



Physical Culture Supplements in Early Twentieth Century Britain

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Abstract

Beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing until the Great War, British consumers concerned with protecting or increasing their health were presented with a series of new and exciting products. Associated with physical culture, a late nineteenth and early twentieth-century concern in the cultivation of the body, such products can be seen as precursors to the modern interest in health food and bodybuilding supplements. Unlike previously consumed health foods, physical culture nostrums relied upon supposedly scientific manufacturing and concentrated extracts to radically transform consumer's bodies. Similarly, they utilised both celebrity and medical endorsements in a bid to entice British men, women and children to use these substances on a regular basis. At a time when societal discourses on individual health intensified, and even the British monarch relied upon a Physical Culture instructor, these supplements promised radical changes in one's physique, energy and ultimately, their life. Here it is argued that the growing popularity of these substances represented an effort to consume new identities through improved health. As will become clear, such substances were linked to improved social, sexual and political identities as expressed through robust health.

Keywords

Physical Culture, Social History, Gender, History of Medicine, Health.

Physical Culture Supplements in Early Twentieth Century Britain

Her figure was slight and graceful, inclining even to fragility but those iron jelloids she had been taking of late had done her a world of good much better than the Widow Welch's female pills and she was much better of those discharges she used to get and that tired feeling ...

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922: 336).

Centred on a day in Dublin in 1904, Joyce's seminal novel *Ulysses* highlighted a new trend in British and Irish life, namely, an influx of new medical nostrums. The woman in question, Gerty MacDowell, turned towards iron jelloids and miraculously her health had improved. Iron Jelloids were not a prescribed substance but rather an over the counter supplement produced from the late nineteenth century. Said to improve nerve and vigour among users, Iron Jelloids, despite their often-medical sounding advertisements, represented a new form of pseudo-scientific food supplement. MacDowell was not the only character in *Ulysses* to turn towards questionable products in a bid to restore their health. Where Gerty MacDowell relied on nutritional supplements, the novel's protagonist, Leopold Bloom, used physical culture exercises. Tucked away in Bloom's room was a course of Sandow exercises. Bloom, like countless others, had become a devoted follower of Eugen Sandow, a turn of the century strongman. Fearing his own vigour was failing, Bloom briefly used Sandow's dumbbell system as a remedy (Joyce, 1922: 665). Sandow, like the producers of Iron Jelloids, often made medical pronouncements with reference to the mythical restorative capabilities of products he used like Plasmon or cocoa (Daley, 2002). MacDowell and Bloom both expressed concern with their physique, appearance and in the case of the latter, their vigour. More importantly, both turned to pseudo-medical outlets. The purpose of the present paper is not, of course, to dwell on the health concerns of two fictitious characters. Instead, the paper examines the rise of nutritional supplements in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, specifically those promoted by physical culturists like Eugen Sandow.

Described by Michael Anton Budd as a *fin de siècle* concern with the ideological and commercial cultivation of the body, physical culture can be understood as a precursor to the modern interest in 'keep fit' exercise and bodybuilding (Budd, 1997: xi). It came at a moment when political, health and military concerns in Britain, mainland Europe and the United States coalesced around the idea that a healthy, fit and athletic body for men was desirable. Previous work on physical culture has focused on the entrepreneurs and their highly-gendered workout

systems (Dyreson, 1989). Far less attention has been placed on the nutritional supplements they promoted. In addressing this relative dearth, the paper focuses on three nutritional supplements promoted by physical culturists in Britain during the late 1890s and early 1900s, namely Plasmon, Bovril and the aforementioned Iron Jelloids.

Lesley Steinitz (2017) and Stephanie Rains (2014) have already discussed dubious health supplements from this time while drawing parallels with older patent medicines which also relied on dubious claims. Building on these works, the paper argues that physical culturists, who were integral in many of these product's advertisements, promoted supplements with reference to normative gender identities and the promise of greater social attainment. For men, physical culturists promised that supplements would increase their strength, vigour and endurance. For women, Plasmon, Bovril and Iron Jelloids were tools to beauty, reforming the body and being devoted mothers. Such messages were promulgated first by physical culturists within these advertisements before being utilised by the company's themselves. These supplements were among the most popular of the decade for athletes and the general public in Britain. They appeared on billboards, in newspaper and magazines and, as the opening quote made clear, in literature. Their history thus tells much about health, gender and wellness in Britain. This paper situates these nutritional supplements firmly within a broader discourse of physical culture and demonstrates the manner in which consumers sought to improve their lives and health through often dubious substances. To do this, the paper opens with a brief discussion of physical culture. Following this, Plasmon, Bovril and Iron Jelloids are examined with reference to the physical culturists who promoted it and what they promised.

Physical Culture in Britain

In 1908, A. Wallace Jones, a British physical culturist, claimed that 'twenty years ago, the term Physical Culture was scarcely known. Nowadays, everyone understands its meaning' (Jones, 1908: 9). Whether or not this was hyperbole is of course difficult to know. It is undeniable however that as a recognised phrase, physical culture's stock grew exponentially in a short period. Personal health concerns had grown in Britain since the beginning of the nineteenth century as industrialisation and urbanisation encouraged a growing middle-class and working-class to devote time and energy to exercise. Men, and to a certain extent women, began to spend excess money on leisure pursuits designed to exercise the body as a means of preventing illness, achieving certain body times or to counteract sedentary existences (Holt, 1990). Initially attracting Britain's upper classes, personalised forms of exercise, distinct from sport

or games playing, eventually came to reach a wide variety of social classes (Heffernan, 2017). Key in this development was Eugen Sandow, a Prussian born strongman who came to British attention in 1889. Training in Brussels with his mentor, Professor Attila, Sandow was alerted to a challenge being issued in London's Royal Aquarium Theatre by Samson, a fellow European strongman who had been playing in London for several weeks (Chapman, 1994: 38-49). Offering £500 and the title of World's Strongest Man to anyone who could best him in competition, Samson was challenged and, following two separate days of competition, defeated by the below pictured Sandow.



Fig 1. Photograph of Eugen Sandow from the mid-1890s (Sandow, 1897: 115).

Sandow, as retold by his biographer David Chapman, soon after attracted large audiences to the cause of 'physical culture' (Ibid.). Within a decade of his victory over Samson, Sandow was selling products throughout the British Empire. He ran his own alternative health institute in London and counted monarchs among his followers. A key reason for Sandow's success was his much-coveted physique. Unlike previous Vaudevillian strongmen, Sandow's physique was lean and muscular rather than rotund and portly. Sandow appeared outside of shows dressed in his best evening wear, spoke on matters of literature and attempted to portray a keen sense of respectability. He, and other physical culturists, sought to normalise the muscular body and display it in public free from ridicule, suspicion or scorn (Ibid). The physical culture enterprise came to be predicated on the idea that the ideal, implicitly white, male body was muscular and vigorous. With this body, men would become conquerors of their social, sexual

and sporting worlds. Only physical culturists, and the products they sold, could, it seemed, achieve this promise.

Overwhelmingly a male enterprise, physical culturists nevertheless reserved comments on female exercise (Budd: 77). Echoing a longer Victorian theory of woman's supposed frailty and lack, female physical culture was often seen as restorative (Vertinsky, 1990). Whereas male physical culturists were told that dumbbell or barbell work would bring greater strength or vigour, women were routinely presented with the claim that exercise would reform their frail bodies and bring them back to a natural equilibrium. The strong female body, albeit with the exception of certain strongwomen performers, was rarely, if ever, praised in the British press. There was no female equivalent to Sandow, in the sense that no female physical culturist was given the opportunity to build a business encompassing magazines, workout devices and nutritional supplements. This meant that for women, supplements like Bovril, Plasmon or Iron Jelloids were advertised with vague statements from unknown individuals dealing with domestic work or motherhood. In attempting to explain motivations regarding the rise of physical culture at this time, Budd (1997) cited anxieties surrounding male and female bodies, the need for increased income and a desire for social advancement. There was also an imperial element to such concerns as discourses in Britain at this time routinely cited the idea that British citizens were becoming physically degenerate compared to their colonial subjects. These desires were also applicable to those willing to buy supplements.

Building on these fears, physical culturists began promoting exercise equipment and specialised foods in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Previous work on physical culture workout devices, most notably the 'Sandow Developer', a piece of home workout equipment, highlighted the manner in which physical culturists used health, sex and gender to promote their products (Heffernan, 2018). Caroline Daley (2002) cited Sandow's use of public exhibitions featuring half naked men exercising with his 'Developer' as a common promotional tactic. Likewise, Dominic Morais (2013) work on Sandow's entrepreneurial endeavours explained how Sandow's advertising and monographs helped shape ideas about the ideal male body. An equally popular tactic exhibited by physical culturists and marketers was to associate the athletic feats of physical culturists with the foods they ate or nutritional supplements they used. Interest in athlete's diets grew in importance over the course of the nineteenth century, as too did the specialisation of the diets themselves. Early nineteenth century athletes were commonly told to eat day old bread or avoid water and eggs when training (Park, 1997: 137-145). Such information was often given through word of mouth recommendations or gleaned from a coach's secret repertoire. Physical culturists, unlike their athletic counterparts, were not

training for competition but rather for life. Deprived, for the most part of competitions, a physical culturist's body was taken as evidence of their successes. What they ate and what they consumed thus took on a heightened importance. Building muscle or shedding weight required a great deal of attention to one's diet and it is no surprise that a proliferation of information on diet accompanied the rise of physical culture in the 1890s.

It was for this reason that physical culturists wrote candidly on their diets. Arthur Saxon, a German strongman, spoke of his voluminous appetite which encompassed large quantities of bacon, meat and eggs. Eustace Miles, a British tennis player and vegetarian physical culturist, promoted a strict vegetarian based on health and moral grounds. George Hackenschmidt, an Estonian wrestler and weightlifter, encouraged a diet rich in vegetables and meat while Bernarr MacFadden, an American physical culturist, advocated for everything from fasting to all milk diets (Roach, 2008: 29-34). Food was an integral concern to the physical culturist and their followers. It was for this reason that many physical culturists were sponsored by advertisers seeking to promote the health-giving qualities of their foodstuffs. Seen by many as the most authoritative public voices on health, oftentimes to the chagrin of physicians, physical culturists made ideal endorsements. Like the workout devices and exercise systems physical culturists promoted, supplements, like Plasmon, Bovril and Iron Jelloids, were linked to broader messages surrounding gender, health and societal advancement.

Plasmon ... What Is It?

Produced in 1906, a Plasmon pamphlet opened with a question as pertinent then as it is now, 'Plasmon ... What is It?' (Plasmon Ltd., 1906). Described by advertisers as 'the albumen of pure fresh milk in the form of a dry, soluble granulated, cream-white powder', Plasmon was a milk powder substance first made in Germany in the 1880s (Ibid: 3). Initially produced as a medicinal food product for patients, Plasmon came to Britain in 1899 when a group of British entrepreneurs secured the exclusive rights to sell Plasmon outside of Russia and Germany (Steinitz: 154). In Germany, Plasmon was understood with reference to its sustenance capabilities, a point demonstrated in Dr. C.R. Virchow's deliberations on Plasmon for the German government. Suitably impressed, Virchow, concluded that the foodstuff was cheap, digestible and completely hygienic (Ibid: 3-4). Virchow concluded that Plasmon was more advantageous than meat for strength, endurance and vitality. In a series of trials run by Virchow, men had survived several days of hard labour and little sleep on Plasmon alone (Ibid: 1-2). Equally important was Dr. Prausnitz, Professor and Principal of the German State

Department of Hygiene. Performing his trials on Plasmon contemporaneously with Virchow in the late 1890s, Prausnitz proved equally enthused

There is no food-preparation known to us equal to Plasmon, either as regards constancy of composition as guaranteed by its source or in respect to the proportion, solubility and digestibility of the nutritive constituents (Ibid: 2)

Prausnitz and Virchow both stressed Plasmon's regenerative capabilities alongside its nutritional purity. Advertised after the Second South African War (1899-1902), which, given an early string of British losses, encouraged a moral panic surrounding British men's bodies, Plasmon's purity and performance enhancing capabilities, appeared then to be of great importance in strengthening bodies (Heggie, 2007). Plasmon's British group, titled 'International Plasmon Limited' made much of its restorative qualities. Lesley Steinitz's (2017) work on Plasmon found that the group routinely reproduced Virchow and Prusnitz's respective evaluations alongside anonymous comments in *The British Medical Journal*, *The Lancet*, *The Medical Press and Circular* and several other medical periodicals. Endorsements, official or otherwise, from physicians and scientists played a substantial role in Plasmon's advertisements through direct endorsements and marketing in trade journals.

Equally important, were endorsements from physical culturists and well known sportsmen. Promoted by Eugen Sandow, Eustace Miles and C. Lang Neil, these physical culturists linked Plasmon to their own physical prowess. In 1906, Plasmon printed a series of Sandow interviews on the product, most notably including a centrepiece Sandow interview in *Plasmon ... What Is It?* (1906). In interviews, Sandow spoke of Plasmon's nutritional value, calling it the essential foodstuff 'I have so longed wished for' (Ibid: 6). Furthermore, Sandow claimed that he often went several weeks exclusively consuming Plasmon (Roach: 32). By this time, roughly the early 1900s, Sandow was the undisputed figurehead of physical culture in Britain. Regularly advertised as the 'World's Most Perfectly Developed Specimen', Sandow's physique was taken as embodied evidence of his health expertise (Chapman). If Sandow, deemed the 'celebrated strong man' in Plasmon's advertisements, used the product to maintain strength during arduous times – a term Sandow used but never defined - it was implied that individuals could do the same. Sandow's claim that he recommended Plasmon to all desirous of health was illustrative of this. In selling books and workout devices, Sandow played on others' desires to replicate his physique. By suggesting, or outright telling, audiences that they too could become a Sandow, the strongman used his body to entice consumers.

Sandow was not the only physical culturist found in Plasmon's advertising. C. Lang Neil was sporadically used by the company but his influence paled in comparison to Eustace Miles. Miles, a vegetarian athlete who won a tennis silver medal at the 1908 Olympics (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2006), was a regular commentator on Plasmon. An entrepreneur, whose business interests spanned novels, articles, a vegetarian restaurant and speaking tours, Miles was matched only by Sandow in Plasmon's marketing campaigns. Plasmon's advertising distinguished Miles as 'the authority on physical culture', as opposed to Sandow's title of the 'celebrated strongman' (Plasmon, 2-3). Why was Miles 'the authority'? His voluminous writings provide one such answer. In a series of monographs published from 1900 to 1914, which dealt with physical culture for the athlete, the schoolchild and finally the general public, Miles promoted Plasmon's nutritive capabilities.

In *Better Food for Boys*, published 1901, Miles implored the next generation to use the modern and 'scientific Plasmon for biscuits, soups and other recipes. This he assured them, would build their minds and muscles for adulthood just as it had built Miles' own muscles. Miles most popular work, *Failures of Vegetarianism* (1902), told readers that his own diet consisted of 'simpler foods' such as Plasmon and milled nuts. Miles likewise noted that despite his meat eating preferences, the great Sandow 'too believed in Plasmon.' Finally in *Muscle, Brain and Diet* (1905), Miles spoke of experiments conducted by the athlete concerning the best foods for sustenance. Unsurprisingly Plasmon was among his 'never-failing sources of Proteid or body-building material' (1905: vi). Interestingly, it was Miles and not Sandow who was later mocked for his strict dietary protocols and love of Plasmon. In 1906, a satirical poem lambasting Miles and his vegetarian diet circulated England

I love it! I love it! Let those who please
Enjoy a diet of nuts and peas;
Let Shaw compose his dramatic scenes
On cabbage, tomatoes and kidney beans
Let Eustace Miles find muscular force
In carrot cutlets with Plasmon sauce,
Or other equally messy slop –
But give me my old-fashioned mutton chop ('Mutton Chop', 1907)

The mocking nevertheless pointed to the fact that when individuals thought of Miles, they thought of Plasmon and vice versa. The company had successfully associated itself with

physical culturists. It was for this reason that Plasmon's logo was itself modelled on a Greco-Roman strongman. Plasmon was presented for men as a foodstuff which would increase their endurance, their physical stature and their vigour, a term often taken to mean one's sexual potency (Chapman, 1994).

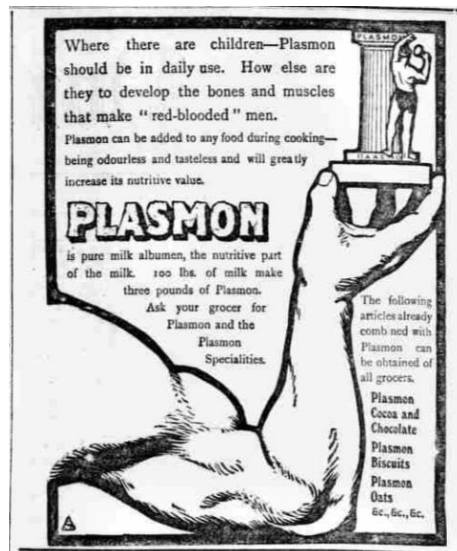


Fig 2. 'Plasmon', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (1 August, 1907), p. 4.

Jan Todd's (1998) research on female physical culturists at this time revealed the often subversive nature of female muscle building. It was for this reason that Plasmon's advertising towards women was often rooted in traditional concerns surrounding motherhood, women's frailty or the need for healthy children. This was seen in 1903 when Plasmon produced a promotional cookery book aimed at women (International Plasmon Ltd., 1903). Concerned with improving the nutritious value of food in the home, the cookbook did not aim to build women's physiques to muscular proportions but rather to sustain woman's health, overcome deformities and ensure healthy children. Later Plasmon advertisements, aimed at women likewise played with anxieties surrounding both the health of the mother and her child to sell products.

In one advertisement, women were told that to truly protect their children's health, and thereby ensure they built the muscle and sinew needed for adulthood, Plasmon was needed ('Plasmon Advertisement', 1911). In others, Plasmon was presented as a vital tonic for empowered motherhood ('Plasmon Advertisement', 1909). Such advertisements did not explicitly use physical culturists for advertisements geared at women but appeals to vibrant health, a cornerstone of the physical culture enterprise, remained. In this way, men and

women's use for Plasmon was distinguished. What unified them was an interest in consuming better health. As physical embodiments of the supposed physical ideal, individuals like Sandow or Miles were the product's most resounding endorsements.

Building Better Bodies Through Bovril

Emerging contemporaneously with Plasmon was Bovril, a blended meat extract created by Scotsman John Lawrence during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Made primarily from Beef, Bovril quickly associated itself with ideas of British nationalism and the caricatured embodiment of Britain, 'John Bull'. This was certainly the case during the Second South African War when Bovril advertisements explicitly told of its nutritional value for troops at the front (Steinitz, 2017). Readers of British newspapers in 1901 were met with the claim that Bovril was 'the most acceptable and useful present that Tommy Atkins can receive' as only Bovril could sustain men's strength through gruelling marches and equally exhausting battles ('Send a Case of Bovril', 1901). At the forefront of such advertising was Bovril's association with muscular and strong physiques. Advertisements at the beginning of the twentieth century claimed that 'Bovril means vigour and strength' or that 'Bovril is a strength giver and muscle former' (Steinitz, 2017). Somewhat surprisingly given its explicit association with male bodies and endurance, Bovril's use of physical culturists was less extensive than Plasmon. The latter counted Sandow, Miles, Neil and a host of other physical culturists in their advertising material, Bovril's British agents satisfied themselves with less popular physical culturists, those whom only the most devout would recognise.

One such physical culturist was Tom Burrows, an Australian born athlete who came to Britain in the late nineteenth century. Proficient in boxing, cricket and wrestling, Burrows was famous for two things. First his work with the Royal Army Physical Training Corps, the unit responsible for training British troops and second for his prowess with Indian clubs. Indian clubs, as suggested by their name, are bottle sized clubs, said to have been inspired by traditional heavy Hindu clubs, swung around the body for health purposes (Heffernan, 2017). Originally popularised in Britain in the early nineteenth century, Indian club swinging was still in vogue by the century's end (Heffernan, 2019). In the case of Burrows, he achieved a national fame in Britain for his ability to swing Indian clubs for hours on end without stopping.



Fig 3: Tom Burrows, *The Text-Book of Club Swinging* (London: Health & Strength, 1908), p. 57.

In 1913, Burrows successfully swung Indian clubs for a hundred hours without resting (Heffernan, 2019). His promotion of Bovril, which began in the early 1900s, reinforced the company's claims that Bovril increased strength, endurance and vitality (Burrows, 1908: 60-62). As discussed elsewhere, Burrows' fame in the early twentieth century was found among a small cohort of physical culture enthusiasts (Ibid). His was not the renown of Sandow. It was perhaps for this reason that Bovril also called relied on Edward Aston and Arthur Saxon to promote the strength giving properties of their foodstuff.

Aston, an English middle-class weightlifter, was deemed by many of his contemporaries to be among Britain's strongest living men in the early 1900s (Willoughby, 1970: 143). Famed for his weight lifting prowess, Aston briefly enjoyed a commercial relationship with Bovril. In British newspapers and physical culture magazines, like *Health and Strength*, Aston claimed that Bovril was the only additional foodstuff he needed when it came to diet (Kent, 2012: 172). Further illustrating this point were Aston's mail order exercise courses which began to circulate from 1905. Mail order courses, like Aston's, often acted as the primary sites of knowledge for physical culturists (Pollack and Todd, 2017). Magazines and newspapers regularly commented on the importance of exercise but few featured the

detailed, systematic nature of mail order courses which would lead consumers through a week by week plan for improving their health. In Aston's course, readers were told to

Try Bovril, it aids digestion and renders the food taken more nutritious bringing out all the good qualities in the food, which would otherwise pass through the system unassimilated. A drink of HOT BOVRIL after exercise restores the lost energies much quicker and is a safeguard against fatigue (Aston, c. 1905: 3)

A self-styled world's strongest man, Aston echoed Burrows' claim that Bovril safeguarded against fatigue, which was a broader concern in Britain at this time (Rabinbach, 1992). Furthermore, he claimed that it enhanced the nutrition of one's food which, Aston explained, would increase one's strength, muscle and nerve. This he knew from his own experience (Ibid). Bovril's reputation as a physical culture supplement, as attested by those whose feats of endurance were undeniable, appeared then to be legitimate.

It was perhaps for this reason that Arthur Saxon likewise proved so enthused with Bovril. Saxon, like Aston and Burrows, was another physical culturist whose fame stemmed from his legitimate feats of strength. Where vaudeville strongman shows still featured dubious feats of strength, achieved through sleight of hand or a shrewd mastery of physics, Saxon held a reputation as a strong and honest performer (Kent, 2012: 123-125). Saxon came to England in the late 1890s and achieved a nationwide fame in 1898 following his victory over the previously mentioned Eugen Sandow in a weightlifting match (Chapman, 1994: 107). Eschewing pageantry in his shows, Saxon's physical culture monographs were often brutally honest. In *The Development of Physical Power* (1905), Saxon rejected the traditional physical culture trope of claiming a sickly childhood to state that he was always strong. Furthermore, he claimed that successful physical culturists needed to have the constitution of a horse from adolescence. Turning to Saxon's relationship to Bovril, he revealed that in a growing world of physical culture supplements the

one preparation ... which I can conscientiously recommend is that known as "Bovril." It is a fact that most leading athletes recommend "Bovril," and nothing can be better either before or immediately after practice than a cup of hot "Bovril." It prevents and dispels fatigue (Saxon, 1905: 19)

Through Burrows, Aston and Saxon, a clear message was presented to male physical culturists. To be men of endurance and great strength, Bovril was a necessary addition to one's diet. After all, three of the most trusted physical culturists told them as much. Health and the ideal muscular physique, was one small purchase away.

For women, Bovril focused instead on the promise of radiant health and slender physiques. Echoing Plasmon's assumption that women were lesser in physical endeavours, the beef-based extract focused on outer beauty rather than internal strength. The underlying message however was still similar to those aimed at men - namely that a daily dose of Bovril would enhance one's health. Thus early Bovril advertisements linked the product to 'health and beauty among women', noting its use by dainty women and beautiful girls. To further illustrate this point, captions often used the silhouette of a young slender woman, laughing freely ('Bovril Advertisement', 1900). For those unconvinced, Bovril included images of its supposedly typical female consumers



Fig 4. 'Bovril for Health and Beauty', 1907.

The above advertisement was particularly interesting for its conflation between beauty, whiteness and health. One was typically implied to assume the other. Other Bovril advertisements featuring women generally focused on women as housewives, cooks or domestic servants ('Bovril for Housewives', 1909). Akin to Plasmon's contemporaneous advertisements, Bovril's advertisements in this regard stressed its ability to enhance the nutritious value of foods. Accordingly, readers of the *Northern Whig* were told that the 'tired mother will find a cup of Bovril a wonderful reviver and strengthener when 'fagged out' because 'Bovril is liquid life' ('A Bottle of Bovril', 1900). Whereas male readers of national and local newspapers were told that Bovril's regenerative capabilities would allow them to work harder, run faster, or at the very least longer, women were told that Bovril would improve their beauty or allow them to continue their housework (Steinitz, 2017). The messages were similar in that they pertained to appearance and work but the underlying gendered assumptions spoke of a subordinate role for women and a sense of greater mobility for men.

This was not, of course, unique in *fin de siècle* advertising in Great Britain. What marked Bovril, Plasmon and Iron Jelloids as unique was their repeated association with the world of physical culture, a world which although containing its own gender hierarchies, was nevertheless more open when it came to encouraging female participation. It is interesting therefore that these nutritional supplements claimed physical culture could improve men's sexual and social lives to while simultaneously reiterating traditional discourses for women. This approach was later modified in the early 1910s when 'Bovril for Health' advertisements began to feature women playing golf as an acknowledgement of the 'new woman' ideal emerging in the British press (McCrone, 1988: 177). Despite the emergence of 'new woman' advertisements, far more advertisements focused on women in the home and women as mothers.

The Wonder Supplement? Iron Jelloids

Iron Jelloids, the iron dietary supplement mentioned by Joyce in *Ulysses*, did not gain real popularity in Britain until the late 1900s. Promoted as early as 1887, when it was associated with imperial explorers and businessmen, like Cecil Rhodes, the product moved away from imperial health towards individualised conceptions of health and beauty (Howell, 2018: 76). Perhaps inspired by Bovril and Plasmon, the company began to associate with physical culturists and athletes by 1910. Evidence that this might have been the case is that Tom Burrows, the Indian club swinger once associated with Bovril, began promoting Iron Jelloids

at this time. By the early 1910s, Burrows' fame was the highest it would ever be (Heffernan, 2019). Still a minor physical culture celebrity, Burrows had gone on several world tours, published monographs and engaged in Indian club swinging exhibitions. From 1910 to his fateful 100 hour Indian club swing in 1913, Burrows continued to promote Iron Jelloids as a source of his unflinching nerve. Like Bovril and Plasmon, the supplement was seen as a contributor to his athleticism. This was made evident in advertisements which appeared in 1914 linking Burrows' feats to the product. Telling readers that 'superb vitality is what makes champions', the statement was followed by the assertion that, regardless of one's strong appearance, inner vitality, as cultivated by Iron Jelloids, was what mattered ('Why He Used' Iron Jelloids', 1914). In the case of Burrows he 'knew that the effort [of his club swing] would tax even his marvellous powers of endurance. This is why he took Iron Jelloids' ('Superb Vitality', 1914). The 'abundant vitality' deemed critical for Burrows was said to be necessary for all Englishmen and women struggling to maintain their energy in an increasingly busy world. Hence they too needed Iron Jelloids. They too could purchase health and achievement through the product.

Other Iron Jelloid advertisements were done in a similar vein, noting that Burrows had in fact been advised to take Jelloids in advance of his athletic feats. At a time when new advancements in food manufacturing seemed to promise much – a point evidenced in H.G. Wells' (1904) short story, 'The Food of the Gods', concerning a growth enhancing food – Iron Jelloids were presented as indispensable to any man engaged in strenuous activity. Tom Burrows, a man whose own physical endeavours promoted a great concern about his wellbeing, used the product. His endorsements routinely ended with the claim that, 'if you feel depressed, run-down, low-spirited, if you suffer from loss of appetite and indigestion, if you are easily exhausted and out-of-breath at the slightest exertion' ('Superb Vitality'), a course of Iron Jelloids was needed. Far from benign, these symptoms were related to a lack of vitality or vigour, two words often related to sexual potency. Physical culturists, like Burrows, were often presented as the archetypal vibrant male, owing to their physicality. To be like them, and thereby present a desirable masculinity, men needed Iron Jelloids. In medical journals, products like Iron Jelloids were advertised akin to important medicines (Mickalites, 2012: 109). In newspapers and popular periodicals, messages instead focused primarily on the duties and expectations placed on male and female bodies.

Like Bovril, Iron Jelloids later combined its great interest in the physicality of the male body with broader conceptions of British nationalism. Following the outbreak of the Great War in the summer of 1914, Iron Jelloids' advertisements moved away from physical culturists to

images of soldiers training for battle. Despite a change in appearance, at least in the sense of the men being advertised, the emphasis on the strength and sinew of the male body endured. Indeed Budd's (1997) treatment of military physical culture made clear that the ideal male body in the military was muscular. Marketed for 'strength and endurance' ('Iron Jelloids for Strength and Endurance', 1914), the product linked itself to ideas of courage and dash in the 'fighting line' before stressing once more the importance of 'vitality' (Ibid). Now seen as the 'driving force' behind military victory, Iron Jelloids and their vitality enhancing properties were affordable, transportable and, most importantly of all, effective. The stress on male bodies brimming with vitality, a point embodied by Tom Burrows, continued.

For women, motherhood and external beauty came to dominate advertisements. Advertisements in *Pearson's Weekly* in 1910 ('The Most Delightful Summer Pick Me Up', 1910), combined both aspects of womanhood when an Iron Jelloids advert featured the silhouette of a slim woman staring into the sunset with the claim that the wonderful 'summer pick me up' was suitable for all women. Another advertisement ('Iron Jelloids', 1912) featured Miss Marie Lohr, an Australian stage and later film actress, in her wedding dress extolling the benefits of Iron Jelloids. Even supposed medical endorsements relied on traditional ideas of femininity. In 1911, Dr. Andrew Wilson issued a short pamphlet on Iron Jelloids which spoke of the great assistance it provided to mothers, especially those with sick children. Seeking to appeal to caring ideals of motherhood, Wilson wrote of Iron Jelloids almost mythical sustenance capabilities as evidenced by its restorative effect on children. Such marketing continued during the Great War. The message of Wilson's prescriptions was clear, woman's greatest good was found in the caring of one's children. Returning to newspapers, a 1913 *Yorkshire Evening Post* ('For Anaemia and Weakness', 1913) advertisements depicted two women, dressed in their best dresses, giving each other health advice. Caringly, one is told by the other to take Iron Jelloids three times a day, and to give some to her child who is looking a little pale.



Fig. 5. Iron Jelloids and Motherhood. (For Anaemia and Weakness', 1913)

Iron Jelloids were a physical means of ensuring children's future health. Messages surrounding 'new woman' or suffragists were noticeably absent from an advertising campaign steeped in conservative values. This of course, is not particularly surprising. Kelley has found that Edwardian advertisers often utilised traditional, imperial messages to sell products (2010: 7-11). Iron Jelloids appeal to women, through their children and role in the home, re-iterated this point. Regardless of this conservatism, a clear attempt was made to instil the idea that one could purchase health through a course of Iron Jelloids. Where men were told the supplement would increase their vitality, women were told it would reform their own, and their children's, health.

Beauty also played a role. At a time of increased anxiety around the female body in Edwardian Britain (Dyhouse, 2013), precipitated by imperial concerns about the future of the British race, advertisements for Iron Jelloids featured testimonials from 'Ellis Pender' who claimed that 'everyone says how much better I am looking' following a course of Jelloids (Iron Jelloids', 1912). E. Birdseye from Kelvedon, was no longer 'white as a sheet', but rather 'brighter and different in every way' (Ibid.). People could not help but comment on her radiant beauty. Targeting tiredness and anaemia, Jelloids' benefits were presented as health rejuvenators which, more importantly, would improve one's beauty. Women would stop being 'pale, easily-out-of-breath, tired' etc. Instead they would re-emerge from their health crisis akin to the women dressed in their evening gowns found in Jelloids' advertisements. For men and women, Jelloids' sought to appeal to those interested in improving their health through the consumption of new, almost magical, nutritional supplements. In either case, advertisers sought

to imbue medical ideas with gender norms, often linking a praiseworthy masculinity or femininity to a body made virile through Iron Jelloids. For women, Iron Jelloids did not explicitly use physical culture figures but rather a discourse of physical culture namely that health could be, and often was, purchased.

Conclusion

In March 2018, *The New York Times* estimated that in the United States alone, the nutritional supplement industry was worth roughly \$133 billion (Molver, 2018). In Great Britain, Euromonitor estimated that the industry would be worth £358 million by the end of 2018 (Euromonitor, 2018). Today, many supplements are sold based on pseudo-scientific terms, while many more call on ideas of masculinity and femininity as forged through the body. They are promoted to consumers using actors, politicians, musicians and athletes. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing to the outbreak of the Great War, nutritional supplements began to promise British consumers seemingly endless health, unbounding vitality and perfect parenthood.

Confidently advertisers presented the message that life could be conquered through the consumption of new products born from modernity. In Plasmon, Bovril and Iron Jelloids, the renewal of one's energy, strength or life force was as simple as buying a product. Life, and the overcoming of one's obstacles, was no longer a mystery but something man, and science, had gained control over. Simultaneously, a great anxiety underpinned these discourses. Were individuals deprived of energy, listless and struggling to get through the day or were they vibrant, physically strong and rarely fatigued? Men were warned against the 'tell-tale' signs of weakness – baggy eyes, pale skin and a certain inertia towards life. To combat these dangers, and thereby live a rewarding existence, men were told to present their bodies in a certain way and consume products accordingly. As Britain crept ever closer to war, be it the Second South African War or the Great War, products began to invoke a patriotic body built along physical culture lines and sustained by their respective products.

For women, advertisers focused on their external beauty and role as mothers. Gone were concerns about one's business or soldierly duty. In their place was a heightened emphasis on one's skin, face and body size. Again there was a confidence that one could simply consume their way to greater health and a worry that one's existing body was not enough. The Janus faced nature of these advertisements spoke to broader societal contradictions and concerns as

found in Zweiniger-Bargielowska's (2010) work on this period. The sole role depicted by Plasmon, Bovril and Iron Jelloids for women, with one or two exceptions, tended to be domestic servitude or motherhood. In each instance the product was presented as a necessary bulwark to one's health and, stemming from this, their productivity. Whether acknowledged or not, the messages aimed at men and women were steeped in the language of physical culture. Mr. Duffy, a Joycean character, this time found in his 1914 work *The Dubliners*, was said to live just a short distance from his body, blissfully unaware of his physiological existence (Joyce, 2013: 55). On the other hand, physical culturists, and those who followed their advice, were keenly aware of their corporeal form. Thus, when physical culturists promoted supplements with reference to normative gender identities and the promise of a fuller life, many listened.

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