

# The Way Food, Diet, and Exercise Are Communicated in Women's Health Magazine: From a Critical Perspective

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Women's Health Magazine creates a fantasy world for many women, in which they can attach themselves to the ideal beauty standards, and work towards reaching those ideals by engaging in diet and exercise. The advertisements in this magazine mostly give value to the Western ideal of white beauty, which is about the slenderness of the feminine physical body. However, the white beauty ideal makes women in different cultures such as the Turkish and Latin women to resemble this ideal by changing their darker hair colors to blonde, changing their darker eye colors to blue, and changing their curvy body types to slim; even though, their curviness represents sexual desire in their specific culture, and thus it leads these women to lose their cultural characteristics that make them more feminine (Mendible, 2007, pp. 3-8). In other words, the white ideal beauty causes many women in other cultures to have some kind of cultural assimilation in terms of their own beauty standards, and instead cause them to embrace an international standard of beauty that is Western, and many women such as the Turkish and Hispanic, as well as, the Korean, Chinese, and Japanese, undergo some kind of a process of cultural assimilation related to their cultural body characteristics, as a result (Yan & Bissell, 2014, p. 197). In other words, these women lose their indigenous body characteristics and they instead try to resemble the slender ideal body of the West with the spread of globalization, which has a major influence on that (Hoskins, 2014, p. 110). The aim of this paper is to show how the Women's Health Magazine, a popular contemporary magazine, crates a discourse on food, diet, and exercise, which have a major influence in shaping and assimilating the body type of Turkish women from a critical perspective.

*Keywords:* women's health, magazine, food, diet, exercise, body

## Women's Magazines

Women magazines are commodities, which are designed aesthetically with vivid and shiny colors, and with smooth and high-quality paper covers containing the popular images of stunningly beautiful celebrities and which are designed to draw the attention of their readers on the shelves of bookshops or at the magazine corners of the supermarkets, while creating many sensations in the observer at first glance (Iqani, 2012, pp. 61-70).

In general, magazines are categorized according to the topics that they discuss and they are separated as fashion, lifestyle, health, food, and technology, etc., according to the target audience they are addressing. Among them, contemporary women's magazines deal with many issues such as how to have a fit and attractive

body by doing exercise, how to maintain a healthy diet to lose weight, which fashion trends to follow this season, what kind of apparel and cosmetic products to shop at department stores, how to meet with the man in their dreams with the help of practical piece of advice, how to live a pleasurable life, how to attract your partner by cooking good food, and how to spend their leisure time efficiently (Corrigan, 1997, p. 88).

In other words, women magazines inform the female readers in a friendly tone about these various issues and they educate women about how to become desirable individuals in society (Iqani, 2012, p. 104). Women's magazines imply to women that if they do not take care of their bodies with diets, exercise, cosmetics, plastic surgery, and fashion, they would not fit into the ideal concept of an individual in society who has the proper characteristics, and instead their bodies will decrease their worth (Corrigan, 1997, p. 158). The aim of this paper is to show how a contemporary women's magazine named Women's Health Turkey, which is mainly based on diet, and fitness; in fact, influence how Turkish women develop certain behaviors towards food. Since food advertisements and culinary sections in contemporary women's magazines have not been frequently analyzed (Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999, p. 111), the aim of this paper is to shed light on this issue by bringing a critical point of view. With this aim, a literature review is put forward.

### **Women's Health Magazine**

As a guide for many women, Women's Health Magazine, a contemporary and popular women's magazine, often talks about why being on a diet is essential for achieving a fit body and it continually motivates women to be on a diet and watch their weight all the time. The culinary pages in the magazine promise women how to lose weight in a short amount of time and they tell women how to maintain their lightweight for a long time as long as support with exercise. The culinary section in this women's magazine often provides its female readers a healthy diet based on eating healthy meals starting from morning to night including the snacks, and it tries to change the daily eating habits of its readers.

Women's Health Magazine offers its readers the recipes of healthy dishes and beverages, which will help them to detox their bodies and will help them to lose weight. Detoxing is about abandoning consuming food, which contains artificial additives or ingredients for a period of certain time; instead, it is about purifying the body with "super" food, which contains high nutrition, anti-oxidants, and which nourishes the skin with its anti-aging elements, and which lastly helps digestion (Woolf, 2014, pp. 77-78). Furthermore, the fruits and vegetables that are found in the recipes of healthy meals or detox drinks usually have special ingredients such as expensive vegetables, exotic fruits, or special nuts, and mainly protein dishes such as meat, fish, and chicken. Also, the ingredients are not often found in common markets, but they are mainly found in exclusive supermarkets, thus the magazine mainly appeals to higher classes.

The magazine usually mentions about the benefits of fruits and vegetables in different seasons and talks about why they should be consumed in certain amounts in a detox diet, as they will help women to have a fit body and slim belly while they will also help them to have a shiny skin. It finally provides a healthy eating plan, which is separated into different meals and snacks during the day. In other words, the magazine normalizes dieting as a daily activity, and it shows dieting as a positive behavior of reaching health (Conason, 2015, p. 147). The magazine also tells their female readers how many calories that they need to take during each meal from each food that they consume and helps them to make calculation of their daily calorie intake.

### **The Approach of Women's Health Magazine Towards Ideal Beauty**

Many women usually start dieting with excitement at the beginning of the week and they go shopping to the supermarkets to provide the food in the diet list at the previous weekend, and afterwards they prepare themselves the meals in the diet list during the week. However, once dieting gets tougher in time, then they become fed up with it, and they become depressed as they think that they will not be able to accomplish it until the end and will not be able to get rid of the fat in their bodies. Therefore, the way that this magazine handles dieting can be criticized from a different perspective because showing dieting is so simple, stress-free, uncomplicated, and fast-resulted on the surface can create some problems and lead women engage in unhealthy eating behaviors such as anorexia or bulimia, or excess physical activity or even using diet pills (Kim & Lennon, 2006, p. 345).

In fact, the editors of the magazines, in other words, people working in the mass media, are the ones who often create the standards of the ideal white beauty for average women to be accomplished, and they make average women passionate about being thin and being beautiful as these editors show that these are the criteria which make average women become desirable individuals in the society and they imply that women should struggle to achieve this by making it an idealized aim for themselves (Yan & Bissell, 2014, pp. 194-196).

Nevertheless, the pictures of celebrities on the cover of women's magazines are taken in professional photo studios while the photographer with the best lighting angles applies many different photo-taking techniques; afterwards, he uses photo-shop techniques to eliminate the flaws on the faces and bodies of the celebrities and then the perfect image which decorates the cover of the magazine is formed eventually by creating a feeling of desire and admiration in the average female readers (Iqani, 2012, p. 95).

In the culinary section, Women's Health Magazine often talks about nutritious food, which will detox the skin and will help the skin to shine and look younger, and thus it usually gives the recipe for a shake made out of different vegetables or fruits. The magazine gives a priority for women to look younger and to protect their young appearance no matter they age every single year. In a way, the magazine reflects the value that society gives to women as it accepts young-looking woman as attractive and appealing (Woolf, 2014, p. 160).

Thus the magazine implies that women should always give an effort to look younger by using a variety of anti-aging cosmetic products and by detoxing their bodies with nutritious food. Wilson and Blackhurst (1999, p. 115) underline that women's magazines set certain unobtainable beauty standards that they expect women to achieve, and this is also reflected in the food advertisements. The magazines praise the white thin beauty ideal by showing the bodies of glamorous models and they give instructions on how to achieve such a body by preparing sections of food and exercise that are based on getting slimmer (Spencer, Russell, & Barker, 2013, p. 2359).

Women's Health Magazine shows dieting is something necessary for reaching to the ideal white beauty and it presents dieting as a long-term goal of many women by educating them how to count calories with the diet instructions on its culinary pages, and it implies that women need to make their body size smaller by watching their weight all the time (Blood, 2005, p. 84).

According to Wilson and Blackhurst (1999, p. 113), the advertisers preparing the food advertisements taking place in women's magazines do not feel any discomfort from the fact that they disturb the unconscious of many women as they make them feel dissatisfied about their body image. In fact, they make many women

being obsessed with how they look in terms of shape. It also makes women guilty about eating too much since women feel anxiety about how they will control their weight, as they are afraid of gaining too much weight.

### **The Behavior That Women Develop Towards Food**

Thus, many women who diet abstain from telling that they are on a diet to people who ask about it; instead, they prefer saying that they are eating normal as usual; however, they in fact categorize some food as good or bad, and they avoid some foods as much as possible, and they feel guilty if they eat those food that they have categorized as bad, and this way they try to restrict themselves and feel relieved (Conason, 2015, p. 152).

Foods, such as high-fattening categorized as bad may bring pleasure and happiness at first taste; however, it immediately brings feelings such as regret and guilt after one consumes them because they are most highly calorific, low nutritious, and unhealthy (Lupton, 1996, p. 1). Furthermore, the culinary sections of the magazines imply women that they need to feel guilty and embarrassed out of the act of eating too much, and thus they need to repress and control their appetite by limiting their calorie intake since the other way signifies not only a weak personality and some weak characteristics such as laziness to do exercise (Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999, p. 115).

In other words, the main idea of protecting the moral worth of the body depends on saying no to excess food that is tempting by reducing the calorie intake, and this also has psychological foundations because it is about controlling the human instincts (Germov & Williams, 2017, p. 235). However, women who restrict themselves with diets are tempted to try high-calorie food more often on the contrary, and they will have thinking about high-calorie food by being attracted to them (Conason, 2015, p. 155).

### **The Way Dieting Is Presented on Food Advertisements in the Magazine**

By providing a healthy style of eating, Women's Health Magazine defines women with the things that they should not eat because the things which women normally eat define who they are in their actual life and thus through distinguishing and eliminating certain foods above others, the magazine shows women how they can attach themselves to this new diet-style of living (Belasco, 2002, p. 2).

However, food advertisements related to dieting in Women's Health Magazine create a misconception that dieting is so easy, painless, quick, and fast resulted that any woman can start any time even though dieting requires perseverance and determination (Kim & Lennon, 2006, p. 345). In other words, dieting often turns out to be a boring and depressing thing for most of the women because it is hard to follow the diet list every single day, and most of the diets are usually abandoned in the half process or it does not fully reach to its aim all the time (Woolf, 2014, p. 58).

Furthermore, Wilson and Blackhurst (1999, p. 120) mention that the food advertisements are probably more dangerous than fashion and beauty advertisements because they are closely related to the eating behaviors of women as they show what kind of food a woman should eat and how many calories a woman should take by dieting herself to reach the white thin beauty ideal, which may lead to disordered eating behaviors as a result.

Food advertisements related with dieting usually cause two different behaviors in women; one of them is that women can start dieting through exercise which is an active way of reaction while the other is about using diet pills and other weight loss products which is a passive way of reaction (Kim & Lennon, 2006, p. 345). Doing exercise requires one to go to the gym or outdoors and it is about burning calories, while using diet pills is about trying to find a solution without exercise while harming the body.

Woolf (2014, pp. 59-60) explains the nature of diets in a couple of elements and accordingly most of the diets are punishing because one has to endeavor its tediousness, one has to stay hungry for a long time, one has to suppress her cravings, one has to stay away from certain foods such as foods containing carbs, sugar, and fat, one has to obey the strict diet list without making excuses, and one has to deal with its psychological side effects such as feeling emotionally down.

Women who diet always believe in the idea that through dieting they can shape their bodies and they can bring into the size that is praised by the society, and thus dieting is an alternative other than the choice of exercise (Emmons, 1992 cited Kim & Lennon, 2006, p. 348). Furthermore, cosmetic and plastic surgery, liposuction and botox are shown to the average female consumer as a chance for transforming the undesired, loose, and unpleasant body to the ideal one by reproducing it to fit into a new social class (Paterson, 2006, p. 109). Nevertheless, women who constantly diet to reach a slender ideal body image engage in unhealthy eating behaviors compared to women who mainly diet because they are mostly concerned about eating healthy food for the best of their bodies (Kim & Lennon, 2006, p. 346). Then, these women usually deal with eating disorders.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary women's magazines, which are printed, are considered valuable sources for research because they include many articles, images, advertisements, and editorials on diverse topics (Braun, Clarke, & Gray, 2017, p. 123). Women's Health Magazine has been analyzed from these different angles because not enough emphasis has been given to the culinary sections in the magazine, which shape the eating and exercise behaviors of many female readers. In other words, in the literature, not enough attention has been paid so far to the food advertisements and culinary pages taking place in women's magazines, which look very appealing with the healthy recipes, and colorful and vivid food images that are ornamenting the pages.

Most of the food advertisements show being slim as sexy while they show being fat as something horrible and they imply that having a fat body is something unappealing, and if a woman has fat on her body then she has a problem (Kwan & Graves, 2013, pp. 25-27). Having a fit body has an influence in how women will feel themselves better and confident for the gaze of other people. Thus, the discourse on the magazine continually develops on the issues of how to diet and exercise, how to lose weight, and how to put a woman's body into shape.

The magazine often advises women to watch their weight all the time by eating certain light meals and drinking certain healthy drinks helping to detox the body. Nevertheless, the magazine often shows dieting as such an easy thing, which women do not have to worry about by getting into stress as Kim and Lennon (2006) previously have mentioned. However, dieting is, in fact, a painful thing especially for women who have excess weight. Therefore, the magazine always puts ideal beauty standards in front of women, and it expects them to reach those high standards by looking good and young.

Therefore, the female readers are implicitly advised that they need to groom, shop, diet, do fitness, and take care of their bodies to preserve a perfect image that is related with the white ideal beauty. However, the women who do over-exercise and diet, unfortunately, engage in unhealthy behaviors such as eating disorders, as a result. In other words, the magazine expects Turkish women to transform their bodies to a lighter size and resemble the Western ideal of beauty, which not only means culturally assimilating the ircular body but also anticipating to invite diseases such as anorexia or bulimia in the long term.

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