discourse of fitness in a way that resonates with Philippine culture. In its design, routines, and promotional language, the gym embodies a localized globalism that traces its discursive ancestry to the Ancient Greek gymnasium, but reshaped through modern European and colonial influences.

The Fit Stop also exemplifies the three features that Sassatelli (2010) argued typify gyms around the world. First, fitness clubs are predicated on the notion of capability. They are spaces where individuals train their bodies to perform functions up to the standards they set for themselves. The Fit Stop's marketing already highlights this. Members are invited to "get stronger, healthier, and more confident." Second, gyms

exhibit what Sassatelli (2010, p. 23) calls "structured variety." In The Fit Stop this appears in the diverse program mix, from circuit training to group exercise, tailored to different goals while retaining fitness as the common denominator. Finally, gyms are spaces of "fun discipline." Although training can be exhausting or even painful, clubs advertise themselves as friendly, enjoyable, and social. The Fit Stop's promotional imagery, featuring smiling exercisers, enacts this discourse by reframing bodily exertion as community and enjoyment.

In these ways, The Fit Stop demonstrates how the discourses of global fitness culture are both embodied and rearticulated in the Philippine context. This process produces what De Sousa Santos (2006) describes as localized globalisms, visible in practices such as the prominence of basketball in the Philippines or cricket in India. The Fit Stop can be understood within this lineage. Its social media post promising strength, health, and confidence does not simply repeat a global fitness message but expresses it in terms that are locally legible and appealing. In this sense, the gym translates a transnational discourse of bodily improvement into a form that resonates within the Philippine setting. Its spatial design, program offerings, and promotional language all reflect a version of fitness culture whose roots extend back to the Greek gymnasium, while having been reshaped through modern European developments and colonial transmission.

Seen more closely, The Fit Stop shares several characteristics commonly associated with contemporary gyms worldwide. It presents fitness as a matter of developing bodily capability, inviting members to work toward personal standards of strength, health, and confidence. This emphasis is evident in its promotional language, which frames exercise as a means of self-improvement rather than competition. The range of activities on offer also reflects a structured diversity. Different programs address different goals, yet all are oriented toward enhancing fitness as a general capacity. At the same time, the gym promotes an atmosphere in which discipline is paired with enjoyment. Training is demanding, but it is presented as sociable and rewarding rather than punitive. Images of smiling participants reinforce this framing by associating bodily effort with community and pleasure. Together, these elements show how global fitness discourses are taken up, adapted, and given concrete form within a specific local context.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The genealogy developed in this paper shows that discourses of physical training have never operated as fixed or universal frameworks. Rather, they have taken shape in relation to the social conditions in which they emerged and have been repeatedly reworked as those conditions changed. From early Greek discussions of areté and eudaimonia, through periods in which bodily discipline was downplayed or reasserted, ideas about exercise have continually shifted in meaning and emphasis. In each case, articulations of physical training both reflected prevailing social concerns and helped organize how bodies were understood and governed. The gymnasium in classical Athens functioned as a space for shaping civic subjects, just as later movements linked bodily discipline to moral or national projects. These historical trajectories form the background against which The Fit Stop can be understood as a contemporary Philippine expression of long standing discourses about physical training, health, and appearance.

The Philippine case makes these relationships particularly visible. Discourses associated with physical education, religious instruction, and commercial fitness were not simply introduced intact. They were taken up, adapted, and embedded in local institutional and social arrangements. Colonial school programs emphasized discipline while also promoting particular ideas of modernity. Religious initiatives framed exercise in moral terms and fostered new forms of collective activity. More recently, commercial fitness has circulated global ideals of bodily improvement that are taken up within existing social practices. The Fit Stop reflects this layering of influences. Its programs, spatial organization, and promotional language draw on widely recognizable fitness ideals while giving them a form that fits local expectations of sociability, effort, and self-improvement.

These patterns also point to a second theme developed in the paper, namely that discourses of fitness have always been subject to contestation. Across different periods, physical training has been linked to civic duty, religious restraint, health, morality, or consumption, with no single interpretation remaining dominant. In the Philippines, American colonial physical education played a formative role in normalizing organized exercise and sport, creating conditions in which later forms of fitness could take hold. Contemporary gyms build on this foundation, even as the meanings attached to exercise continue to shift. The Fit Stop's emphasis on strength, health, and confidence

captures one such articulation, presenting fitness as both disciplined and aspirational, without resolving the tensions inherent in these ideas.

Examining The Fit Stop through a genealogical lens helps make sense of these continuities and changes. Practices that appear familiar or self-evident, such as structured exercise routines or promotional claims about bodily transformation, can be traced back to much older ways of thinking about the body and its cultivation. Genealogy does not suggest a direct line of inheritance but instead reveals how ideas persist by being repeatedly reinterpreted and repurposed. In doing so, it offers a way of situating everyday fitness practices within broader historical and cultural processes.

From a practical perspective, the analysis highlights how local gyms act as intermediaries between global fitness discourses and everyday participation. As The Fit Stop shows, widely circulating promises of health and improvement gain traction when they are framed in ways that align with local experiences of discipline, enjoyment, and community. For those involved in health promotion or policy, this suggests that effective interventions depend not only on adopting global models but on understanding how such models are made meaningful in specific settings.

Taken as a whole, this study argues that contemporary fitness practices in the Philippines should be understood as historically layered formations rather than as straightforward borrowings from elsewhere. The Fit Stop exemplifies how global ideas about physical training travel, change, and take root in new contexts. Its discursive lineage can be followed from early European articulations of bodily cultivation, through modern and colonial transformations, to its present day expression in the Philippine fitness industry. In this sense, it stands as a clear instance of localized globalism, shaped by global histories and sustained through local practice.

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