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***From a Strongman Comes Forth a New  
Woman: The Influences of Eugen Sandow on  
Women's Body Ideology, 1900-1925***

In the second half of the Nineteenth Century the ideal woman's body began to shift from the frail, corset-formed figure to a more healthy and robust model for womanhood. This aesthetic shift was initiated by male physical educators such as Dio

Lewis and Dudley Allen Sargent, and, at the turn of the century, by the eccentric publisher Bernarr Macfadden. Macfadden made the renovation of women's bodies a central plank in his platform to make America healthier and more eugenically sound. In *Physical Culture* magazine and through his "perfect woman" contests, documented by Jan Todd, in "Bernarr Macfadden: Reformer of Feminine Form", Macfadden's ideas about appropriate feminine fitness reached a large audience.

However, Macfadden was not without competitors for both the physical culture dollar and for dominance in the field in general. Across the Atlantic in England, Eugen Sandow, the professional strongwoman, was also working to reform men and women, and like his American competitor, Sandow began a magazine and published a number of books on exercise. In these publications, it is clear that Sandow, too, had definite ideas about what was beautiful and about what sorts of exercise were most appropriate for the "gentler sex". Although David Chapman's *Sandow the Magnificent* (1994) does an excellent job of documenting Sandow's contributions to the field of physical culture, the biography does not consider Sandow's interest in women's exercise and body ideology. Nor does it explore the influence Sandow had upon the women of his era. Chapman does mention that Sandow used both his wife and daughter to promote what he considered a popular conception of beauty. However, he does not take the further step and then analyze the physical ideal Sandow supported.

This paper attempts to fill this gap. It explores Sandow's relations to women's exercise and his conceptions of the ideal female body. Chapman's contention that Sandow was homosexual — or at least bisexual — makes this area of inquiry especially intriguing. So does the fact that at the time of his death his relationship with his family was so discordant that his wife and daughter saw that Sandow was buried in an unmarked grave and they refused to be associated with his name after his death.

This paper also contrasts Sandow's influence and conception of ideal womanhood to that of Bernarr Macfadden. Todd has argued that Macfadden influenced women's conception of an ideal through his magazine "Physical Culture" and his campaign against the corset. Macfadden's magazine lasted longer, but Sandow's was more prestigious. In fact, among the most significant aspects of Sandow's career are the high regard in which he and his ideas were held by the upper classes and the fact that his books had a worldwide circulation.

This paper is made possible by the donation of the Harold Weiss collection to the Todd-McLean Physical Culture Collection at the University of Texas at Austin in 1998. Mr. Weiss was an avid collector of Sandow memorabilia, and managed to bring together an almost full run of Sandow's British and American magazines.