

# Manna from the Glossy Pulpit: Food Advertising in Women's Magazines

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## Recommended Citation

Reeves, Kira-Lynn, "Manna from the Glossy Pulpit: Food Advertising in Women's Magazines" (2012). *Master's Theses (2009 -)*. Paper 175.  
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MANNA FROM THE GLOSSY PULPIT: FOOD ADVERTISING  
IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate school,  
Marquette University,  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

December 2012

ABSTRACT  
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Kira-Lynn Reeves

Marquette University, 2012

Women's magazines reach millions of readers each month, and have been the subject of many academic inquiries from media effects studies to feminist analyses. While many studies have investigated female readers' experience with these texts, or examined the advertising content of women's magazines, little research to date has focused on food advertising. This liberal feminist critique explores the experience of reading the 2011 issues of the three popular women's magazines, *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle*. Using Stern's (1996) textual analysis method for advertisements, this study examines how food advertisements in women's magazines encourage women to think about food and eating.

Food advertisements tend to align with the overall narrative constructed by the magazine in which they appear: food is accessorized in *Glamour* advertisements as a means for enhancing one's life; in *SELF*, food is presented as both fuel and reward for exercising; and in *Family Circle*, food represents a mother's love and a woman's realm as the family's grocery shopper, meal planner, and primary cook. Food takes on multiple meanings through advertising and frequently suggests that a woman's food choices are indicative of her worth, personality, or success as a mother, for example. Possible interpretations and implications of these food advertising observations are explored.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hunger makes successful women feel like failures (Wolf, 1991, p. 197).

Picking up a Friday night Ben & Jerry's fix at the campus convenience store, my college roommate and I each grabbed a magazine as we passed the gleaming display: *Vanity Fair* for her, *Glamour* for me, shimmering under the florescent lights like treasure. We did so swiftly and silently, neither one of us making a comment or thinking twice. Grabbing a magazine was like grabbing a bottle of water: we seemed to do so instinctively, almost catatonically, with both a certain reverence and inherent need. Simultaneously, it felt like a guilty pleasure: indulging in a frivolous purchase was juxtaposed to feelings of urgency and necessity, like answering the magazine's beckoning call to be apprised of the latest fashion and femme fatale stories within. Back in our dorm room, my roommate and I would cut out the glamorous, fantasy-style photo shoots to decorate our walls. I let out the occasional sigh, but would not say what was on my mind out of embarrassment, feeling weak as I mentally compared my features to the fiercely stunning models in the advertisements. The lithe arms, the tanned and toned legs—so different from my inherited thick inner thighs—shouted at me from the page, pointing out what I am not, declaring what I should be. The ice cream suddenly soured in my mouth, reminding me that foods like this won't help me look like *that*.

My silence gave credence to the truth of these emotions, deepening the self-consciousness I felt: at 19 years old I was 185 pounds, thighs dimpled with cellulite, calves and arms stocky, undefined, not shapely. Though I miraculously passed through high school without so much as a second thought to my weight or appearance, only

vaguely acknowledging the incredible smallness of the many 90-pound girls in the hallway who seemed to attract guys, slowly my eyes were opening. There was a whole skinny world out there: a world of salad-eaters and runners, activities I had previously found repulsive, preferring three hours of swim practice to running a single mile. Now, that skinny world was spreading before me like a giant chasm of hope and health, sexiness and success. It seemed I had no choice but to jump in.

Six short years ago, I moved away from home and into the college dorm—a setting both destructive and distracting to many that proved to be a place where I thrived. Academically, emotionally, and physically, I embarked on four years of wonderful change and discovery. I achieved high grades, secured great college jobs and internships, and lost nearly 50 pounds. By graduation, a time to celebrate the pinnacle of all these accomplishments, I was no longer the happy college student, proud and content to look back on what I had done. For reasons unknown to me and alarming to my family, I had become almost compulsive—obsessed—with calories, exercise, and a number other than my GPA: my weight. When I should have been cheering myself on the loudest, I was darkly whispering insidious suggestions about the size of my thighs and the sin of eating those cookies, that ice cream, this sandwich. Unwanted, unbidden, and seemingly uncontrollable, these thoughts pursued me post-college, at times distracting me from my work, at other times, demoralizing me into an unfriendly person fixated on one goal: *getting thinner.*

Food became a nemesis. Could I feel just as full without the almond butter on my celery?, I wondered, or only drink coffee for lunch? Just how little could I eat in a day, waking up to an even flatter stomach the next morning? Denying food went hand-in-hand

with seeing lower numbers on the scale, and a praising rather than punishing voice in my head. I felt powerful: while others relied on bread, I eschewed carbohydrates and relied on myself. While I watched people at the grocery store happily packing up their ice cream, cookies, and crackers, I bought my salad greens and nonfat yogurt with conviction. Over time, however, the sinfully caloric items in other shopper's carts grew appetizing, and instead of feeling proud that I would not have to burn off *those* calories, I grew resentful of the vicious voice always demanding more miles and less food. I, once a united front dedicated to my own health and happiness, had forged a terrible split into two camps. It took years before I began to understand why.

Disordered eating was not my problem, I told myself and those close to me: disordered *thinking* was, and I did not know how to stop it. What had happened to the successful, self-loving college girl who took care of her body, was proud of her body, but was not a slave to her body? I had made a positive life change by losing weight; now it had turned against me. Too many nights, when I would normally be out running to combat the stress of the day, I crumpled onto the couch, too lightheaded and hungry to move. Hunger had become my new ally: it worked faster than running, was more efficient than weightlifting. Hunger meant seeing 142 on the scale tomorrow, maybe lower. Hunger meant weight loss.

### *Background of this Study*

In her 2007 book *Perfect Girl, Starving Daughter*, feminist author Courtney Martin unpacks the complexity of hunger in the lives of young women today as it intersects with the emotional and physical self-destruction running rampant through this demographic. Body image issues, eating disorders, and an overzealous need to achieve all



stem from the intense hunger women have adopted in their quest for perfection: “We grow hungrier and hungrier with no clue what we are hungry for. The holes inside of us grow bigger and bigger” (Martin, 2007, p. 21). Women attempt to fill these holes “with food, blue ribbons, sexual attraction, [and] trendy clothes” (Martin, 2007, p.6), but the craters inside remain, blasted out by the exhausting and continuous effort to be the most effortlessly beautiful, smartest, and strongest girl. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1993) also cites the intrinsic nature of hunger in a woman’s life, especially as it is captured and recapitulated by Western advertisers who pit women against their own appetites, depicting hunger as “an insistent, powerful force with a life of its own” (p. 103)—a force only the most in-control women can occasionally manage.

Physical and metaphorical hunger does not only have to do with food or the drive for achievement in a woman’s life; it is a cultural imperative and a defining aspect of femininity. Hunger and hatred of fat, as Martin (2007) notes, has become part of every young girl’s education: as she is introduced to the wonders of biology, she learns how to put her body into ketosis, torching fat while carbohydrate-starved. Women learn to count calories as adeptly as they balance their checkbooks, to compare themselves to other women as constantly as they draw breath. Clinical nutritionist Alexis Beck (2010) notes an increase in women who may not meet every criterion necessary to be diagnosed with an eating disorder, but obviously suffer from a debilitating obsession with their weight, eating, and excessive exercise. This phenomenon, defined as *disordered eating*, describes any abnormal eating practices (CDPH, 2000), such as eliminating entire food groups, rigid calorie restriction, fasting, using diet pills, and avoiding social situations that involve food (Karras, 2008; Noll & Friederickson, 1998). Naomi Wolf calls such women

“mentally anorexic” (1991, p. 199) and describes the broader impact of this physical and mental hunger on women and society:

She is politically castrate, with exactly enough energy to do her schoolwork, neatly and completely, and run around the indoor track in eternal circles. She has no energy to get angry or get organized, to chase sex, to yell through a bullhorn, asking for money for...women’s studies programs or to know where the women professors are. (p.199)

The war women wage on their hunger and their fat inevitably leads them to split into two distinct people—a phenomenon noted by Wolf (1991) and echoed by Martin (2007). Wolf (1991) remembers the childhood moment she discovered a fundamental shift had occurred in her teenage cousin:

Still compact in a one-piece kid’s body, I was alarmed to think that womanhood involved breaking apart into pieces that floated around since my cousin seemed to be trying to hold herself together by a feat of concentration...that could only mean, I thought, that when I was a woman, I would want to get out of my own body into some little kid’s. (p. 201)

Martin (2007) argues that this ‘breaking apart’ involves becoming two warring people in one body: the *perfect girl* and the *starving daughter*. The perfect girl heaps accolade upon achievement in sports, academics, music, physical attractiveness, and work, siphoning her strength and energy from the *starving daughter* she constantly abuses. The starving daughter wants a rest, not a six-mile run after only four hours of sleep, not *another* skipped dinner. But the perfect girl will have only strict discipline and self-deprivation. On occasion when the starving daughter musters the strength to resist her tormentor, indulging in ice cream or hitting the snooze button, the perfect girl exacts punishment severe enough to keep the starving daughter silently cowering in the corner once more.

There are moments when we read the honestly written word of another and think she must have stolen her material straight out of our own minds. Reading Martin's *perfect girl, starving daughter* dichotomy was such a moment for me: her honest writing lifted the bewildering body image battle going on inside myself out of abstraction and into accessible reality. Illuminated at last, I could begin the long, meandering process of analyzing my experiences, mining my memory for key points of influence and impact. Encouraged by the brave women who had shared their stories before me, captivated by the personal truth I found in the feminist perspective, and angry about what I had just begun to learn about body image, the media, and the women at their intersection, I dedicated the rest of my graduate school work to the study of how the media communicate to women about food, eating, and their bodies.

Unexceptional as my struggle with eating, exercise, and self-acceptance has become, repeating itself many times over in dorm rooms and waiting rooms and grocery lines throughout the nation, virtually no woman—or man, for that matter—escapes the very personal pang of disliking his or her own body at some time in his or her life. From the occasional complaint about a bad hair day to dark, debilitating disease, women disproportionately suffer from unhealthy relationships with food, eating disorders, and lifelong cycles of binging, dieting, and self-deprivation. Some women starve themselves to death; others purge their food, shamed by their appetite, disgusted by their lack of willpower to resist eating in the first place. Still others gorge themselves on enormous quantities of food—meals meant to serve a family of four—in an attempt to fill the void left by the beauty standards their dimpled, flawed bodies fail to meet.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Hungry, and still dissatisfied with our reflections, we have become a society obsessed with our bodies and hell-bent on changing them to match the culturally established parameters of attractiveness. We join gyms in droves; we try pills and push-ups, calorie counting and cardio. Americans spent an estimated \$46 billion on the diet industry in 2005 (Hoffman & Rose, 2006), a figure consistent with research projections over a decade ago (Smolak, 1996; Garner & Wooley, 1991). According to the Association for Eating Disorder Awareness (AEDA, 2012), 80 percent of women in the United States currently want to lose weight, while 80 percent of men want to either lose weight or gain muscle. And in a nation facing the world's most severe obesity epidemic (OCED, 2012; CDC, 2011), we may be inclined to ask, *is this a problem?*

Unfortunately, just like the overeating that produced our excess pounds in the first place, research indicates Americans are inclined to take dieting too far. Dieting is the number one behavior likely to lead to an eating disorder (AEDA, 2012), and more than one in three of moderate dieters will progress to pathological dieting (AEDA, 2012; NEDA, 2010; Shisslak & Crago, 1995). By the time our children reach adolescence, they have tried a variety of destructive dieting practices in attempt to control their weight, such as smoking, skipping meals, and vomiting (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005). Alarmingly, many studies have discovered that regular or constant dieting, fueled by the desire to be thinner, is beginning as early as age six; fourth graders who should be learning languages and long division are instead focused on the size of their stomachs (Gehrman, et al., 2006; Davison, Markey, & Birch, 2000; Kater, Rohwer, & Levine, 2000; Gustafson-Larson & Terry, 1992; Mellin, Irwin, & Scully, 1992; Collins, 1991). The National

Eating Disorders Association (NEDA, 2005a) reports that an estimated 10 million females and one million males struggle with a clinically diagnosed eating disorder such as anorexia—the deadliest of all mental illnesses. Millions more battle binge eating disorders; across all categories, an inestimable number of cases go unreported or undiagnosed each year, as patients must meet *all* criterion to be diagnosed with an eating disorder (M. DiMattina, personal communication, October 4, 2011). Recent research demonstrates that eating disorders, once thought to be a ‘white woman’ disease, do not discriminate based on race, gender, or culture (Martin, 2007; NEDA, 2005b).

From dieting and disordered eating to excessive exercise and extreme makeovers, we are living in a media-saturated culture that normalizes these self-destructive behaviors and stretches them across every demographic. New recruits join the “cult of thinness” each day (Hesse-Biber, 2007); in recent months, both ABC (Lovett, 2012) and NBC News (Deam, 2012) ran reports on eating disorder trends and anorexic magazine models, now considered “plus size” if they wear a size six. Our distracting and deadly preoccupations with our bodies, food, and eating remain elusively multifaceted, hard to predict and harder to control, triggered by biological, psychological, and social factors such as the media (NEDA, 2004a). As my literature review will show, and groups like the NEDA and AEDA confirm, the media contribute to the “narrow definitions of beauty” and “cultural pressures that glorify ‘thinness’ (NEDA, 2004b) that impact all of us. The average American spends 20 percent of each day watching TV (Nielsen, 2012), surfs the Internet for over two hours a day (Frederickson, 2010), and may see up to 5,000 ads per day, especially if living in an urban area (Story, 2007). This constant consumption leaves us defenseless against media’s version of reality. Other nations around the world are

beginning to recognize this pervasive influence as worthy of correction: Israeli lawmakers have banned clinically underweight models from advertising shoots and fashion shows (Ostroff, 2012), while the United Kingdom has cracked down on overly-retouched advertisements, and continues to consider placing black box warning labels on fashion magazines (Sweney, 2011; Crumley, 2009), all in an effort to steer our vision away from the distorted and back to the authentic.

Despite the exponential growth of social media web sites and constant connectivity via Smartphones, American teenagers still spend four hours per week reading magazines (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Recently, the *Miss Representation* organization, advocating for gender equality and media literacy, reported that after only three minutes of paging through a fashion magazine, three out of four teenage girls experienced feelings of depression, shame, and inadequacy (March, 2012). In 1997, researchers found that after only 13 minutes of exposure to fashion magazines, college-age women reported less body satisfaction and a heightened desire to lose weight (Turner & Hamilton). Magazine executives claim readership has increased by 11 percent over the past decade in their “Magazines: The Power of Print” advertising campaign (Adams & Ovide, 2010). The Magazine Publishers Association (henceforth MPA, 2011a) confirms that magazines reach millions of readers each month through subscriptions and pass-along readership—sharing the magazine with a friend (McCracken, 1993). While no aspect of the media can be excluded as we attempt to understand how our culture is impacted by the images we consume on a daily basis, magazines continue to be a vital yet understudied aspect of the media landscape, particularly when it comes to questions of food advertising.

I chose the religious metaphor for the title of this work because I wanted to capture not only the persuasive power I believe media, like women's magazines, exert in our lives, but also the way we have embraced this influence over our perceptions and choices. Magazines address our greatest culturally induced dilemmas: the size of our waists, weight of our wallets, and wealth of material possessions (Winship, 1987). From editorial copy offering "This month's guarantee: Lose weight faster!" (*SELF*, November, 2011, p. 10) to the countless advertisements for makeup, fashion, and food, magazines provide us with a cornucopia of information we devour like holy manna. Specific to food, magazines provide an abundance of ads, articles, and recipes. Sometimes, these ads seem congruent with other messages in the magazine about getting "summer-tone[d] in no time" (*Glamour*, May, 2011, p. 170) or "feel[ing] calm and happy" (*SELF*, July, 2011, cover); at other times, food advertising and other eating-related content seems contradictory to the magazine's emphasis on slim silhouettes, intense exercise, and couture fashions for the petite.

Whatever form body dissatisfaction takes—clinical eating disorders or a debilitating preoccupation with food, exercise, and her reflection—women live within this epidemic of damaging behaviors, and our self-esteem continues to rely heavily on our body image (Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010; Fallon, 1994). According to a recent survey by *Glamour* magazine (Dreisbach, 2011a), 97 percent of women think at least one devastatingly cruel thought about their own body every day. Food is often involved in the criticism, as one woman reports her personal mantra: "Fat ass. Don't eat that. You could probably use an eating disorder" (Dreisbach, 2011a, p. 306). Food, the sacrificial lamb of weight loss, and its restriction is the number one way women learn to

control their waistlines and for many it becomes a life-long obsession. Given that women may frequently find themselves at odds with food in our appearance-obsessed, media saturated culture, how food is represented and advertised to a mainly female audience becomes an interesting area of investigation.

This study seeks to further understand how food advertising in women's magazines—that is, publications primarily aimed at females—communicate with women about food and eating. In a culture where women may find themselves affected by a rigorous physical ideal and a subsequent negative relationship with food, how food advertisements present their product and establish different contexts for food and eating in a woman's life becomes of interest. Food advertising takes up considerable real estate in women's magazines (McCracken, 1993) and is important to examine given our society's widespread, fractured relationship with food, resulting in the polarizing extremes of the 'supersized and super-skinny.' In the following study, a feminist critique of food advertisements and the women's magazines they appear in, I analyze advertisements for the messages they send to women about food, and connect these interpretations to the broader messages about food and body shape. I will continue to analyze and incorporate my own body image, eating, and media experiences recorded in a personal journal throughout this process, aiming to more deeply understand our culture as well as disclose my stories as so many other brave women have done before me. A feminist critique, informed by feminist theory, traditionally aims to interpret the representation of women's lives in a given text and offer a new perspective that may affect other readers' interpretations and change how they approach future texts. The liberal feminist perspective that informs this critique, explored further in Chapter Two,



respects the importance of the individual and encourages the sharing of personal experiences as a valid method for understanding the world. The inclusion of my own autoethnographic content in this study is thus relevant to this feminist critique as I incorporate key moments and memories from my life that have influenced my relationship with food, my body, and my understanding of how I am supposed to relate to food as a woman living in this society. Chapter Two will discuss further the relevant research on women's magazines, body image, and food advertising.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly (Schmich, 1997).

### *Introduction*

Women's magazines, publications aimed primarily at women, have been a widely circulated staple of the American media landscape since the end of the Civil War (Zuckerman, 1998). Since that time, these magazines have been addressing social, political, and cultural topics of interest to females, and selling advertising space in order to stay in print. As prolific sources of information and entertainment consumed by millions of readers each year (MPA, 2011a; Storey, 2009), women's magazines warrant consideration from a variety of communication standpoints, including inquires on how these texts fit into the lives of their female readers and how women use, relate to, or reject magazine messages. In 2011, over 300 million magazines were circulated in the United States, 90 percent of which were delivered right to our doors through paid subscriptions (MPA, 2011c). Four of the top 10 circulated journals in the U.S. are women's magazines, including titles such as *Family Circle* and *Better Homes & Gardens*. The women's magazines alone represent over 82 million of the magazines being delivered to home mailboxes all over the nation (MPA, 2011d).

As Mary Ellen Zuckerman notes in her historical account of women's magazines, these publications "survive, flourish...[and] endure" (1998, p. 241); indeed, titles like *Better Homes & Gardens* and *Good Housekeeping* have been in circulation since 1922 and 1885, respectively (MPA, 2011a). The continuous popularity and longevity of

women's magazines in particular make them impossible to ignore when considering any question of gender-oriented media, and how these media influences our cultural understanding of our roles, bodies, and lives. Like many scholars whose work will be reviewed below, Zuckerman (1998) highlights the magazine's ability to not only reflect but direct the discourse women absorb on various issues, including beauty standards. The media are now considered as much a risk factor in the development of low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating as other sociological and psychological factors (NEDA, 2010). A substantial body of research shows a connection between media exposure and women's body dissatisfaction—a key factor in the development of pathological dieting habits and eating disorders (AEDA, 2012; NEDA, 2010; Pipher, 1995). How issues of diet, eating, obesity, and thinness are handled by media is a chief concern for our society; yet, food advertising, a prominent feature in women's magazines and our media landscape, remains underexplored in terms of the narrative constructed by food ads and the messages they send on these topics.

To date, content analyses have quantified the most common types of food advertising appearing in different women's magazines (e.g., Lee, Bean, Galliford & Underwood, 2009; Mastin & Campo, 2006) and other studies have combed television and print food advertising for health and nutritional claims (Zwier, 2009; Jones, Andrews, Tapsell, Williams, & McVie, 2008; Jones, Wiese, & Fabrianesi, 2008; King & Hill, 2008). However, little research has explored the nature and tone of food advertisements aimed at women. The present research is important because it seeks to illuminate this aspect of women's magazines and the messages within food advertisements that may play a role in the construction of women's relationships with food, eating, and ultimately, their

bodies. In the following sections, the relevant literature on women's magazines, food advertising, and the link between the media and women's body perceptions will be explored. First, feminist scholarship on issues of women's bodies in the media will be reviewed.

### *Theoretical & Conceptual Overview*

Historically, no group has more zealously identified the conceptualization, representation, and controversy surrounding the female body as an issue of its own than feminist scholars. From Susie Orbach's landmark text, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978), to the more recent work of feminist author Courtney Martin (2007), the issue of female representation as framed by media has rigorously been studied under the feminist lens. Feminist theory is composed of a variety of 'feminisms' embodying various goals, ideas, and schools of thought concerning equal treatment of individuals in our society regardless of gender and other characteristics such as race, class, and sexual identification. Different feminisms may address, frame, and analyze societal issues, such as equal pay for women and men, in varying ways. I draw on liberal feminism specifically in this work: the liberal feminist perspective believes in the rights of the individual, including the right to equality for women and men, eschewing social injustices based on laws and culturally-reinforced gender roles that empower men and disenfranchise women (Tong, 2009). Also, the autoethnographic portions I incorporate into this work, taken from my personal journal kept throughout this process, reflects the liberal feminist perspective's concentration on and deference to the experiences of an individual. Liberal feminism also dedicates energy to the issue of the female body and the continual cultural revision of its 'ideal,' arguing that a woman's body must be her own to define and use (Baumgardner & Richards,

2000). That “nearly every civilization has sought to impose a uniform shape upon the female form” (Choi, 2000, p.63) makes the issue no less serious today as women continue going to excruciating, even deadly, lengths to conform. Liberal feminism helps me to answer questions about how women are communicated to and represented in food advertisements in women’s magazines—how a woman’s relationship with food is represented in these ads. To me, feminism in part means advocating for a woman’s individual right to be free from a negative body image (and subsequent destructive behaviors) that are thrust upon her by an unachievable physical ideal perpetuated by media. A disproportionate level of importance is placed on the female form compared to men, and no feminist perspective would suggest the solution lies in making men’s bodies just as objectified as women’s. Rather, a liberal feminist seeks equality for women *and* men by liberating both genders from an obsessively strict set of physical ideals. Women can only be truly equal, and at equal advantage, in our society when their worth is not established by appearances and their energy is not primarily funneled into how they look.

To regain control of the female form’s representation, feminist authors like Naomi Wolf (1991) seek to explain exactly how the female body comes to be under societal control. Wolf’s concept of “the beauty myth” postulates that images of beauty continue to be used against women in our society by establishing an ever-narrowing set of parameters that women feel compelled to live within. Though Wolf’s idea is not new nor a peer-reviewed academic theory, it remains a critical text for many women who find that it “resonate[s] with [their] own lifetime of experiences” (Kite, 2012). The beauty myth, Wolf argues, is the counterpoint to every feminist achievement: “for every feminist action, there is a beauty myth reaction” (1991, p.28), which restricts the acceptable

parameters of femininity, thus keeping women distracted and exhausted trying to achieve the beauty standards, rather than seizing political opportunities or taking on challenging projects. Evidence for the existence of the beauty myth, as noted by many scholars, is the correlation between women's successful equality gains in the workplace in the 1970s, and the simultaneous decrease of the average model's size by 25 percent in just a few years (Douglas, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Maine & Kelly, 2005; Pipher, 1995; Myers, 1992; Wolf, 1991). The beauty myth explains this phenomenon: the feminist action, achieving more workplace equality, was answered by the beauty myth as women were told to shrink—physically take up less space—by media depictions of suddenly withered, famous women.

More recently, feminist scholar Rebecca Coleman (2008) describes the ongoing tension between women's bodies and images of women's bodies. While past feminist inquiry used the binary of "body/image" (2008, p. 163) to illustrate this interaction, Coleman argues that "body—image" (p.175) is a more appropriate and accurate approach, accounting for how images can limit or expand a woman's conceptualization of her body. Coleman asserts that feminist scholarship must inquire about the relationships women have with actual photographs of themselves and how they mentally picture themselves. This will more accurately capture how a woman interacts with her self-image, both real and conceptual, and help scholars to understand the complex relationship a woman has with images of herself.

Sue Thorman's (2007) work on the intersections of women, feminism, and the media foreshadows Coleman's (2008) assertions. Advertising images, particularly in women's magazines, position female viewers as spectators of a masculine-based ideal,

gazing into a fantasy world filled with “icon[s]” (Thorman, 2007, p.43) that women are driven to reflect through “self-control (diet, exercise, etc.) and self-management” (Thorman, 2007, p.43) like wearing the right clothes or getting a trendy haircut. In this way, advertising gets women to look at themselves as males do, *while* males do; this gaze spurs women to mimic the idols they see in their (supposedly) representative forum: the magazine. Like Coleman (2008), Thorman’s (2007) observations demand that feminist scholarship question how images are used to extend and limit a woman’s ‘picture’ of her body—and the ideal female form.

McRobbie (1997) argues that feminist thought *must* continually concern itself with women’s magazines, despite the faction of scholars who would rather dismiss the texts, along with the images and advertisements designed for the male gaze. Summarizing the feminist scholarship that has focused on teen girls’ and women’s magazines, McRobbie notes both the stark opposition and the more accepting approaches to these publications. McRobbie recognizes feminist authors who condemn these magazines as damaging texts, full of advertisements that “[do] nothing but convince readers of their own inadequacies” (p. 190), as well as those who see these publications as useful societal indicators of women’s positions. Ultimately, McRobbie argues that there is an inextricable relationship between feminist thought and women’s magazines, and rather than attempt to break that tie, feminism should embrace the fact that these publications “provoke” (1997, p. 191) intense questioning and keep scholars carefully monitoring the portrayal of women in the media.

At first glance, magazines may seem to further the feminist cause by providing the space for women to converse about topics pertinent to their lives; however, the beauty

myth ensnares these texts just as it does women: in order to have the revenue necessary to exist, the magazine must incorporate advertising, and nothing makes more sense than selling beauty products and fashion to a captive audience already vulnerable from the images and articles recommending the latest fat-busting exercises or anti-aging tricks. Women welcome these texts into their lives, digesting the messages from advertisements and editorials alike. In the following sections, the relationship between magazines and their female readers will be explored, along with the role of fantasy elements, advertising, and the image-driven propagation of the 'thin-ideal' within these publications. Finally, the small body of relevant work concerning food advertising will be reviewed.

#### *Women's Magazines and Their Readers*

Popular women's magazines are identified by many scholars as a primary channel for communicating with women, pivotally influencing the lives of their readers (Ytre-Arne, 2011; Durham, 2008, 1996; Gill, 2007; Gough-Yates, 2003; Zuckerman, 1998; Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Hermes, 1995; McCracken, 1993; Ballaster, 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Wolf, 1991; Winship, 1987). As a primary example of "women's mass culture" (Wolf, 1991, p. 70), the magazine has long been the primary source of content by women, for Western, middle-class women, providing a rare forum where women's issues are principally represented. Because magazines provide a forum for women to communicate with one another, women assign them to a position of high authority, allowing the magazine's messages to blast into their homes, their offices, and their lives. McCracken (1993) corroborates this concept, asserting that these periodicals offer "a woman-centered articulation of the world" (p.2), telling small narratives within a larger discourse that "render thousands of aspects of life knowable and manageable" (p.2), making the



magazine a compelling source of information and instruction. As Carmen Caldas-Coulthard (1996) observes, reading a woman's magazine "is very difficult to resist...because they deal with women's lives and desires, they show ideal bodies, represent ideal careers and ideal relationships. They also offer advice and hope through many voices" (p. 251) to which women can easily relate. Throughout the years, Caldas-Coulthard (1996) notes, women's magazines may have updated their outward appearance and their visual content, but maintain a basic, static storyline that addresses various issues from a female perspective. Despite their largely unchanging nature, women's magazines remain appealing to women because they unravel the problems and simplify the complicated business of being a woman (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996).

Magazines "exude intimacy and a kind of sisterhood," writes Zuckerman (1998, p. xv) in her historical account of women's magazines. Janice Winship (1987) agrees, observing that magazines are like having a continuous "conversation with a friend" (p.82) through a series of relatable narratives that come to satisfying and hopeful conclusions. Winship (1987) also notes that most women purchase magazines as a means of enjoyment, though the contents may drive them to creative thought or action like trying a recipe the periodical provided. Researchers (1991) note that magazines serve as "friend, advisor, and instructor on the difficult task of being a woman" (Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, & Hebron, 1991, p.124-125), which they argue is perpetuated by the femininity myth the magazine tells readers about the disparity between the women they are and the women they should strive to be. Establishing femininity—the *right* kind of femininity—as a lofty accomplishment fraught with challenges, magazines then present themselves as the helping hand, as Ballaster's team (1991) argues. Corroborating the significant role of

women's magazines in our culture, Caldas-Coulthard (1996) calls these texts "pervasive" (p.250), noting their steadfast presence in our society with "a highly important role in the maintenance of cultural values, since they construct an 'ideal' reader who is at the same time both produced and in a sense imprisoned by the text" (p. 250). From headlines declaring this month's issue will help readers 'improve their marriage' or 'lose 10 pounds – *fast*,' women's magazines have long established themselves as their reader's best friend and confidant, while subtly controlling the conversation and continually reinforcing cultural ideals that may vary with trends, but fundamentally remain focused on portraying a set version of femininity.

In-depth studies investigating magazine readership reveal more about how women negotiate the magazine's dialogic dominance, and even overcome perceived harms to continue reading their favorite, glossy newsstand staple. Extensive interviews with women across demographics and nationalities validate how deeply women can be influenced by the representation of their gender in magazines: one reader describes the omnipresent 'ideal woman' that she sees in these publications as "sexy, beautiful, intelligent, superwoman" (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 201). Some readers in Gauntlett's cultural investigation welcome these messages into their lives, enjoying that magazines "provide an imaginary space of self-indulgence [where] I can play at being a different, more glamorous, shallower, richer version of myself" (2002, p. 198), whereas others are far more critical. One woman denounces them as "harmful—[in] that they encourage you to question your life and your happiness and tell you what you ought to be doing and feeling" (2002, p. 202), and for this reader, the worst part is that "women [are] telling other women all this harmful stuff" (2002, p. 202). Gauntlett (2002) declares magazines

to be frequently paradoxical, reports that many readers do not always take their magazines seriously, and cautions that even ‘un-serious’ readers “are still absorbing lots of messages about what society (as seen through the magazines) thinks is important—such as beauty and sex—and what readers can be less bothered about—such as serious political issues” (p.206). Even the most casual encounters with magazines, then, put consumers eye-to-eye with the media’s articulation of the world, and while today’s generations grow increasingly media literate, we cannot possibly thoroughly process and filter every message we receive (Martin, 2007) blocking out those we perceive as harmful.

Like Gauntlett (2002), other scholars assert that “magazines are often read as time-passers and an escape from a busy reality” (Winship, 1987, p.53)—that not all cases of frequent magazine readership are intense or tumultuous. Hermes’ (1995) in-depth portrayal of two life-long magazine readers uncovered that women nonchalantly pick up magazines to fill brief pauses in activity, and may not read any magazines for months at a time. Yet even these seemingly innocuous moments, Hermes (1995) argues, become consequential as the magazine “provides unique forms of affirmation, reassurance, and dreams of perfection” (p.63) for women that apply to their roles as mothers, wives, and professionals. Women use magazines to navigate the outside world, absorbing the practical advice on how to be a better female, regarding the publication as both friend and foe, the object of both criticism and pleasure. Some readers value the magazine’s editorials that provide a sisterly dialogue; others “enjoy the engagement with consumerism” (Gauntlett, 2002, p.198) provided by advertisements and product endorsements. One such reader displays her enthusiasm in an interview: “I love the

sensuality of them—the heavy shiny pages, the high production values” (Gauntlett, 2002, p.198) that keep her reading each month.

While women’s uses for and relationships with magazines vary greatly, as seen throughout the existing literature, the concept of the magazine as a ‘dreamy escape’ appears frequently, not far from the tongue of any experienced reader or the observations of any researcher. Indeed, many scholars have noted the ubiquitous presence of fantasy elements and themes in women’s magazines, particularly used in the magazine’s advertisement content. Understanding magazines more thoroughly requires further inquiry into the nature of advertising in women’s magazines, and the whimsy employed therein. As Beatrix Miller, 1976 editor of *Vogue* magazine, said, “We are 60% selling a dream and 40% offering practical advice,” (as qtd. in Winship, 1987, p. 11-12).

#### *Advertising and Fantasy*

While articles and stories from other readers do much to contribute to the cultural dialogue within women’s magazines, advertising has also appeared between the pages of these periodicals from their inception. Underscoring the crucial role advertising plays in these journals, aforementioned scholars like Zuckerman (1998) note how print ads “intersect with the magazine’s editorial content” (p. 74) and are thus as influential as any other aspect of the magazine. As early as 1895, marketers targeted women’s magazines as a way to win over the “‘buying department of the household’” and thus secure “‘the patronage of the family’” (qtd. in Zuckerman, 1998, p. 61) through the woman’s recognition and endorsement of a product. This cultural construct of the woman as the family shopper has not changed, and indeed, in 2010, women were reported as making 83 percent of all consumer purchases in the United States, and 91 percent of “general

household purchases” (Hill, 2010, p. 144) including food. Advertising for such products must successfully engage with female audiences, and not underestimate the financial impact of failing to do so (Hill, 2010).

Women’s magazines and the advertising content that supports them have fused together, making the magazine dual-purposed in a sense. The magazine caters to their reader’s informational and entertainment desires, and catalogs products and services that readers are encouraged to buy. Zuckerman explains: “With magazines still funded by advertisers, the sell message persists. As has been true throughout their history, this adds up to publications both helpful and limiting to the women they target. They remain embedded in the consumer culture that gave birth to them” (Zuckerman, 1998, p. xv). This idea parallels Coleman’s (2008) concept of bodies and images capable of both extending and limiting women’s perceptions of their own physicality; Zuckerman’s (1998) point reiterates the ability of an image, in this case advertisements, to do the same. While advertising may inform readers of new products on the market, the magazine inevitably ends up endorsing the product and the tactics used in the ad, regardless of whether or not either conflicts with the magazine’s other messages. Caldas-Coulthard’s (1996) summarizes the outcome of this content collision: “The sexually attractive woman is the beautiful one who, to please men, is persuaded to buy the products being advertised in the magazine. Editorial and advertising material are thus inseparable” (p. 255) and women consume both types of content seamlessly while turning the glossy pages. Winship (1987) explains that the combination of ads and articles establishes a delicate balance between the basic goods needed in everyday life, and luxury items that establish a dream world—the appeal of which makes magazines highly successful. By first

defining femininity, then advertising tangible tools for achieving desirability, women's magazines position themselves persuasively in the lives of their readers who are attracted to the relatable, familiar, and often friendly voice of the favorite publications.

However, the simple "combination of entertainment and useful advice" (Storey, 2006, p.119) is not enough: the use of fantasy and escapist elements—the building blocks of the 'other world' magazines create—further the appeal of the featured products, deepens the connection between the reader and the magazine, and makes the magazine and the advertisements agents of instilling desires (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; Storey, 2006; Winship, 1987; Zuckerman, 1998). From stilettos to diamond studs, luxury cars to cashmere, the magazine features and promotes material goods in imaginary settings, ripped from storybooks. Accustomed as we are to the images, we accept them without question as we browse: the tangible existence of the image easily transfers to its contents. In other words, the image itself does exist, even though its contents are built with the tools of illusions: sets, props, costumes, makeup, and digital alterations. Only after prolonged study with the aim to dissect these images do we start to see their fantastical absurdities, though as Caldas-Coulthard (1996) argues "Visual pleasure is [still] stimulated through beautiful pictures of people and things" (p. 252). Even the observation that the photo shoot and advertising images are dream-like, creative constructs, no amount of "knowing" can "cast the shadow of doubt over the dazzling, compelling, authoritative images" (Bordo, 2003, p. 104) which become part of our realities and fuel our desires. As Winship (1987) notes in her analysis of advertising:

We recognize and relish the vocabulary of these dreams in which ads deal; we become involved in the fictions they create, but we know full well that those commodities will not elicit the promised fictions. It doesn't matter. Without bothering to buy the product we can vicariously indulge in the

good life through the image alone. This is the compensation of the experience you do not and cannot have. (p. 56)

Janice Winship argues that women find this fantasy world fulfilling because “women are placed first here. She is the centre stage and powerful. The magazines persuade us that women, like the models, can succeed” (1987, pp. 11-12) and this promise of success, along with the place of prominence in the magazine, builds the foundation for how wildly successful these publications become. Women readers ultimately buy and repeat-purchase these magazines *for* the outlandish fantasies and advertisements for unaffordable, impractical items, not in spite of these features. Noting that readers may still “complain about the amount of advertisements, too expensive clothes, and the far-fetched fiction” (Winship, 1987, p.7)” women still respond to the “dreamy lifestyle” (p. 13) presented in the magazine as “an image to aspire to” (p. 13) no matter how outlandish, expensive, or impossible that image may be to achieve. For many readers, this visual paradox draws them in rather than repels them from the periodicals. One reader describes her fascination with advertising in women’s magazines:

I love to look at the latest fashions, exclusive purses and beautiful make-up. It isn't about having the money to buy these things, but the possibility of dreaming about it. To me this is a fantasy world, and I want the stunning models to be in that world. If the magazines' models looked like me... I wouldn't buy them! (Høgden, 2002, p.12)

While enthusiasm for this fake consumerist heaven becomes evident, several questions arise pertaining to the consequences of women’s mass engagement with this fantasy world. Where does this departure from reality leave women? Are magazines merely a means of temporary escape, filling a dull moment, as Hermes’ (1995) analysis finds? The implications for feminism and female empowerment remain central to the question of women’s magazines, despite the fact that many readers report enjoying the

high-end advertising bombarding them from the glossy pages. John Storey's (2006) cultural studies approach to the connection between magazines, advertisements, and the dream-like world they co-create suggests that

they generate a desire for fulfillment (through consumption). What is ultimately being sold in the fictions of women's magazines, in editorial or advertisements, fashion and home furnishing items, cookery and cosmetics, is successful and therefore *pleasurable* femininity. Follow *this* practical advice or buy *this* product and be a better lover, a better mother, a better wife, a better woman. (p. 119-120)

Storey (2006) argues this poses a problem for feminism as the magazine and advertisements present women as individuals uninfluenced by social norms which dictate their purchases and behaviors. Thorman (2007) summarizes that magazines and ads must create a mythical world through their content because "female desire and fantasy must be enacted through narrative so that women as social subjects find new possibilities of identification, engagement, and agency" (p. 72), without which there would be no possibility of imagining women in the situations and materialistic conquests we see them swathed in. Advertisements provide the space in which women can visualize this engagement with the constant, active process of morphing themselves into the established cultural narrative.

Thus the fantasy elements of women's magazines fall under scrutiny from the feminist lens, questioning whether or not drawing readers into a mythical world bent on selling them a fantasy is a true act of 'sisterhood.' As women "fantasize about perfect selves" (Hermes, 1995, p. 62) and ideal lives while reading magazines and gazing wide-eyed at the advertisements therein, absorbing the directives and images they see, research suggests the fantasy becomes a reality that women ruthlessly pursue, particularly when it comes to achieving the perfect body (Durham, 2008; Martin, 2007; Wolf, 1991). In the



next section, the literature concerning the thin-ideal propagated by women's magazines is reviewed.

*Women's Magazines and the Thin-Ideal*

An abundance of research explores the relationship between exposure to magazines and print advertising and women's reported body image (Anschutz, Van Strien, Becker, & Engles, 2011; Knobloch-Westerwick & Crane, 2011; Sheldon, 2010; Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010; Dittmar, Halliwell, & Stirling, 2009; Yamamiyaa, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac, & Posavac, 2005; Cameron & Ferraro, 2004; Turner & Hamilton, 1997). Many other studies investigate women's body image, media exposure, and the concept of the 'thin-deal' (Prichard & Triggemann, 2012; Slater, Triggemann, Fitch, & Hawkins, 2012; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Hawkins, Richards, Granley, & Stein, 2004; Gauntlett, 2002; Groesz, Levine, and Murnen, 2002). This extensive body of literature leads the more recent investigators to acknowledge the preponderance of evidence collected on this topic and state that "it is generally agreed that the thin beauty ideal provided by the mass media has a negative influence on the body image and eating behavior of girls and young women" (Anschutz, Van Strien, Becker, & Engles, 2011). Taken together, these studies find that exposure to images portraying the 'thin-ideal' results in changes to women's reported body image, most often by decreasing their body satisfaction, self-esteem, and increasing their acceptance of unhealthy approaches to eating, such as persistent dieting. One key study found that women will automatically compare themselves to advertising models, assessing their need to diet and exercise based on how closely they perceive their own bodies to resemble the women seen in magazines (Smeesters, Mussweiler, & Mandel, 2010).

Women predictably reacted to models heavier or thinner than themselves by reporting stronger intentions to eat less and increase exercise after viewing the ads.

A few studies report an *increase* in body satisfaction after extended exposure to images of ideal bodies appearing in magazines and advertisements, but find this result mediated by the dieting practices of the participants (Knoblock-Westerick & Crane, 2011; Anschutz, Van Strien, Becker, & Engles, 2011). Women may get a ‘boost’ from ‘thin-is-in’ media images when they are engaged in behaviors they believe will help them to reflect those images, such as dieting. Furthermore, women’s deep internalization of the ‘thin-ideal’ as the societal beauty imperative is corroborated across the literature, even in studies that do not report exposure effects (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997), confirming that media such as advertising and magazines are key components of women’s acculturation into the slender-is-beautiful standard. In sum, women are clearly impacted by the constant bombardment of media depictions of the lean female body, absorbing these images and more often than not, striving to reflect them.

Along with advertising images featuring ultra-thin models, magazines constantly run diet and exercise related articles which have been shown to increase reports of unhealthy weight control practices in adolescents as well as adults (Utter, Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, & Story, 2003; Choi, 2000). Choi’s (2000) ethnographic work with avid female exercisers identifies titles like *Shape* and *Cosmopolitan* as catalysts for the ruthless workouts pursued by women seeking to fix their currently “imperfect” body (p. 67). From getting the “ultimate body” to becoming “the happiest [you]’ve ever been” (p.67), women continually receive the message from magazines that exercise, combined with food restriction, is the best way to become thin, toned, and finally beautiful. Choi

reiterates the concept that female physicality is governed by specific, universally accepted truths: the female body is flawed, requires reduction, and is only beautiful if carefully sculpted. Unfortunately, other universal truths follow these: Choi confirms the body dissatisfaction and self-objectification that results from this culturally imposed idea of the feminine ideal.

Wykes and Gunter (2005), in their study of how print media influences our collective understanding of what is 'sexy' and desirable in terms of the female image, found that popular magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *Marie-Claire*, and *Sugar* do more than supply the latest diet or sex advice: these magazines actually sell a definition of ideal femininity for the heterosexual male that chiefly includes youthfulness, thinness, and attractiveness. Echoing Wolf's (1991) beauty myth concept, Wykes and Gunter (2005) argue that these magazines suggest the only use of female empowerment is the ability "to buy versions of themselves" (p. 82) since women are most decidedly not adequate as they are. Similarly, Stephens, Hill, and Hanson (1994) apply the beauty myth to advertising specifically, arguing that ads for diet and beauty products play a large part in the perpetuation of the female thin-ideal. The team observed that advertising, perhaps more than magazine articles, is poised to deliver a powerful blow to women's self-image because ads feature dazzling images of the beauty standard, usually in the shape of a culturally exalted model, alongside a product, be it diet pills or eyeliner. This juxtaposition implies the latter will achieve the former—a potentially damaging message when the protein shakes or skin cream inevitably does not produce miraculous results, and leaves behind the question of whether the benefits of such advertising outweigh the harms of propelling consumers to pursue an unachievable ideal.

Luckily for the advertisers, as the literature reviewed above explains, women are often enthusiastically inspired to chase after the materialistic and intangible lives presented in magazines and advertisements alike. While expensive clothes and accessories are frequently advertised in women's magazines, so too are more practical items such as food. Food advertising in women's magazines has historically taken up a significant portion of magazine content (McCracken, 1993) and continues to be a major contributor to magazine advertising (MPA, 2009).

### *Food Advertising*

The vast majority of food advertising research done to date focuses on the nutritional and health claims made in the ads (Zwier, 2009; Jones, Andrews, Tapsell, Williams, & McVie, 2008; Lohman & Kant, 2000; Hill & Radimer, 1997; Pratt & Pratt, 1996; Pratt & Pratt, 1995; Barr, 1989) or on food commercials aimed at children (Jones, Wiese, & Fabrianesi, 2008; King & Hill, 2008; Cowburn & Boxer, 2007; Kelly & Chapman, 2007; Story & French, 2004; Hill & Radimer, 1996). These studies usually concentrate on a specific market, such as Canada or Australia, and look at marketing across several channels including television and the Internet. While it is important to understand what claims food advertisements make from a consumer standpoint and how ads might influence impressionable children, these studies do not provide insight into the narrative constructed by food advertising aimed at adult women.

Two content analyses conducted on food advertising in women's magazines reveal interesting information on the types of food most commonly promoted in these texts. Mastin and Campo (2006) found that the majority of advertising in magazines aimed at an African-American female readership promoted empty-calorie beverages,

fatty foods, sweets, and fast food. Only seven ads for fruits and vegetables appeared in the sample spanning two decades. Similarly, Adams, Simpson, and White (2011) found that in over 1,300 food ads appearing in women's magazines from the United Kingdom, only two percent featured fruits and vegetables while the rest promoted fat-and-sugar-laden products. Both of these studies note the contradictory nature of the food ads to the magazine's other health-and diet-related content. Articles on calorie restriction and exercise send a "mixed message" (Mastin and Campo, 2006, p. 281) to consumers, and are diametrically opposed to the potato chips and candy bars advertised on the very next page.

In one of the few studies examining the subtext of food advertising aimed at women, Susan Bordo (1993) identifies distinct patterns in food ads: women should eat as little as possible and always in private, focusing on diet products, while men should enthusiastically and shamelessly devour high-calorie indulgences like Hagen-Dazs or Duncan Hines frosting. The JELL-O ads depict slender women lounging in chairs in figure-minimizing positions, declaring themselves 'girls who can't say no' to dessert or for whom "dessert [is] always on my mind" (Bordo, 1993, p.107) as though they barely manage to control their unwieldy desire for sweets. These already thin women's appetites become associated with dark transgression in the ads that suggest only with reduced fat and sugar products like JELL-O snacks can women stay so slim. In stark contrast, men's appetites are celebrated in food ads as guys are shown as adorable, confident and appropriately voracious in their crooning desire for sweets. An ad for Haagen-Dazs shows a muscular, mostly naked man launching off of a diving board into a bowl of dark chocolate ice cream. Women, who are juxtaposed to self-conscious, waistline-watching

references in food as, are instead encouraged to “Dive In” to their meager, portion-and-calorie controlled frozen WeightWatchers dinner. The double-standard uncovered by Bordo’s (1993) analysis lays a solid foundation for understanding the messages communicated via food advertising about how women should approach eating, their appetites, and the foods they crave.

Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) continue to examine print food advertising, focusing specifically on ads appearing in women’s magazines. Like Bordo (1993), Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) recognize the insinuations in food advertisements that women’s appetites are unholy and dangerous, requiring constant surveillance and control. Wilson and Blackhurst identify food advertisements as an understudied culprit of the media’s influence on women’s body image issues, specifically the drive for extreme thinness. Arguing that these food ads contain messages that normalize dieting and other practices associated with disordered eating, the researchers cite several food advertisements appearing in *Ladies Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Fitness* during the 1990s. Magazines’ pervasive focus on dieting in general primes readers to digest food advertisements, able to dictate to women not only what foods to purchase, but *how* they should think about food, and how eating relates to the all-important goal of being thin. Ads for Kellogg’s Special K cereal links eating with fitting into date-night dresses, or their bikinis, and shames women into eating the 110-calories-per-serving cereal to achieve a body worthy of these garments. Other food ads in Wilson and Blackhurst’s (1999) analysis suggest that the featured product, like Quaker oats, is the panacea for lost of social opportunities and wardrobe choices that accompany eating chocolate and cookies instead. Messages like these suggest that women need to be

conscious of their eating habits as they directly impact their appearances, reinforcing a fear of fat and appetite while simultaneously suggesting the solution: dieting. Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) conclude that food advertising directly contributes to women's negative body image by reinforcing the thin-ideal and reminding women that unrestricted eating puts them further from that ideal. While Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) contribute significantly to the understanding of food advertising's role in women's magazines, they do not outline a method used to conduct their analysis, nor do they provide a theoretical underpinning for their work.

While Bordo (1993) and Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) begin to shed light on the discourse of food advertising, much more investigation is needed to understand the narratives constructed by food advertisements, and how these narratives may be interpreted through a feminist lens, especially given the broader context of women's magazines, in which these ads so frequently appear. Little has been recorded on the possible readings of print food advertisements aimed at women's magazine readers, and given the literature connecting both food, eating, and body image, along with the links between the media and body image issues—a precursor for disordered eating—food advertising can no longer be overlooked in the quest to understand how our media, like women's magazines, influence the intimate corners of our lives, like our kitchen pantries.

### *Summary*

As this review demonstrates, women's magazines have long been a part of the Western media landscape, and enjoy a unique, complex relationship with their readers. While presenting a female-centric forum for information and entertainment, women's magazines also engage in the development of dream-like fantasy worlds, encapsulating

the “consumer culture that gave birth to them” (Zuckerman, 1998, p. xv) through their visually indulgent photo shoots and advertisements. The parade of beautiful possessions and people raises several questions from a liberal feminist perspective as to how women are to reconcile the ideal life they see portrayed in their magazines, including the perfect body, with their own less-than-perfect realities. The relationship between readers and magazines, the media’s overt value on thinness and physical perfection as the female beauty standard, and the criticizing messages of transgression and guilt historically seen in food advertising aimed at women all contribute to the cacophonous discourse on women, their bodies, and their food. The current research seeks to single out the sounds—the narrative—of food advertising in women’s magazines to isolate this voice in the din and more deeply understand how food advertising communicates with women and engages with the societal expectations placed on a woman’s appearance, appetite, and eating habits. Though it is already clear that food advertising does more than just fill space between a magazine’s feature stories, this research endeavors to listen closely to the messages coming from food advertisements.

Magazines serve a pivotal function in women’s lives, supplying information and dialogue on issues central to their lives; however, along with fitness articles and editorials on managing an overbearing mother-in-law, magazines sell advertising space, becoming an outlet for many additional messages capable of influencing women. To date, little research has focused on food advertising in women’s magazines, despite its prevalence (McCracken, 1993) and the obvious role of food in women’s body image issues and pursuit of thinness (Blood, 2005; Bordo, 1993; Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999). This study seeks to shed light on the narrative messages in food advertising, and how those



messages may be interpreted, taking the magazine as a whole into account. Chapter Three will describe the research goals, materials, and method of analysis used to achieve a deeper understanding of food advertising in women's magazines.

## METHOD

*Mirror, mirror  
 All I see—  
 A monster taking over me  
 Thinner, tighter, on it screams,  
 I'm only eating in my dreams.  
 Mirror, mirror...*

- Researcher's personal journal, 7/28/2011

*Research Goals*

The chief goal of this research is to understand the narratives constructed in food advertisements appearing in women's magazines. This study seeks to identify and analyze the thematic messages food advertising communicates to women about food and eating, how female readers are encouraged to think about food, and how these messages may be interpreted given the thin-is-beautiful media landscape we live in.

Conducting a textual analysis achieves the goal of contributing to the literature on food advertising, women's magazines, and the media's representation of the ideal female form by approaching these questions qualitatively. While several studies to date have examined the magazine from a more holistic approach (i.e. Caldas-Coulthard, 1996; McCracken, 1993) and several studies focus on the health content of food advertising, very few studies have endeavored to observe and interpret the meanings within print food advertising aimed at women. This research is important to understanding more about the highly nuanced relationship between women, food, and their bodies.

While focusing on food advertising in women's magazines, this study also takes into account the surrounding material in these publications as the context in which the food advertising appears. Articles, images, and advertisements for other products are also

incorporated into this textual analysis as a means to more completely understand the discourse on food, eating, and women's bodies in these magazines. Since women can derive meaning from all parts of a magazine, it is useful to analyze not only the food ads obviously endorsing their products, but the editorial copy and other content accompanying these ads that women encounter.

A final goal for this research is to intertwine my experiences with body image, food, and the media, recording my observations and reactions as I immerse myself in these magazines. By including personal narrative, I seek to illuminate aspects of this research, and bolster the liberal feminist scholarship by declaring and honoring my experiences as an individual. I also contribute to feminist scholarship by asking questions about how women are represented by media—particularly media aimed at them, as in the case of food advertising in women's magazines. Adding my voice to the growing chorus of women sharing their stories, I validate and affirm their efforts while continuing to expose the harmful reality of having a disordered relationship with food and one's own body. My introspection and reflection upon my experiences reveals valuable insight into these issues and I am compelled to document them in the interest of purposeful storytelling, outreach to others who have or are suffering similar trials, and honest research into a topic that I hold as timely and of critical significance.

### *Research Materials*

To achieve the goals of this study, three different women's magazines from the most recent year at the time of this writing were read and analyzed. All 2011 issues of *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle* were read and analyzed, with a focus on food, eating, and other body-related content. Food advertisements were removed from these magazines

for an in-depth textual analysis. These magazines were selected for two main reasons: first, according to the Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS) descriptions of these publications, each emphasizes a different aspect of women's lives. While *SELF* focuses on "health, beauty, fitness, and nutrition" (SRDS, 2011a), *Glamour* concentrates on "beauty and fashion" (SRDS, 2011b) and *Family Circle* "represents the strong connection women have to their families" at which they are the center (SRDS, 2011c). Second, these popular magazines represent large readership bases, all ranking in the top 60 magazines by circulation (MPA, 2010); their guaranteed circulation rates in 2011 ranged from *SELF*'s 1.4 million, to *Glamour*'s 2.5 million, and *Family Circle*'s 3.8 million, making *Family Circle* one of the top ten most circulated magazines in the United States (CondeNast, 2011a; CondeNast, 2011b; Meredith, 2011; MPA, 2011d).

A complete year's subscription to each of these magazines was acquired for this analysis to simulate the total content subscribers to these magazines receive in a given 12-month period and to capture the narrative trends seen throughout the year. The most recent year was used in this analysis in the interest of being as current as possible. In observing past issues of these magazines (e.g., *Glamour*, October, 2010; *SELF*, July 2009 & April, 2008; *Family Circle*, August, 2010 & March, 2009), no significant differences in format or monthly features was found within each of the magazines. As stated in the literature review, magazines closely adhere to their formulaic presentations to match what their loyal readers have come to expect (Storey, 2006). Some magazines even attach a "Special Feature" to each month that remains consistent over the years: *Allure* magazine, for example, names January "the Makeover Issue," March the "Insider's Issue," September the "Fall Trends Issue," and so on (SRDS, 2012). The unwavering structure

seen in women's magazines has been described by researchers as the way the magazine sets up and delivers on "textual expectations" for upcoming issues, which "have the same structural format with the same set agenda for internal sections" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996, p. 252) each month. Magazines employ these regularities as persuasive tactics to keep readers purchasing the familiar periodical (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996) that does not require re-navigation and continual adjustment to changing feature sections.

A comprehensive search of *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle*'s web sites, media kits and SRDS information revealed no atypical practices or occurrences in their 2011 publishing year, nor did an Internet search return any news results to suggest 2011 was an unusual year for magazine publications. Only *Family Circle* reported in September of 2011 that it would be reducing production from its standard 15 issues to 12 issues beginning in 2012 in order to cut costs (Moses, 2011).

All full, half, and quarter-page food advertisements appearing in any issues of the three magazines from January to December of 2011 were included in this study to get a comprehensive look at all such advertising appearing in print for an entire year. Food was defined as a solid, edible item or product, including beverages and restaurant items. Ads for diet supplements, vitamins, and ads for over-the-counter or prescription medications were excluded as these items are not designed to serve as primary meal, snack, or beverage components, but rather are items tangential to eating. Magazine articles that commented significantly on food and eating were also marked for closer analysis; for example, an article titled "The Summer Foods Even Skinny Chicks Eat" (Jio, 2011, p. 102) was critically read to understand the message sent to women about food and eating through editorial copy in the same magazine. Other advertisements and articles that stood

out as pertinent to understanding these magazines and their various narratives were also incorporated into this analysis.

To achieve my goal of supporting this research with my own experiences regarding women's magazines, food, and body image, personal narrative has been incorporated throughout the study. This narrative, italicized in the text for easy identification, captures my experiences reading women's magazine, wrestling with my own food and body image preoccupations, and encountering the body image issues of other women. Heeding the advice and efforts of previous scholars who have practiced autoethnographic inquiry, I critically read the autoethnographic accounts of others, such as Lisa Tillman-Healy (1996) and Megan Axelsen (2009), on their battles with body image and disordered eating. Best practices for using this method were also reviewed: for example, according to Spry's (2001) account of 'good autoethnography,' personal narrative must strive to be well written, highly reflexive, and emotionally engaging as to forge a relationship between myself and my reader. Careful writing and re-writing of my narrative, based on an evolving understanding of my experience, was necessary as I gathered evidence from my past and current experiences. In other words, my narrative aims to accurately identify and explain the "situatedness of [my]self with others in social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710), and remains vigilantly critical and cognizant of the influences on my emerging explanations of my experiences throughout the research process.

#### *Method of Materials Collection*

After obtaining each issue of *SELF*, *Glamour*, and *Family Circle* magazine from January to December of 2011, I went through each magazine to ensure each periodical

was complete (i.e. no pages missing, illegible). Then, I spent time with each issue, recording observations, reading articles, and identifying all full, half, and quarter-page food advertisements present. The ads were removed from the magazine for ease of organizing, analyzing, and comparing with other ads. If ads appeared on both sides of the same page, the page was marked with a post-it note for future color photocopying to separate the materials. I color photocopied any food ads as necessary, indicating the magazine name, issue, and page number on the back of the photocopy for citation reference.

While going through the magazines for food advertisements, I also marked any other content in the magazine that significantly contributed to the magazine's narrative on food, eating, or women's bodies. For example, articles promoting a certain meal plan, or reporting on dieting, disordered eating, and body image issues among women were read and analyzed for their messages on these topics. The analysis of this content provided a comprehensive look at the magazines as a whole, and provided a broader understanding of the context of these magazines, in which the food advertising also appears. Furthermore, examining the complete magazine allowed for a richer analysis of the food advertisements and overall messages that these publications send to their female readers, and how these messages encourage women to think about food and eating.

To identify the critical components of my personal narrative, I examined past journals, saved poems, photographs, remembered events, conversations, and emotions that helped me to explain my experiences with body image issues and food despite a positive lifestyle change. As feminist author Courtney Martin (2007) achieves in her account of the bad body image epidemic among Western women, I needed to record my

significant experiences to lend credence to the accounts of others and add my voice to the chorus of those revealing personal truths that speak to a larger phenomenon.

Additionally, I continued writing accounts of new experiences, revelations, and observations throughout the research process.

### *Method of Materials Analysis*

I conducted a textual analysis of the food advertisements taken from the aforementioned magazines, following Larsen's assertion that textual analysis "brings out the whole range of possible meanings" (1991, p. 122), and allows for the systematic organization of themes and patterns in the data that point to a larger discourse. Textual analysis provided the most appropriate method for this study as it accounts for the full range of symbols, from words to colors, appearing in the advertisements, and inquiring after their larger cultural meaning and how they are encouraging the viewer to think about and relate to food.

After removing or photocopying all food advertisements out of their magazines, I used a postmodern approach to systematically determine and organize meanings that emerged from the ads based on Stern's (1996) approach to advertising texts. First, I examined the ads based on similar word and scene choices—"the parts or literary attributes" (Stern, 1996, p. 61) of the materials. For example, all ads that prominently use words like "Yes" or "Absolutely" or display similar scenes, such as a woman sitting on a couch with her child, were placed in the same pile. Next, I reorganized the ads based on how they constructed meaning from these individual elements: while different ads for the same product initially presented many common parts, closer examination of their communicated meaning separated them into different themes. Lastly, I pulled out the



underlying assumptions and meanings present in the ads, and developed subthemes within the larger categories.

Weaving my personal experience throughout the body of this study was achieved by writing, rewriting, and reorganizing my narrative into its most authentic and accurate form. In addition to careful rewriting and reflection on the experiences I have had, I continually asked for corroborator's opinions and reviews of my emotional engagement with the reader—that is, as Spry (2001) defines good writing, avoiding mediocrity by striving to “transform readers and transport them into a place where they are motivated to look back upon their own...identity construction” (p. 713).

In summary, the current study utilized textual analysis to discern the messages in food advertising found in women's magazines. Allowing for a richer understanding of this important media outlet, this study looks for the emergence of themes in the messages sent to women about food and eating in food advertisements and women's magazines in general. Specifically, I used Stern's (1996) textual analysis method for identifying and organizing messages in print advertising, and analyzed the messages sent through editorial copy in the same magazines. Interwoven into this analysis, I narrated my experiences with body image and women's magazines, using my own voice to authenticate the experiences of others, as well as follow the feminist approach to inquiry. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide new and deeper understanding of the relatively unexplored role of food advertising in women's magazines and contribute to the discourse on women's body image issues—a topic of very real importance to the many women who struggle with their perceived reflections each day.

*The black hole of ordered distraction: counting calories like precious coins daily scrounging for fewer, fewer. Learn to resist, punish. Purge desire for resolve, sensuality for success. Narrow measurement—no room on the waistline for error. Imperfection be damned like a sin of the skin: pulled, corrected, taut & tan.*

*Ribs that can be counted, vertebrae that fingers can scale like the sad foothills of a soul consumed with petty lists instead of poetry. Worry over wonderment at the world, reduced to numbers, nibbles, crumbs. And drifting deeper down the black hole.*

- Researcher's personal journal, 5/2011

## INSIDE THE WOMEN'S MAGAZINE

Every magazine tells her she's not good enough,  
 The pictures that she sees make her cry.  
 Perfect only in her imperfections... (McLaughlin, 2007).

*Inside a magazine, time stands still. The passing minutes thud along like a clock in a distant room, but while reading, the surrounding world fades into a muffled murmur, and I feel I am being held in a safe, warm, sunbeam where the entire world is explainable, even down to the most horrific events. If this brave woman can tell me and all Glamour readers about her sexual assault, then no challenges are insurmountable. If the busy mother of six had time to remodel her historic farmhouse kitchen, then surely I can do more to make my living room hip. While suspended inside a magazine, life moves at a more reasonable pace. In the quiet room where I am sitting, I can hear my heart beating, feel my chest breathing, and sense the information trickling into my greedy brain. Who could resist knowing Sarah Michelle Geller's secrets to looking her best? Why wouldn't I make time to read about Jillian Michael's plan for me to lose eight pounds this month? The distinct feeling of inclusion is intoxicating and addictive. I only want to keep reading.*

In 2011, *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle* magazines landed among the 60 most circulated women's magazines (MPA, 2011d) and produced a total of 39 issues: *Glamour* and *SELF* each circulated 12 issues while *Family Circle* produced its standard 15 issues (delivering extra installments in April, October, and November). Reviewing each publication's past media kits reveals no irregularities in production for these magazines in 2011; however, *Family Circle* announced in September it would be cutting

back to only 12 issues per year to reduce costs (Moses, 2011). Between them, the three magazines printed a total of 7,161 pages, reached millions of readers, and ran 554 full, half, and quarter-page food-and-beverage advertisements. *Family Circle* ran a total of 409 food ads in the last year, accounting for the majority analyzed here, while coming in second behind *Glamour* for total number of pages, suggesting a high food ad ratio to other content in *Family Circle*. Indeed, paging through a given issue of *Family Circle* is a start-and-stop experience when looking at an average of 28 food ads for every 160 pages of magazine. Conversely, *Glamour* printed the least number of food ads—59 total—while publishing nearly 500 more pages during the year than *Family Circle*. *SELF* consistently printed the slimmest magazines of all three publications in 2011, some 600 pages less than even *Family Circle*, while including 86 food and beverage ads throughout the year.

The ratios of food advertising to other content in each of these magazines corresponds with their mission statements and general categorizations by the Standard Rate and Data Service (SRDS), all of which are reviewed below. That the majority of ads came from *Family Circle* can be explained by the magazine's target audience: women in their early fifties who are focused on their role as matriarchs in their homes and their communities (Meredith, 2011), and are thus more likely to be planning meals, preparing, and serving food than the younger readers of *Glamour*. Likewise, *SELF* includes food and diet-related feature sections in every issue as a part of their fitness and health foci (CondeNast, 2011b), and their advertisements follow suit, tending to focus on workout apparel and footwear. The food and beverage ads that do appear in *SELF* are more likely to refer to physical activity or dieting than ads in the other periodicals.

Before delving further into an analysis of the food advertising appearing in *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle*, establishing a broader context for these magazines is useful, especially when trying to evaluate how food and eating are handled as a part of the overall discourse of these publications. To better understand the identity of each of the magazines, the following sections explore each magazine in turn, including their self-defined purposes, readership demographics, and circulation rates. While magazines use many metrics to calculate readership such as paid subscriptions, sales, and online use, I highlight each magazine's 2011 rate base as the key indicator of circulation size. A magazine's rate base refers to the circulation amount they guarantee to advertisers (Fine, 2006), making it of prime interest to any study concerned with advertising specifically. Finally, my observations, analyses, and interpretations of each of these magazines are explored below.

*Glamour: Feminism, Fashion, Fairytales, and Food*

According to the magazine's media kit, *Glamour* "helps every woman become the 'Do' she was born to be. Smart, chic and all-American, *Glamour* gives readers exactly what they need to transform every part of their lives: from their closets to their love lives and beyond" (CondeNast, 2012a). While parent company, CondeNast, cites *Glamour's* print audience as 12 million strong at the time of this writing (2012a), *Glamour's* rate base was listed at 2.3 million in 2011, with women, mostly between 18 and 49 years of age, making up 94 percent of their audience (CondeNast, 2011a). The publisher's positioning statement describes *Glamour* as "often optimistic, always inclusive, beyond empowering and can always separate the Do's from the Don'ts. If *Glamour* had a campaign slogan, it would be Yes, She Can" (SRDS, 2011b).

The ‘girl-power’ feminism evident in these self-definitions is both indicative of *Glamour*’s decent intentions and apparent ignorance of how short the magazine falls in terms of true female empowerment. By “helping” women to become “a ‘Do’”—*Glamour*’s code for fashionable, professional, and successful—the magazine asserts that women require help to achieve acceptable traits they do not otherwise possess. This idea reverberates throughout *Glamour*’s monthly installments of the “How to Do Everything Better Guide” and the constant categorizing of fashion, food, and social behaviors as either “Dos” or “Don’ts;” it is repeated through advertising and editorial copy alike. The “Dos & Don’ts” culture within *Glamour* is pejorative, conforming, and oversimplified, teaching women it is acceptable to view the world through this non-nuanced lens. Rather than celebrating women, this discourse incites self-criticism and judgment of other women, encouraging women to not like themselves and constantly seek change. From tweeting (September, 2011) to bikinis (June, 2011), *Glamour* has “Dos & Don’ts” for every imaginable social and sartorial choice.

The language of self-change fills *Glamour*’s pages. From articles like “5 New Things to Do With Your Eyes!” (September, 2011, p. 215) to ads like Nike’s “Make your body. Make your life” (September, 2011, p. 138), a central theme emerges: women do not find themselves in an acceptable state naturally. Our eyes need “new things” done to them and our bodies need to be ‘made.’ We need “101 Ways to Look Hotter Now” (May, 2011, cover) *and* the extensive article on how to protect our health against new environmental threats. Vacillating between genuine, research-based information and fluffier content, *Glamour* juggles many ‘hats’ as it strives to report, inform, and reform the imperfect woman (the reader). While helping women battle the elements or ask the

right questions at their next doctor's appointment, *Glamour's* goals feel noble, born out of sisterly concern; while garrulously sharing "10 things to do with a bobby pin" (October, 2011, p. 130) to a celebrity's recent "Don't Moment" (February, 2011, p. 40), *Glamour* seems far more committed to the shallow, petty, and appearance-based 'tips' that take up the majority of the magazine's real estate.

*Glamour* has mastered appearing to champion women, while backhanding them on the same page, let alone within a single issue. Monthly features like, "Hey, It's OK..." recount all the shortcomings of simply being human, like skipping a workout after a hard Monday or not having "the foggiest idea of how to talk to a three-year-old" (August, 2011, p.42). Momentarily endorsing what sounds like "Don't" behaviors, the magazine's discourse flip-flops between acceptance and criticism. While celebrating the "Women of the Year," (December, 2011, cover), *Glamour* also prints ads with language such as "Be the girl you were too lazy to be yesterday" (*Glamour*, September 2011, p. 89). Thus the magazine's editorial copy and advertising choices frequently oppose one another, co-constructing the general voice of the magazine in a contradictory manner. *Glamour* continuously runs the Lancome ad featuring actress Julia Roberts (for example, September, 2011, p. 34), an ad that has been banned from circulation in the United Kingdom after it was deemed too egregiously retouched to be used as a representation of reality (Sweeney, 2011), and prints articles renouncing Photoshop® overuse in the magazine industry (Dreisbach, 2012). More than happy to tip its hat to the issues of an outrageously airbrushed media landscape, *Glamour* still participates whole-heartedly in the process, clearly retouching each picture they print to stunning flawlessness, and thus contradicting itself in preaching and practice. Likewise, while claiming to be against

women's "unproductive body griping" (Dreisbach, 2011b, p.162), *Glamour* publishes entire articles that end up showcasing exactly that: from cellulite to belly bloat, *Glamour* highlights these flaws and expands upon their readers' biggest body complaints. Instead of just offering expert advice on overcoming self-scrutiny, *Glamour* prints messages that focus on these imperfections, and encourage self-criticism among women, all while claiming that the article will "get [you] the body you were born to have" (Dreisbach, 2011b, p.162). The obvious question aside (*wasn't I born with the body I was born to have?*), if *Glamour* harbors any real goals of supporting their women readers, can ads and articles in such clear contradiction to one another be chalked up to the price of doing business? In articles that point out the "the organizational disasters of your life, including your purse!" (May, 2011, p. 190), and tell readers to "Get Your Sh\*t Together," *Glamour* reminds women that her fridge and her purse are two of the biggest "organizational Black Holes" (November, 2011, p. 182) in her life. It seems unlikely, given a woman's hopelessly disorganized natural state, that she could achieve any accomplishment worthy of being a 'Woman of the Year.' Contradictory tones and topics sit side by side in any given issue of *Glamour*, whiplashing readers between companionable sharing and patronizing criticism that women simultaneously read.

Month to month, year to year, the *Glamour* gospel does not change, even as it speaks out against the damaging media representations of women. After awhile, reading these headlines does not incite feelings of friendly banter, like a cheerful older sister's chiding; rather, *Glamour* becomes a demeaning, scolding agent of change. Yet rather than refusing to listen to the often harsh critique, one in ten American women reach for



*Glamour* on a regular basis (CondeNast, 2011a); the fairytale escapes the magazine provides may help to explain this counterintuitive loyalty.

Opening an issue of *Glamour* is like opening the door to a glistening wonderland— a candy-coated spectacle of fashion and fragrance, makeup and men, baring enough skin to be rated R. Where food advertising, exercise moves, and recipes absorb the space in *SELF* and *Family Circle*, ads for shoes, eye shadow, and perfume dance in spectacular color and unrealistic settings. *Glamour*'s monthly fashion shoots near the end of the magazine provide dazzling, escapist imagery that takes the reader on road trips and safaris in unaffordable designer pieces. Particularly in December, *Glamour* accelerates into holiday overdrive. The first ten pages are exhilarating to the point of sensory shutdown: giant candy canes in gorgeous hues; women adorned in sequined miniskirts, absurdly shaped heels, walking through snow-kissed scenes with perfect curls and meticulous makeup. It takes extra effort to shake off the daydream and question its validity: in real life, *no one* would wear these outfits on the street (much less in a snowstorm), and *nowhere* do these fantastical settings exist—they are just sets in a studio.

But the fairytale persists: on the next page, riding through a sundrenched field of tall grass on white horses, two lovers are passionately embracing. Ralph Lauren Romance provides this “love story” (*Glamour*, December 2011, p. 29) in a fragrance, bottling the imagination and lust for this summer-in-December interlude. Will wonders never cease? On the next page Tiffany & Co. brings us back to more seasonable weather conditions (though no more realistic) as a woman in seven-inch heels climbs a snowy staircase next to another male Adonis concealing a little blue Tiffany's box behind his back. The magic

of these fairytales is irresistible, and imagining oneself inside of them is inevitable. Once again, it hardly seems *Glamour* is on the side of women when selling them a life that is far from real and yet seems to be just out of reach, keeping them hungry—but for what, women have no idea.

In this advertising pressure-cooker of an issue—one of the largest *Glamour* printed all year, only three food advertisements appear. Despite their comparatively small amount of food and beverage promotions, *Glamour* has no trouble keeping food, weight, and exercise at the forefront. Though much sparser than in *Family Circle* and *SELF*, the food advertising in *Glamour* has certain attributes that make it stand out in an already commercial-saturated text. The ads are almost always full-page: only a handful of half of quarter-page food advertisements appeared in any 2011 issue of *Glamour*. Also, the ads employ bright colors and elements of fantasy that both stand out and align with *Glamour*'s artistic fashion spreads. In a nearly 200-page issue with only one food advertisement, the November issue has no shortage of commentary on food and eating. From the “10 Healthy Foods (that come in a wrapper)” article (*Glamour*, November 2011, p. 113) to the in-depth story on a couple who lost 300 pounds between them, to the three pages of recipes at the back of the magazine, food still features heavily in *Glamour* as an important fixture in women's issues.

*I scan the list of packaged healthy foods and cannot help but smile smugly: all except the VitaMuffins and cookies are in my pantry. An unnatural and overly-proud response. Eating healthy should be the thanks I give to my body for all it does for me. Instead I find myself patting my own back on the magazine's behalf. Good girl, you*

*listened to Glamour. What's wrong with me? I sigh, but I know the answer: inside this world, content is king. I am merely serving my magazine master.*

### *Finding MySELF*

With a rate base of 1.4 million in 2011 (CondeNast, 2011b), *SELF* magazine has the smallest circulation of these three magazines, though it is estimated to reach an audience of 6.5 million at the time of this writing and enjoys an online readership boom (CondeNast, 2012b). Like *Glamour*, 94 percent of *SELF* readers are female with a median age of 38 (CondeNast, 2011b). According to their media kit, “*SELF* informs and inspires women about fitness and beauty, diet and health, style and happiness — all to help them improve their well-being, achieve their goals and become their vision of their best self” (CondeNast, 2012b). The publisher’s positioning statement echoes this idea that *SELF* leaves readers feeling, “empowered. Inspired. I am in charge. I choreograph my life” (SRDS, 2011a). *SELF*’s focus on diet and exercise throughout its average 150-page issue emphasizes the idea of being “in charge,” particularly of one’s body.

Like *Glamour*, *SELF* is clearly female-focused, and professes its dedication to women’s power. Where *Glamour* features the “it” actress, singer, or model of the moment on their covers (from Kate Winslet in April to Rhianna in September), *SELF* regularly features people known for the physical accomplishments like trainer Jillian Michaels (January, 2011) and weight loss success story Jennifer Hudson (September, 2011). Popular and successful women, from Zooey Deschanel (July, 2011) to Kim Kardashian (April, 2011), occasionally take the *SELF* spotlight (Kardashian also appeared on *Glamour*’s February cover), though *SELF* makes a show of their figures rather than their careers by positioning all of their cover women suggestively: if the the

women are often scantily clad or lounging suggestively. Headlines and cover photos from *Glamour* suggest the fantasy-land of sartorial and sensual bliss inside, while *SELF* primes readers for a girly version of boot camp; where *Glamour*'s cover prepares readers for the latest makeup and fashion trends, the *SELF* cover gets readers ready for new workout routines and meal plans.

While *SELF* and *Glamour* share advertising similarities—the infamous Julia Roberts Lancome ad serving as *SELF*'s back cover for three months of the year (February, September, November, 2011)—*SELF*'s sparser makeup and clothing ads are less about fashion and more about the 'fit, slim, and young' trifecta. Ads for clinical strength anti-aging creams and procedures like Botox (April, 2011) replace *Glamour*'s nail polish spots; yoga pants and running shoes are regular promotions, while the couture brands like Prada and Ralph Lauren do not appear. If the already slim and toned women on the covers of *SELF* were not enough to cue reader's to *SELF*'s primary focus, a year's worth of headlines suggest its intense, weight-watching focus: "Burn 1,000 calories, It's Fun, We Promise!" (December, 2011), "Burn 750 calories" (October, 2011), "Burn 300 calories" (January, 2011), "Burn 100 calories in 10 minutes!" (July, 2011). Each and every cover features most, if not all, of the following words: slim, thin, tone, boost, lose, skinny, drop, burn, fat, weight loss—supporting past research that women's magazine covers consistently "focus on improving one's life by changing one's appearance" (Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisle, 1999, p. 647). All at once, the culmination of these words screaming in giant, bold, black text that our bodies need serious work is overwhelming and accusatory; in small doses, perhaps the headlines offer motivation, somehow assuring that readers can "Make today happier" (March, 2011) or "Feel calmer every single day"

(February, 2011). It is this message that first reaches and allures readers; as Carmen Caldas-Coulthard (1996) explains, “The headline is crucial...[headlines] are the most important powerful persuasive and auto-promotional tool used to attract magazine readers” (p. 257) and they reappear multiple times throughout each issue. Headlines define much of the magazine’s content, and while *Glamour* and *Family Circle* may feature headlines like “How to Lose 10 lbs fast” (*Family Circle*, March, 2011) from time to time, they are more diversified in their cover content, priming readers for money-saving advice or health news. *SELF* leaves no room for doubt, from cover to cover, that it fixates on fitness, diet, and the physical results. Like a fitness-fanatic friend, *SELF* bursts with waist-slimming tips, exercise moves, and muscle-building meals, all targeted at the most personal of possessions: the body. To cram in all of this month’s bouncy and bright content dedicated to the enormous project of the “self,” the magazine employs an unusually small typeface, giving the text a fine print feeling, requiring careful study and attention to detail. Articles like “Your Body Makeover Starts Here!” (Murphy, 2011, p. 150-153) and “Do You Need a Five-Year Plan?” (Ruddy, 2011, p. 154-157) run back-to-back in the September issue, showcasing *SELF*’s attention to the mental, emotional, but above all, physical strength of their readers. From May’s skin protection advice to October’s cancer need-to-knows, *SELF*, like *Glamour*, seems to provide women with information genuinely intent on helping readers stay healthy. But more often than not, this advice is couched in examples of wrong-doing that needs correction, even when it comes to emotional health. Offering expert happiness-boosting guidance, *SELF* provides case studies of real-life women categorized as “the social media addict” (October, *SELF*, p.156) and the overextended “mega multitasker” (p. 158), reinforcing wrong-doing as the

female default even while trying to ‘help.’ Puffy stories from readers like “Too fat for the gym” (Todd, 2011, p. 34) and “I cheated on my husband with food” (Whitely, 2011, p. 42) seem included for how outlandishly they warn against over-eating and under-exercising as the ultimate in misery. *SELF*’s ruthless diktat, “Fitter, slimmer, younger” (August, 2011, p.108), repeats throughout the magazine’s monthly installments on exercise, food, and perhaps most disturbingly, its highly sexualized photographs and advertisements.

Perhaps to avoid overwhelming the average American woman who wears a size 14 (Peeke, 2010), *SELF* breaks down the project of achieving the tighter and more toned body into manageable pieces. Articles concentrate on “thinner inner thighs” (October, 2011, cover) or sleek six-pack abs (February, 2011) in extended feature sections, talking toning tips with celebrities, and working weight-loss into every moment of their reader’s day. Exercise is a constant activity in *SELF*: one article describes how to work your abs in the car, in bed, and even at work, giving “belly pooch the pink slip” (February, 2011, p.114). Even in an article about hair and skin care, *SELF* squeezes in a workout reference by printing photos of fierce models in warm-ups, clutching dumbbells. Shoe ads from Puma and Reebok showcase the female model’s thighs: front or back, muscles bulging, definition bursting through her tiny shorts. The woman in the Reebok ad wearing her toning shoes turns to stare at her rear end reflected in the aquarium glass (March, 2011). Sadly, it seems she cannot focus on her fun outing, but must check on the progress of her workout, physically attached to her feet at all times.

Inside every issue of *SELF*, readers can add to their collection of pullout cardstock cards with advanced strength, cardio, and yoga moves like the contortionist

“back beautifier” or punishing “belly-banisher” (April, 2011, p. 126) that appear *only* possible for the already fat-free woman pictured. While calling readers to the cardio kingdom, *SELF* suggests that exercise is effortless, “sexy, and empower[ing]” (March, 2011, p.113), and the magazine spares no space for images that do not overtly connect fitness with sexual attraction.

Paging through an issue of *SELF* is enough to make the modest blush. This is the land of the nearly-naked woman, clad merely in spandex shorts and a sports bra, a bikini, or in a few cases, nothing at all. Accompanying each article, from “Sculpt like a star” to “Eat up to slim down,” the woman pictured is ripped, blemish-free, and invariably wearing as little clothing as possible. In one photo, a woman is washing windows in only her panties and tank top (July, 2011); in another, she is provocatively posed in just her underwear and sweater—while checking her email (January, 2011)! Ads for Zappos!.com picture women wearing only shoes, their backsides and breast barely shielded by text boxes (September, 2011). In one of *SELF*’s sisterly-sounding zen installments, usually the last page of the issue, a completely naked woman is standing on a rock, butt toward the camera, arms outstretched to the mystical seascape spread before her. The real setting but completely unrealistic story that anyone would find themselves standing naked in this spot makes the scene more absurd than the photographic fantasies in *Glamour*, and more exploitive. Adding insult to absurdity, the blurb on the page encourages readers to “Live as if your body were perfect” (August, 2011, p.143), a difficult demand after 140+ pages of being told—and shown—that our bodies are anything but, while *SELF* shamelessly endorses movie star Shenaé Grimes as having “perfect legs” (October, 2011, p. 68). In

fact, *SELF* makes it abundantly clear that only one body type is truly feminine and acceptable.

Throughout every issue, every single woman photographed in *SELF* magazine has the exact same body type: boy shaped. All of the women pictured in *SELF* look identical to one another from the neck down: narrow hips, small bust, long legs, straight waist, and visible abdominal muscles. Plus size or petite women are nowhere to be found. Where *Glamour* photographs and celebrates the curvy woman on a regular basis, especially when offering wardrobe advice, *SELF* exclusively endorses the athletic and uncannily muscled female form. This single body type, touted as the pinnacle of female beauty and empowerment, serves to exclude those whose reflection does not match, because no amount of diet and exercise will change a person's height and bone structure.

Inside *SELF*, fitness tends to be the primary focus, followed closely by food. Articles and food ads abound in this magazine: with 86 food ads appearing throughout 2011, *SELF* comes in ahead of *Glamour's* 56 food ads, despite a consistently shorter page count per issue. Though food advertising in *SELF*, like *Glamour*, is much scarcer than in *Family Circle*, the ads that do appear align closely with the diet, fitness, and exercise-focus of the magazine. Just as *Glamour's* food advertisements matched the whimsy of the magazine's other content, *SELF's* food advertising, from protein bars to sports drinks, also match the magazine's lean-and-mean mission. *SELF's* ubiquitous food-related content like diet news and meal plans compliments the magazine's diet-consciousness but the sheer amount eating advice starts to contradict the flab-free women pictured on nearly every page. As Sharlene Hesse-Biber explains, "the conflicting 'eat/be thin' message is not new...[and] the diet industry has been quick to capitalize on a solution" (2007, p.165)



in the form of diet food products, like the sugar-free JELL-O and WeightWatcher's string cheese *SELF* regularly advertises. Food ads in *SELF* are more likely to only a half or quarter-page, unlike *Glamour's* full page ads. Also, when *SELF* includes its monthly recipe set, every nutritional detail is spelled out whereas *Glamour's* featured recipes did not usually come with nutritional information. Through images and language, food ads in *SELF* regularly make a direct connection between food and exercise, and while working out is an unequivocally positive topic in the magazine, food and eating are consistently associated with regret and "guilt" (December, 2011, p. 8). Articles like "Eat up to slim down" (April, 2011, p.78) or "Turn off your body's hunger signals" (October, 2011, p.8) in *SELF* suggest that food is another tool for readers to use in the health and weight-loss arena. Even more so than *Glamour*, food is a major pillar of *SELF's* content and the food ads that appear in the magazine align closely with its diet-and-fitness focus.

*Just as I devoured Glamour's food tips, I find myself scribbling out a grocery list after reading SELF's March meal plan, hoping to drop those eight pounds the magazine all but guarantees I'll lose. Sitting with my 12 dog-eared copies of SELF fanned out before me, a stack of those exercise cards and ripped out meal plans, one clear thought scuttles across my harried brain: there are calories to burn, pounds to shed, and yoga tank tops to sweat through. I lose the urge to pick up an issue and dive inside the way I did initially—the way I still do with Glamour. Instead, I recoil, hug my knees, and stare out my living room window. Why this adverse reaction? Is it the slim women smiling back at me, gleaming teeth, toned muscles galore? If they aren't sitting in a position that emphasizes their legs, they are in a bikini, like Gwyneth Paltrow on May's cover, or coyly (albeit awkwardly if I think about) lifting up their sweater to reveal their fabulous*

*flat stomach like Ms. November. Is it the glaring white cover that makes the neon, italicized title look demanding? “Change yourSELF is what it seems to mean. I start to believe I could somehow lose my curvy hips for the narrow, fat-free frames I see.*

*My fiery desire to rebel against the incessant demands—work out this much, eat only this, drink only that—quickly fizzle out. Before long, I am nodding my head along shamefully, ripping out all the exercise cards, confessing silently to the magazine that yes, I really should only eat 1,400 calories a day, and I really should have pushed myself much harder on my run, and I really DO need to make up the workout I missed earlier in the week...After awhile, these thoughts become a punishing chorus that pushes me to tears. SELF is a world of women who have arrived at the pinnacle of female strength and beauty, disciplined and “empowered” by their workouts. If this is feminism’s new form—a reclaimed and self-defined ideal—I am not in the club. Looking at them, and then at my much rounder stomach, leaves me feeling anything but empowered.*

*Family Circle: Food, Glorious Food!*

After 79 years of publication, *Family Circle* is a magazine legend with a rate base of 3.8 million (Meredith, 2011a), and an estimated monthly audience of over 18 million readers (Statista, 2011); as an added advantage, this massive audience is extremely loyal to *Family Circle* with nearly half of its readers rating the magazine as their favorite and reporting consistent readership month to month (SRDS, 2011c). *Family Circle*’s media kit declares that there is “an intimate bond, an emotional connection between the magazine and its readers” as “the most trusted source of information for taking care of” their families (Meredith, 2011a). Similarly, *Family Circle*’s mission statement declares that the magazine “celebrates today’s family and champions the women at its

center...[and] helps readers look and feel their best by delivering the latest health, diet and fitness news, and beauty and fashion tips” (SRDS, 2011d). Though the magazine’s readers have a median age of 52 (Meredith, 2011a), significantly older than the average readers of *Glamour* or *SELF*, several content similarities exist. The same workout clothes are advertised in all three magazines, along with eye makeup targeting those dark circles plaguing women of all ages. Scanning the table of contents reveals that the unchanging feature sections for *Family Circle*, “Style, Health, Food, and Home” (for example, April 17, 2011, p. 1-2), closely resemble the formulaic installments in *Glamour* (“Glamour Beauty, Glamour Fashion, Your Health & Body”) and *SELF* (“Easy Beauty, Your Style, Fit Body, Love Your [August]” (*Glamour*, July, 2011, p.23; *SELF*, August, 2011, p.8). *Family Circle* does not make readers dig for the table of contents, consistently placing it one page turn past the cover, lending itself to easy reference; *Glamour* makes readers wade 15 to 20 pages deep on average, lulling them through the lusty Ralph Lauren ads, while *SELF* readers must navigate at least four pages of makeup, car, and Nike® ads featuring Ms. Flat-Abs.

*Family Circle* addresses women’s concerns on exercise, fashion, food, sex, and money as readily as the other magazines, though it does not prioritize or approach these topics in the same way. In fact, *Family Circle* expands the docket to include kids, marriage, homemaking, family vacations, and showcasing women’s domestic and professional pursuits and accomplishments as well. Whereas *Glamour*’s version of feminism harkened from the “you go girl!” sentiment, and *SELF*’s from a tireless commitment to physical prowess, *Family Circle* suggests female empowerment derives from care giving and multitasking while managing multiple roles. Rather than simply

rejecting the traditional, Mom-as-homemaker family structure, *Family Circle* sends it into hyper drive.

*Family Circle*'s covers suggest this at first glance: never featuring a woman, food is the model on all but five of the 15 covers published in 2011. Tacos (April 1) and pie (July) replace the famous and the buff women on the covers of *Glamour* and *SELF*. When food is not the star, a tasteful bouquet (May) or holiday decorations (December) take its place. Compared to holding the sensually smooth *Glamour*, which feels like a substantive book, serious in its heavy weight like a text of great importance, *Family Circle* feels like a crinkly pamphlet despite the same average number of pages per issue. The sheen, heft, and production glitz are exchanged for the more practical matte finish and homely pictures. In some ways, *Family Circle* looks and feels more approachable, but not as eye-catching or sexy as the sleek muscles of bikini-clad Gwyneth Paltrow (*SELF*, May, 2011). While the family and home take center stage, evidenced by *Family Circle*'s editorial and advertising differences, glamorizing the self is far from abandoned. The thin, young, and fit trinity is worshiped inside this women's magazine, too, elongating the intricate to-do list of being a woman.

Categorized under the headline "Health," this monthly portion of *Family Circle* incorporates holistic wellness and reports the latest fitness and food news aimed at the whole family. Exercise is not always mentioned on the cover page of this installment, making *Family Circle*'s tone far less narcissistic than *Glamour* or *SELF*. January's health section headline, "Use it or lose it" (p. 95) is not chastising about holiday weight gain, but encouraging readers to use all of their vacation days to relax or spend time with family. An article called "Hello Gorgeous" (White, 2011, p. 30) opens a six-page spread

on assembling beautiful bouquets, not a parade of airbrushed beauty queens in priceless makeup and garments. Walking is often emphasized as an energizing and stress-busting activity, rather than a gut-diminishing regimen, as “exercise should relieve anxiety, not worsen it” (Mattheis, July 2011, p.97) according to *Family Circle*. Though the “Health” section is somewhat of a relief after the domineering tone of *SELF* and regularly features pictures of real women (read: size 12+, curvy, short), tan, toned, sports-bra clad athletic goddesses are not absent from the photos in this section. She’s running the stairs in June to “lose more weight in less time” (Mattheis, 2011, June, p. 148) and revealing the “slim down secrets” promised on the August cover. These token elements anchor the magazine to the beauty myth, even while its genuinely friendly and helpful tone distance it from the arrogance and self-involvement seen in *Glamour* and *SELF*. At times, *Family Circle* feels cozy, mature—a haven where women have relinquished the obsession with their faces and frames. At others, the commitment to readers’ wellness feels undermined by the edict to be thin and young.

The articles and advertising in *Family Circle* vary to match its more diversified scope, covering topics and products not seen in *Glamour* and *SELF*. Ads for home laundry detergent, dog food, and vacation destinations make frequent appearances; articles on raising teenagers, keeping the family dog healthy, and remodeling the house are staples. Even some issues addressed in all three magazines, like social media usage, take on a more substantive feel under *Family Circle*’s pen, posing answers to more complicated scenarios than *Glamour*’s simplistic “Dos and Don’ts” binary. However, familiar themes arise in these *Family Circle* features: “Clutter Control” (Stebbins, 2011, p. 21) tackles the whole disordered house, while right after Thanksgiving, an extra issue

helps us fight “Against the Gain” (Bingham, 2011, November 29, p. 73) to lose ten pounds *during* the holidays. Even the beloved family dog or cat cannot escape the pressure to be fit in June’s “Slim down your pet” (Shatzman, 2011, p. 104). The idea that women constantly encounter chaotic disarray in their homes and fat encroaching on every family member continues to be perpetuated in *Family Circle*, even amidst unique, helpful, and timely advice like “How to buy a tablet” computer (Tynan-Wood, 2011, September, p.109) or the most useful new apps for the Smartphone (2011, March). An advertisement for Lee jeans features a slender woman, measuring tape around her waist, showcasing the instantly “slimming” (2011, May, p. 56) fit that defies the old “mom jeans” (November 29, 2011, p. 51) style. Products target women in their primary role according to *Family Circle*, motherhood, while simultaneously distancing women from the stereotype that mothers are stylishly less aware. Walmart’s ads follow a mom around the store as she buys workout clothes, makeup, and shampoo to get “crazy-shiny hair like women in shampoo commercials” (2011, March, p.127). *Family Circle*’s entrenched consumerism runs even deeper than *Glamour*’s, and though often focused on similar pursuits, must expand to include not only beautifying the reader herself, but her home, children, and life. Thus ads for new carpeting, photos of stunning dining rooms, and fashion shoots for this fall’s designer teen looks fill up *Family Circle* and their readers’ to-do lists. Even in an ad for window blinds, the model states, “I go a million miles an hour” (2011, February, p. 109), reinforcing busyness as the new symbol of successful womanhood. Multitasking is to *Family Circle* what fitness is to *SELF*: the holy grail—the ultimate embodiment of twenty-first century femininity, and a badge of honor in the battle of being female. Despite the exhausting nature of this existence, *Family Circle*

half-heartedly attempts to dissuade readers from doing too much, burying phrases like “nix multitasking” (Reyes, 2011, p. 183) into an article which, just as *SELF*’s occasional ‘love your body’ message, is too little, too late.

What is most striking about *Family Circle* is the sheer *everything*-ness women are represented as being. Phone pinned between shoulder and ear, one hand typing, the other reaching for her coffee mug, each woman portrayed throughout one issue of *Family Circle* is multitasking while juggling her multiple roles. She is making dinner, answering email, taking the dog to the vet, wrapping presents, and sipping a homemade latte on the couch while her children gallivant around her. Nails manicured and face painted, she is keeping track of her teen daughter’s driving habits. She knows how to be the perfect listener, an energetic lover, and a problem-solving-super-mom. She has a stash of recipes and chocolates at the ready for an impromptu get-together. She clips coupons, erases her fine lines, and takes an antidepressant. The patio is embellished with new furniture and glassware each spring and her homemade decorations for Halloween transform the living room into....well, into something straight out of a magazine. She “bake[s] to perfection” (2011, November 1, p. 166), polishes the furniture, and straightens her hair. In one ad, she talks with her pharmacist, walks on the beach with her husband, and checks her Smartphone all at the same time (Aetna, 2011, November 1). The bombardment of to-dos and the escalating pressure to purchase soon overwhelms to the point of numbness, making quotes like “36% of moms don’t have enough time to focus on themselves” (Cohen, 2011, March, p.128) seem self-evident. Womanhood becomes synonymous with productivity in *Family Circle*, the person and the action blurring until the female is a walking conglomerate of products and services rendered for others.

Despite this flood of information and activities, the chief medium for expressing femininity and the primary tool in caring for others is clear: food. About 17 percent of *Family Circle* is comprised of food advertising, averaging about 28 food ads per issue, compared to *SELF*'s seven and *Glamour*'s five. Though *Family Circle* prints more pages per month than *SELF*, and fewer than *Glamour*, the magazine has the largest ratio of food advertising to all other content of the three publications. Unlike *Glamour* and *SELF*, *Family Circle* runs a considerable number of quarter-page food ads each month, in addition to half and full page ads. Monthly food tips and news blurbs are also squeezed into the margins giving readers "3 new ideas for cucumbers" (2011, June, p. 168) or information on the healthiest types of nuts (Bingham, 2011, October 1). In stark contrast to both *SELF* and *Glamour*, Also differing from the two other magazines in this study, *Family Circle* food ads are more likely to have a celebratory tone, connecting food with holidays and family milestones like birthdays. Whereas *SELF* tends to feature food in a dieting context and *Glamour* touts a product's coolness and convenience, *Family Circle*'s monthly "Food" section starts with a photo of a fresh, whole food, from bananas in January to basil in June, and continues with page after page of recipes, all accompanied with nutritional information, similar to *SELF*'s presentation. Articles about food throughout *Family Circle* do not tend to focus on weight loss or exercising: "Think Positive!" (Tynan-Wood, 2011, January, p. 18) is the title of a January article about eating healthier rather than dieting, and "Eat bright" (Bingham, 2011, July, p. 100) playfully shows readers how to incorporate more produce variety into their lives. Food is less likely to be associated with transgression and guilt, and more often contextualized as a necessity and opportunity for enjoyment in *Family Circle*.



Intermingled in this section are the majority of the issue's food advertisements. Though some food ads appearing in *Glamour* and *SELF* also turn up in *Family Circle* throughout 2011, the sheer amount of food ads in *Family Circle*, as well as the variety of ads, makes *Family Circle*'s food advertising much different from the other two publications. Ads for children's cereals and lunch products appear, aimed at the female reader in her role as a mother; ads for steaks and salad dressing address women as meal planners and grocery shoppers—all products unseen in the magazines targeting younger demographics. While *Glamour* and *SELF* have more in common when it comes to food related content and ads, *Family Circle* stands apart in sheer amount of material and the wider variety of its portrayal. However, just like *Glamour* and *SELF*, the food ads in *Family Circle* align closely with the magazine's chief topics: home, family, and child-raising.

*Where to begin? Unlike closing the pages of Glamour or SELF, where the task at the forefront of my mind seemed clearer—go shopping, go work out—finishing a single issue of Family Circle leaves my head spinning. Not just grocery lists or exercise moves now, but craft projects, recipes, home to-dos as well. But just as with SELF, eventually the cacophony gives way to one, resonating note—the central theme Family Circle recapitulates in every issue: be everything, do it all. Through a modernized lens, hip to current trends and Smartphone apps, Family Circle still paints a picture of traditional values and gender roles. In the circle, home, family, and food are sacred; so are the body, the face, and the career. If I let this magazine set my expectations for middle age, then I will have heaped collectivist concerns upon the same slavish attention to beauty, figure, and fashion I feel compelled to give now—and the need to be slim and young will*

*never go away. Being a woman in Family Circle's image leaves me feeling drained for my future self.*

*Unfortunately, I am noticing something about the young women in my life: they are already tired. The high-achieving, octane-energy colleagues and friends are already beat. I see it in them as I have come to pluck it out of my own reflection, catching the dark circles, the dogged expression. I hear it from them in the office and as we commiserate in my kitchen. "I used to work out every day," we lament. "I used to get up at 4am, go to the gym, be at work by 6:30. I used to be so productive." Now we drag ourselves home rather than to Bootcamp, order the sandwich rather than the salad. We've had it.*

*Our magazines tell us "Hey, it's okay to pack on the concealer and call it sleep" (Glamour, February 2012), and how to "Erase 8 pounds" (SELF, September 2011, cover), but we are the kind of tired sleep cannot fix and disenchanted with the hollow accomplishment of losing weight. We need what I have come to call "soul sleep"—a rejuvenation of spirit and true self-acceptance. Though they provide us with endless pieces of absurd advice—... "Go ahead! Have a Steamy Summer Fling!" (Glamour, August 2011, p. 110): our magazines do not teach us how to nurture ourselves. We wonder where all our energy went (we expected it to last until we were at least 40) and how women in their 50s balance a home, career, and kids. Does the body image battle ever come to a ceasefire? Will we ever get to embrace ourselves? Family Circle doesn't make me think so.*

*Summary: Leaving the Illusion*

Aimed at different demographics and focused on different topics, three of the most popular women's magazines in circulation represent a cross-section of the content consumed by readers. *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle* spend unequal amounts of time on similar topics such as fashion, fitness, food, and family issues, though each of their mission statements asserts that they publish their material with their female readers in mind. Despite the many differences between these three publications, their ubiquitous monthly attention to food speaks greatly about the role food and eating play in the diverse versions of ideal femininity represented by these magazines. Whether focused on fashion, fitness, or family, all three place food prominently in print and incorporate food advertising. And in all three magazines, food advertisements tend to reflect the publications focus: food ads in *SELF* regularly reference diet and exercise while food ads in *Glamour* evoke a sense of youth and fun, using bright colors and imagery similar to their fashion photo spreads. *Family Circle*'s focus on family and child-raising is reflected in the types of food advertisements found in the magazine as well. In the next chapter, the food advertising appearing in these magazines will be analyzed and interpreted for greater understanding of the messages sent to women about food and eating through these ads.

*Foraging through over 5,000 pages of magazines induces sensory overload—the blazing colors and headlines, the endless stream of articles and objects, clamoring for attention. Glamour invites readers in to its glittery, materialistic web; SELF guarantees the dream body, and Family Circle, the dream life. I walk away from my stack of magazines—all read, all carefully studied—on knees-turned-to-jelly. The endless parade*

*of "Dos and Don'ts" (a Glamour feature), Drop 10 workout moves I feel pressure to do right this instant (SELF) and the omnipresent tips for cooking, decorating, and organizing (Family Circle) that produce a sense of urgency all culminate within their own pages to produce an overwhelming feeling. I am inundated by everything I am not, all the latest trends my home and closet do not resemble, and as always, the size-two-slim body I do not possess.*

*The magazine caresses with the same page that slices into my ego, and when the inevitable moment comes to put the magazine down and walk away, the harsh world comes back into focus. Money is not spilling out my pockets to afford that gorgeous Michael Kors sundress, and I will not be walking through my front door into a lakefront mansion decorated by Crate & Barrel. I have not lost eight pounds, still splurged on that muffin at Starbucks this morning, which SELF just told me was my entire day's allotment of saturated fat and sugar, and, oh yes!—Family Circle did not in fact solve all of my holiday planning dilemmas. The magic of the magazine lingers, and continues to color my eyes for hours after reading. I happened to choose a private bathroom stall after reading one issue of SELF, and lost 20 minutes of my morning examining my waistline in the mirror, displeased with how my stomach was pushing on the top of my pants. No women in the magazine looked like this. And these pants are a size eight! My stomach growls, and I groan in response. The magazines told me, "You have a lot of work to do" and this feeling stays with me for the rest of the day.*

## FOOD ADVERTISING

Our bodies are the places where our drive for perfection gets played out. Food is all around us, as are meals and the pressure that goes with them, (Martin, 2007, p. 17).

*Blueberries -30 – carb*  
*Coffee – 40 – some fat*  
*Yogurt – 80 – protein*  
*Celery – 10 –*  
*Avocado - 50 – fat*  
*Protein shake – 160*

*I open my copy of Naomi Wolf's The Beauty Myth, and this scrap of paper floats out—just one dozens I find floating around my desk, purse, on napkins, the back of a grocery lists. And ironically in the margins of the books I pour over trying to unravel WHY women—why I—do this in the first place. I am a walking calorie calculator, a database of the foods I eat stored permanently in the judgmental spreadsheet of my mind, taking up precious space I angrily want to reclaim for higher uses. It was the easiest habit I ever got into, and now it is as automatic as blinking. Another moment lost to the criticizing voice spreading its venom through me...too fat, too weak, too full. Eat less, do more, run harder. There's always someone thinner.*

*I will learn how to shut you up. I will listen to the brave, unabashed women, the spoken word artists coming through my iPod while I go for a morning run. "Praise the miracle body," they say. "Do not let this universe regret you."*

- Researcher's personal journal, 2/7/2012

*Food Advertising in 2011: A Brief Overview and Key Themes*

The Nielsen corporation estimates that over three million U.S. dollars were spent on advertising in magazines in 2011—up seven percent from the year before in the first quarter alone (2011, June 10). Food advertising in magazines has been identified as influentially superior to other mediums such as television and radio in terms of affecting consumer purchases (MPA, 2009). Coffee, snacks, and soft drinks lead the list of products consumers are most apt to buy after seeing ads in magazines versus on the Internet or TV (MPA, 2009). The apparent success of magazine advertising for food products does not come without a price, however. In 2011, companies like Kraft Foods, Campbell Soup, and Nestle landed among the top 15 biggest spenders on magazine ads, beating out major corporations like Disney, Ford, and Chrysler; Kellogg, Pepsico, and Mars Incorporated all spent more than large retailers like Sprint, JC Penny, and Gap (MPA, 2011b). Kantar Media reports that advertisers spent over 3.2 million dollars promoting food and restaurants in just the first quarter of 2011 (2011, June 13). Given the financial force behind food advertising and its ubiquity on the airwaves and in print, the likes of Kraft and Kellogg developed restrictions on marketing food to children in 2011, working to reduce the number of sugar and fat-laden products aimed at kids (Seidman, 2011) across the media landscape.

While the marketing of food to children should remain a primary concern, there are other vulnerable populations encountering food advertising on a daily basis. As the previous chapters demonstrated, women's ongoing body battles may leave them susceptible to any information or persuasion when it comes to food and eating—topics already at the forefront of their minds. Combined with women's complex, and perhaps

subordinate, relationships with their dizzying and often demanding magazines, food advertising has the potential to significantly influence the discourse facing female consumers. Certainly for the magazines in this study, food and eating are featured prominently in the editorial content, and food advertising accounts for a considerable amount of the print in between.

Of all the 554 food ads appearing in the three magazines throughout 2011, 347 are unique and 208 ads are duplicates, appearing multiple times throughout the year and in some cases throughout all three publications. When I removed the food advertisements from the magazines, I noted the magazine, month, and page number on the back of each ad, allowing me to comment on which publication(s) a particular ad appears in. Throughout the following analysis, I include information about how many times and in which journals a particular advertisement appears, enriching the interpretation and understanding of the ad's potential audience. Working with the ads outside of their magazines allowed me to identify patterns and themes across print food advertising aimed at women—not just across food advertising in one publication. The rest of this chapter will define, explain, and interpret examples for these themes, connecting them to the broader context established in Chapter Four for *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle*. First, I will address a few general differences and similarities in the types of ads appearing across these three women's magazines in 2011.

While some food advertisement crossover occurred among all three periodicals, each magazine primarily stuck to ads and products congruent with their primary focus: *Glamour*'s food ads are for the trendy twenty-year old concerned about watching her figure; fitness features predominantly in *SELF*'s food ads, and the ads unique to *Family*

*Circle* target women as mothers, grocery shoppers, and the orchestrator of weeknight and holiday meals alike. For example, quarter-page ads for frozen alcoholic beverages appear only in *Glamour*, touting the non-hassle, party-ready product. Campbell Soup ads appear exclusively—and in abundance—in *Family Circle*, as do ads for basic ingredients like vanilla extract or dry seasonings. Powerade Zero sports drink ads are unique to *SELF*. Ads for Skinny Cow diet products crossover between the pages of *Glamour* and *SELF*, like the Philadelphia Cream Cheese line shown in both *Glamour* and *Family Circle* (apparently too indulgent for any of *SELF*'s strict meal plans). Only two instances of ads appear in all three magazines throughout 2011: the WeightWatcher's product family and Crystal Light beverage mixes. No matter how dieting, weight, and calorie-counting are prioritized by each of these magazines, they all included food advertisements for diet food products.

Restaurant ads offer a final notable difference in the food ads found across these magazines. All but four issues of *SELF* contain an ad for Ruby Tuesday restaurants. No restaurant ads ran in *Glamour*, but *Family Circle* has full-page promotions for McDonald's, Wendy's, and Moe's Southwest Grill. These fast-food chains suggest Wendy's sophisticated fresh berry and chicken salad is appropriate for the discerning taste of the 50+ *Family Circle* reader, while McDonald's and Moe's focus on women as mothers, feeding their children well while making them happy. Even in just a few restaurant advertisements, the essence of the host magazine shines through, suggesting that women encounter a fairly uniform discourse on food while reading a particular magazine. In each magazine, I found at least one 'token' food advertisement aimed at outside demographics, such as *Glamour* and *SELF*'s Sun Chips ad, featuring a mother



and her son, or the young couple on a date in one of *Family Circle*'s Oscar Meyer ads. Striving to be inclusive, perhaps to catch the eye of the infrequent reader flipping through the magazine in a check-out line, these few ads acknowledge women outside the magazine's standard readership, though the majority of food ads seem contoured to the periodicals' principal audience. As the following analysis reveals, despite the standardization of food advertisements within a given magazine, the ads construct a multihued narrative, replete with directives, temptations, and criticisms, on how women should think about food and eating in their lives.

### *Key Themes*

Through choice words, emotionally-charged images, and an intricate web of associations, food advertising in women's magazines communicates a complex and nuanced set of messages about what food means in a woman's world. These messages encourage women to think about food in certain ways, often directly connected to a specific role women may enact in their lives like mother, friend, shopper, or athlete. Four main themes emerge in my analysis of food advertising: 1) *To Die(t) For* captures how food is often associated with diet and exercise through ads that promote "skinny" food products as virtuous, eating as a guilt-ridden activity, and ads that ultimately connect food to the higher purpose of being thin; 2) *Food Fantasies* employ whimsical imagery and language in ads that present food as something beyond itself, encouraging women to see food as synonymous with adventure, sex, and love; 3) *Food, Family, and the Female*, demonstrates how women achieve successful motherhood and homemaker status through food, and reinforces traditional gender roles with shopping, cooking, and serving food framed as female pursuits; and 4) *Other* comments on food advertisements that did not fit

into an aforementioned theme. The ads in this category are basic food promotions, highlighting the existence or features of a product without an expressive subtext. These four themes capture the repeated and pronounced meanings I interpret across the variety of products, advertising approaches, and the magazines in which the food advertisements appear. Several subthemes emerged during my analysis, serving to more thoroughly explore the nuances at work within the larger categories, and will be discussed within each of their respective themes.

### *To Die(t) For*

Though diverse in their advertised products and visual displays, the food ads in this theme connect food to the concepts of thinness and fitness. Like the editorial content of *Glamour*, *SELF*, and *Family Circle*, the ads may approach thinness from different paths, but clearly communicate with exacting language and unmistakable images that food exists to help women stay or become skinny. Ads in this theme regularly announce calories, carbs, and fat grams. Some ads use nutritional statistics to suggest that a food is not sinful, which reinforces the idea of sinful eating in the first place while persuading women to purchase the product. Another notable subtheme of diet-focused food advertising includes the correlation of eating with exercise. These ads, which mostly come from *SELF*, reference exercise as a prerequisite to eating and imply food is primarily fuel for working out rather than necessary in general.

The food ads most blatantly touting weight loss and calorie counting come from the Atkins diet and the WeightWatchers' ad campaigns. Barely bothering to promote their shakes and bars as "delicious" (*Family Circle*, 2011, June, p. 71), the Atkins ads, only present in *Family Circle*, spend most of the page promising a 15-pound weight drop

in just two weeks. This is the *real* appeal of the products—not the taste or nutritional value—but the far more important guarantee of fast and significant weight loss.

WeightWatchers, on the other hand, lets their name imply the purpose of their products, and spends their extensive ad campaign—one of the largest in this study with 16 different advertisements printed in all three magazines—giving women permission and incentive to buy their food. Using positive language, WeightWatchers encourages us to say “Yes” to their light string cheese and “Absolutely” to their coffee cake (*SELF*, January, 2011, p. 69), while the words double as an assurance of the food’s rich flavors. The WeightWatchers point-counting system, printed small but still visible in all of the ads, reminds women that this food is about weight loss.

Likewise, an ad for Multigrain Cheerios cereal reads “More Grains. Less You!” while touting its 110 calories per serving (*Family Circle*, February, 2011, p.133). Wearing a dress made out of the cereal, the computer-drawn female figure in the ad is complete with a tightly cinched waist. The low-calorie food is designed to help women physically *reduce* themselves (“less you”), which the ad suggests is a positive result. In one ad for Special K cereal, the product itself nowhere in sight, a slim, toned woman sassily poses on the beach in her fire-engine red bikini (*SELF*, June, 2011). Without mentioning Special K’s calories or taste, this ad communicates even more piercingly than all the others that the sole value of this food lies in its potential to help women attain the model’s body. Food becomes an afterthought in these ads; carefully monitoring the waistline is the focus.

The pursuit of ‘skinny’ does not stop at food ads for cereal and JELL-O: ice cream, candy, and alcohol get corralled into the diet mold as well, continuing to

emphasize the importance of calorie control when women and food collide. Ads for Skinny Cow ice cream and candy, found in *Glamour* and *SELF*, are similar to the WeightWatchers ads in terms of nutritional information display, but are even more energetic in the presentation of their products than WeightWatchers positive language. While the calorie and fat grams of an ice cream sandwich are highlighted, the prime real estate of the ad is taken up by exclamations like “Skinny Cow candy is to die for!” (*SELF*, September, 2011, p.121) or a love-letter to Skinny Cow signed by one woman’s “Butt & THIGHS” (*SELF*, May, 2011, p.106). These bold statements are compounded by the reminder that women approach eating with their ‘problem areas’ in mind, devoted to controlling their bodies. Eye-catching as the flashy proclamations are, they do not allow us to miss the cartoon cow in the corner of all Skinny Cow advertisements. With her yellow waist-measuring tape looped provocatively around her, the slender cartoon cow is reclined in a sexually prone position. Even female bovines cannot escape the edict to be thin, as this ad reinforces not only the association of these products with ‘skinniness’ rather than taste, but also the overarching theme that women must always be conscious of what they eat as it affects the size of their bodies. Choosing a ‘skinny’ dessert does not excuse a woman from being a *cow* that eats dessert in the first place.

### *Guilt and Regret*

The Skinnygirl Cosmo ad continues to apply that loaded word to products meant for enjoyment and relaxing, and takes calorie-talk to the next level. Skinnygirl, represented by another computer-animated, size-0 female figure, invites women to serve this low calorie, “zero guilt” drink at their holiday parties (*Glamour*, December, 2011, p.242). An ad for FiberOne yogurt also touts its 50 calories and “zero guilt” (*Family*

*Circle*, April 1, 2011, p. 93). In these ads, calories are not printed just as a green light—an indication that a product is sufficiently ‘light’ enough to eat. Rather, the diet product alleviates the feelings of guilt and transgression it suggests are normally associated with eating. These ads do not just put the calorie information front and center, but use language, including the product names, that reinforce the idea that food carries guilty implications in the first place for women. The preponderance of diet foods advertised, especially in *SELF*, compared to non-diet food products presupposes and perpetuates the stereotype that women are continuously dieting and counting calories.

Perpetuating the idea of guilty eating, three different SnackWell’s ads proclaim “Be bad. Snack well” (*Glamour*, June, 2011, p. 143). In one ad, a pair of black leather stiletto boots, walking away from us down a dark alley, fills the page. Encouraged to sense sin and danger, this ad evokes impressions of sex and prostitution. This woman is a risk taker—not afraid to eat the 130 calorie pack of fudge-drizzled popcorn that “lets you be bad, and still be good.” The few pieces of chocolate-drizzled popcorn featured are “deliciously indulgent,” perpetuating the concept of sin associated with chocolate, and snacking in general. In another ad, we see a the young, sexy owner of the stiletto boots, also wearing a racy leather jacket and skin-tight pants, taking off her motorcycle helmet provocatively, lips parted. The final installment of this ad campaign, which ran entirely in *Glamour*, features a skinny young woman, clad in panties and a silky tee, pinning her boyfriend to their disheveled bed by standing on his back. All three ads build on this edgy innuendo, and position sexual attraction as the source of female empowerment, consistent with *Glamour*’s dedication to the young and sensual. At first it seems like these ads might be saying ‘be a bold, daring, playful woman’ but eat mindfully when snacking, in calorie-

controlled segments. But the second heading reverses any hope of this more positive message when it says these 130 calorie packs “let you be bad.” So women *are* bad for snacking, especially on something that is drizzled with chocolate, but are also *good* for having only the “perfectly proportioned” diet food. The ad *dares* women to *go on*, “be bad,” rather than giving them diet-approved permission, and in this way “diet foods can represent both sin and atonement—one stop shopping for guilt-free pleasure” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 165). While chocolate, ice cream, and popcorn are inherently sinful, the diet versions offer redemption.

Capitalizing on this concept of *being good* by choosing certain foods over others and associating eating with working out, an ad for California almonds depicts a woman in workout clothes eating a bowl of chopped almonds and fruit. Presumably smiling about her “handful of good intentions” (*Family Circle*, July, 2011, p.8) that should carry her until lunch, the ad comments not only on this part of the woman’s day, but how she should eat for the rest of it. Though many food advertisements in this analysis promote snack foods, this ad contradictorily suggests that breakfast should last until the noon meal, discounting the need for snacking. While glorifying exercise, the ad also subtly slams the woman by calling to mind the cultural maxim ‘damned by good intentions.’ Invoking these proverbs to make a point about food and female eating, the California almonds ad suggests that although the woman worked out and is eating a healthy breakfast, she is likely to ‘screw up’ later in the day with her mere ‘good intentions.’

Two other ads from the California almond campaign, which ran five different ads multiple times in *SELF* and *Family Circle* in 2011, cite the inherent sin of snacking and offer almonds as the salvation. The practical and sleek layout of the ads might not have

fit with *Glamour's* zeal for the fantastical visuals, but the ads target younger and older women. A trio of attractive, women with noticeably toned arms hover around a bowl of plain and chocolate-covered almonds, or as the ad calls it, "A handful of chocolate-covered permission" (*SELF*, March, 2011, p. 87). Though none of the ladies are eating, and indeed the bowl looks untouched, the ad insists we can "Maximize goodness and minimize guilt" by having just a 'handful' of the healthy almonds and just a taste of indulgent chocolate that the ad is authorizing. Similarly, an ad for Blue Diamond almonds, oven-roasted in dark chocolate powder, suggests that we "Indulge and feel good about it" (*Family Circle*, March, 2011, p. 122). While a slightly more positive message than 'don't feel guilty,' this ad suggests chocolate is an indulgence to feel bad about, as chocolate is often associated with sinfulness in our culture (Rosenblum, 2005) and likely to be framed as a female transgression (Barthel, 1989).

Another ad from California almonds reads that the nuts offer "A handful of no regrets...a simple snack without the guilty aftertaste" (*SELF*, October, 2011, p. 92). Women are once again encouraged to think about eating as a blameworthy activity, and even though the ads provide consent to eat, women are not shown actively consuming food. The prescriptive and judgmental nature of these ads drew criticism from the Sheppard Pratt Center for Eating Disorders, which condemned the ads for telling women they "*should* feel guilty or experience regret if they eat certain foods" and that they should "rely on external permission to eat" (Clemmer, 2011). Rather than encouraging women to listen to their natural hunger cues, rather than liberating women from the endless lists of 'good' and 'bad' foods, these ads cultivate the dichotomy of shame and potential redemption through dieting.

*Exercise: Another Passport to Eating*

Food advertisements also construct a narrative that inextricably links eating with exercise, in addition to calorie-counting and waist-watching. Most commonly found in *SELF*, consistent with the magazine's fitness fanaticism, these food ads indicate that working out is a prerequisite for eating, and eating is a reward for working out. Pure Protein bars are for "when you're done working out" and an ad for Pure Protein gelatin is recommended for staying in shape "because you've got better things to feel guilty about" (*SELF*, June, 2011, p. 107). It is unclear *what* exactly women should feel guilty about instead, but the message persists that eating begets guilt in a woman's life unless she is careful about what she eats *and* how much she exercises.

Two-page ads for Tyson Chicken Breast Strips subtly criticize women for probably not being able to run a "5-minute mile" (*SELF*, January 2011, p. 58), but still assert that women will cook lean, vegetable-filled meals after their sub-par workout. Page two features a thin female model preparing vegetables, provides healthy dinner recipe ideas, and suggests evening activities such as "Go for an after-dinner jog" or "Do some at-home yoga with the kids" (p.59). Reaching beyond what goes on a woman's plate and into what goes on a woman's schedule is an invasive liberty taken by these ads, designed to further influence a woman's thoughts about eating. Exercising before eating to 'earn it' and working out again after dinner to 'burn it' is the subtext in ads that marry food and exercise. One ad for ready-to-cook egg whites takes this union even further. The carton is split open, revealing a yoga mat inside (*SELF*, March, 2011). Exercise not only takes precedence over nourishment in this ad, but exercise *becomes* the nourishment—the food itself. Women are encouraged to prioritize exercise over eating, and consider food mere



workout fuel. Corresponding with the editorial content of *SELF*, these food ads reinforce the magazine's message that food, subservient to fitness, is neither a reward nor a right, but an earning. Guilty, and sin-ridden, the eating female is thus further constrained when it comes to food.

Taken together, the food advertisements in this theme instruct women that eating involves calorie caution, temptation-resistance, and exercise. The near-unanimous mention of calories in these food ads, and the slavish attention paid to female thinness, send a clear message: women, particularly those targeted by *SELF* and *Glamour*, should think about food in terms of losing weight, staying 'skinny,' and exercising to help achieve those goals. Between guilt and indulgence, permission and regret, women are damned by eating, and encouraged to eat in the same food advertisement. In a sense, these ads are not really selling yogurts and protein bars at all; in fact, they are not even really asking us to enthusiastically purchase the 'yummy!' 10-calorie, radioactive-looking gelatin. Food advertising that positions diet and exercise as the thresholds to eating is selling women a body—the thin-ideal body. The products are almost an after-thought, a means to an end that women will buy in pursuit of that culturally-idolized image. As Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) conclude in their analysis, ads that make such a strong connection between diet, exercise, and eating directly contribute to the epidemic of poor body image and possibly destructive eating habits as women strive to achieve the physical ideal presented by the models selling women their food. The advertisements analyzed here preclude themselves from merely reflecting women's nutritional concerns: they help create and continue calorie-counting as a normal practice for women, while reinforcing the associations of guilt, sin, and transgression with a woman's eating habits.

*Food Fantasies*

Just as food advertisements that link food with diet and exercise are ultimately selling women on the idea of the thin-ideal body, the food ads in this theme are selling women something more than chips and salad dressing. Food advertisements in this theme are categorized by splashes of fantasy that distract us from what the food actually *is*, and sell us on what the food can mean or accomplish for us. Food can improve our personality and foster our relationships. Food is love, sex, and adventure—not just iced tea or chocolate chips. Colorful and imaginative, these ads create alternative realities and give food astounding capabilities. Further diversifying the narrative of women, eating, and food, the advertisements in this theme depart from fat grams and fitness; instead of implying that food is sinful, these ads present food as fun and exciting, ultimately up-selling food as more than it appears to be. Food becomes a medium through which women can enhance their lives and experiences with those around them.

An ad for Oscar Mayer Sandwich Combos claims that they will “make your lunchtime as interesting as Jewel’s” (*Glamour*, Sept., 2011, p.306), as the boxed lunch sits amongst the spilled contents of the famous singer-songwriter-actress’s purse. Designer makeup, a BlackBerry, a seashell, and airline tickets litter the page, evidence of Jewel’s exciting and privileged life. The message here is that when eating what Jewel supposedly has for lunch, a woman can shrug off her own, less glamorous life and attain a smidgen of the idolized Hollywood experience. Though the boxed lunch contains pedestrian items like turkey and crackers, the item is enticing because of its higher aspirations that women, in turn, are enticed to pursue. Likewise, T.G.I. Friday’s frozen entrees, also advertised exclusively in *Glamour*, tell women to stop being “boring”

(October, 2011, p. 256) and become more exciting by changing what food they purchase. These ads are associating eating with women's (currently dull) personalities and lifestyles, suggesting that self-enhancement, a persistent theme throughout *Glamour*, can be achieved through food.

Nestea Iced Tea also makes the connection between a woman's character and the products she consumes. This "refreshing iced tea for the bold" is for the woman in the ad who is provocatively leaning across her man to reach the iced tea. "YES makes the first move" (*Glamour*, August 2011, p. 113), the ad declares, confirming the sexual innuendo seen in the image, and construing the woman's playful promiscuity in a positive connotation. Much like the aforementioned SnackWells ad campaign, this ad equates a woman's sexual prowess with female empowerment. Another ad depicts a woman overlooking the ocean from her vintage convertible, drinking the iced tea by herself. "YES takes the scenic route, YES makes the first move, YES laughs louder, YES opens every door..." the ad rhythmically chants at us, providing what sound like personal mantras (*Glamour*, July, 2011, p. 81). The subtext here is a repertoire of desirable feminine traits that women are meant to aspire to: being strong, independent, and ambitious, just like "the YES tea." This ad also tugs on the cultural stereotype that women have difficulty saying 'no' and should strive to 'do it all.' Though the occasional magazine article encourages women to reduce their overextended workloads or say no to a friend, busyness and *doing* for others are often framed as ideal femininity, especially in *Family Circle*. That these ads appear exclusively in *Glamour*, though, makes sense as their images rely on sex and materialism to depict the liberated female.

These ads market their food or beverage as a source of attractive personality traits that women can attain through consumption—a play on the ‘you are what you eat’ maxim. Just as Oscar Mayer will make a woman more interesting, or Nestea will make her more outgoing, another ad campaign contends that buying pork makes her “vibrant” (*Family Circle*, Sept., 2011, p. 229). Life-size images of pork ribs and kabobs dominate the three *Family Circle* ads, framed by the boldfaced words “Be amazing” (July, 2011, p. 125) or “Be inviting” (December, 2011, p. 179). Despite the enormous pictures of pork, it is clear that the ad is not asking the meat to be any of these cheerful adjectives; rather, the ad calls for women to adopt an ‘inviting’ cooking repertoire and a ‘vibrant’ energy. In small pictures across the top of the ad, we get visual confirmation of this call to action: a woman enthusiastically prepares dinner with her daughter, and another socializes vivaciously with her guests, all brought to her by her magnetizing menu. Women are encouraged to see food as a means of self-expression, of saying something about who she is. Food transcends its status as inanimate, and becomes capable of commenting on the content of a woman’s character, not just her stomach.

#### *Smoke and Mirrors*

While some food advertisements in this category are busy anthropomorphizing their products, others are stretching reality in a different way, attempting to convince women that a seemingly ordinary food is more than it appears. Food ads in this subtheme employ whimsical visuals to suggest that familiar products should not be taken at face value, but looked at closely to reveal their enticing, hidden nature. The text in these ads is often juvenile, especially considering the majority of ads in this subtheme appear in *Family Circle*. Perhaps evoking the busy matriarch’s inner child or providing an escape

from the demands of older adult life, the ads hope to make a positive impression that will compel her to grab the item off the shelf at the next opportunity. Distinct from ads that encourage women to adopt the labels given to the food, these ads also depart from the diet and exercise discourse seen in the previous section. In this subset, only two ads mention calories or fat-grams in ultrafine print, and none relate to exercising; indeed, there are more unhealthy food items advertised in this category than any other. From chips to candy, these products represent a notable storyline in the narrative on women and eating.

For example, the Tostitos Artisan Tortilla Chips advertisements ask, “When is a tortilla chip more than a tortilla chip?” (*Glamour*, 2011, p.190; *SELF*, 2011, p. 109) The photo progression in the ad leads from the tortilla chips to freshly-picked peppers. It is important to note this ad does not appear in *Family Circle*; its presence in the other periodicals aligns with *Glamour* and *SELF*’s theme of self-improvement for the woman who does not find herself naturally polished or buffed enough, but needs to change, striving to be more, just as these chips transcend themselves. The idea that tortilla chips can retain the properties of fresh vegetables is painstakingly sold with a straight face in this advertisement. Women are encouraged to suspend their disbelief, and allow the ad to sway them into believing *this* tortilla chip provides not only an upscale experience, but a serving of healthful foods.

Just as the chips are made synonymous with fresh vegetables, four ads use fruit to transform the original product from packaged to freshly-picked. “Get real. Get Jelly Belly” (*Family Circle*, July, 2011, p.21) reads an ad for the jelly bean candies, several of the beans scattered on a mirrored surface. The red bean’s reflection reveals that it is really

a cherry; the green bean is really an apple, and all of the beans reflect whole fruits. The Jelly Bellies, impossibly balanced on their curved ends, seem to be standing in order to more fully reveal their hidden identities. Similarly, a bushel of fresh strawberries springs from the bite taken out of a frozen Edy's Fruit Bar which is equated with "real fruit, naturally" (*Family Circle*, July, 2011, p.43). With the visual juxtaposition of the products to fresh fruit, these ads build the connection that consuming these desserts is transposable with eating healthy, vitamin-rich foods. These snack and dessert ads deviate from their chocolate-covered counterparts, as the warnings or permissions women may have come to expect from food ads depicting such 'sinful' products are nowhere to be seen. Inviting and playful, the ads in this theme are eerily free of any direct mentions of the foods being 'guilt-free,' though the visuals cue us to think of the chips and candy as fresh produce that is naturally faultless. This facet of the narrative composed by food advertising aimed at women is designed to entice by subverting the real qualities of food and getting women to see it as something other than it is, relying on fantasy rather than fact. Other ads in this category chose more literal—and risqué—elements to influence how women interpret food.

### *Sex and Love*

Food adopts the ultimate fantasies in this subtheme, and attaches the ideas of sex and love to some of the richest foods advertised in this analysis: pizza, pasta, and brownies all appear, and the freedom from associations with guilt, regret, or 'being bad' continues. In fact, they meet their antithesis in the decadent images that suggest bliss and bounty, passion and pleasurable eating, rather than avoidance and restraint. The bouncy tenor seen in other ads within this fantasy-based theme persists here, but pulls on a more

visceral cultural thread, and adds another factor to the discourse of women, food, and eating.

Food becomes synonymous with sex and love in these ads; women are encouraged to see food as symbolic of something greater, deeper, and more meaningful than a can of cherries or a bottle of salad dressing. Interestingly, these products tend to be viscous, like creamy sauces or lusciously melting peanut butter and chocolate, adding to the sensuality of the ads and helping to evoke the sexual connotations. Through powerful visuals and choice language, these ads unmistakably perform sexuality and recapitulate culturally recognized innuendos. For example, the text in one Newman's Own pasta sauce ad reads like the beginning of a dirty joke: "So, crushed tomatoes, basil, olive oil, and spices walked into a jar..." (*Family Circle*, Nov. 1, 2011, p. 160). In another, a pizza, anthropomorphized with the gift of speech, tells a neighboring salad, "OMG, you look amazing. Who are you wearing?" (*Family Circle*, May, 2011, p. 184), a play on the colloquialism 'what are you wearing?' In two other Newman's Own ads, fantasy comes even more to the forefront, as the salad dressing says, "Part of me is extra virgin, but I know exactly what I'm doing" (*Family Circle*, August, 2011, p. 167), leaving the implications to our imagination. "If pasta could fantasize, this would be noodle nirvana," says the ad for creamy alfredo sauce, bathing a bowl of pasta in its rich whiteness (*Family Circle*, August, 2011, p. 23), and leaving women to do the real fantasizing at the ad's suggestion.

The Newman's Own products, only found in *Family Circle* in this analysis, deal in the tantalizing language of sex, which might be seen as a revisiting of the idea that eating is sinful, but the jaunty nature of these ads and the richness of the products

advertised does much to distance them from this concept. Ads like those from Newman's Own are playful rather than promiscuous—a theme that tints the pages of *Glamour*. While these ads encourage women to fantasize about and relish food, women have yet to be shown actively consuming food—until now.

Only one out of 347 ads in this analysis shows a woman with food actually in her mouth. A young, redheaded woman has her lips wrapped around an Oscar Mayer Angus beef frank protruding from her boyfriend's mouth. The phallic nature of the picture is overwhelming: his bared teeth and flexed jaw position him as the source of the sausage, suggesting he has the firmer grip while her fingers support the hot dog as it enters her softly opened mouth, her cheeks puckered inwards as though she is sucking on a straw. The sexual overtone is weakly diverted by the words "Love at first sight" (*Family Circle*, 2011, p. 161), as the couple is looking at each other across the sausage, and one has to wonder what love has to do with this scene. Is it the cultural maxim that guys like a girl with an appetite, who doesn't just order a salad? Or is *she* 'in love' with the release of eating this fattening food—perhaps the first time she has eaten such a food in months while searching for a relationship? It is significant that the woman is not alone in the one and only ad that shows a female eating—not just *about* to take a bite. Something about the male's presence in the ad gives the woman permission to eat, revisiting the idea that women need external approval to consume, while associating eating with sexually pleasure, intimacy, and love.

And food becomes synonymous with love in several food ads: chocolate and cherries transcend their simple status when used by a woman in her baking. Just as women are steered to think of food in terms of sexual fantasy, these food ads also



communicate a very clear equation to women: food = love. An ad for Toll House morsels asks, “Who would you bake some love for?” (*Family Circle*, August, 2011, p. 53), as two women work together over a mixing bowl. Though brownies and cookies appear to be the tangible end result of a woman’s efforts in all of Toll House’s ads, each and every one directs women to “Bake some love.” Betty Crocker cookie mixes also provide women with three simple steps to follow: “Pour. Mix. Love” (*Family Circle*, December, 2011, p. 153). Food is presented in these ads as a viable vessel for not just expressing love, but for a woman to *enact* love. In an ad for Lucky Leaf cherries, where women are instructed to “Bake your heart out,” the product spells “I love you” (*Family Circle*, December, 2011, p. 109)—again gifted with the power of words, food now speaks through her and for her, capable of rendering the most heartfelt sentiments. Similarly, in an ad for Barilla noodles and pasta sauce, the two products represent the most classic, towering romantic heroes of all time: Romeo and Juliet. Food is granted a substantial identity through food advertising: a voice, a heart, a mind, even archetypal characters to portray. Food has been the gateway to a more glamorous life, a more gregarious personality, and sexual intrigue: now food has become a physical, consumable representation of love.

Drawing on a range of cultural icons, hot-button phrases, and sexual symbolism, the ads in this fantasy theme represent a significant portion of the discourse on women and eating, as told by food advertising in women’s magazines. In these ads, women are led down different avenues of thought toward food and eating that share a common thread: food is so much more than just *food*, and can make daydreams a reality. A completely different chapter is added to the story of woman and food by these ads, which thoroughly depart from the tone of diet and exercise-based food promotions. While it can

be argued that associating food with sex and love is more pleasant to most women than thinking of WeightWatchers and workouts, shrouding products in a veil of fantasy is also problematic. JellyBellys are not real fruit in a sugary disguise; cookies alone cannot substantiate a loved one's emotional needs. Fortunately, an extensive collection of advertisements analyzed in the next section instructs women on how to successfully meet the needs of her family and fulfill the many duties of being female through food.

### *Food, Family, and the Female*

Continuing to equate food and love, food advertisements dramatically shift their focus in this theme to the multiple roles a woman may enact in her life: mother, wife, cook, homemaker, and shopper. Food advertisements in this category do not send sensual messages, inviting women to take pleasure in their own eating, nor do they concern themselves with calories or cardio, though the women pictured in these ads remain invariably slender and young, despite the fact that they supposedly have multiple children. Rather, these ads reinforce the traditional gender roles by portraying women as the grocery getter, the family cook, and the resident nutritionist. Food, as demonstrated in the visual and textual messages of these promotions, is a way for a woman to be a good mother, attentive and involved with her children, and spending time with the family. Food provides a medium for women to garner recognition and appreciation from those around her, as well as triumph over the pressure-filled holiday season. Women are encouraged to see food as an asset and a tool they expertly wield to create precious moments on holidays and every day. The ads in this category present a woman as an eater only by association with her family: the food in front of her *came* from her, but ultimately is not *for* her. Though she partakes in the family dinner, has dessert with her daughter,

and dons the famous “got milk?” mustache with her son (*Family Circle*, August, 2011, p. 13), her eating is an act of engagement, creating a special moment for others rather than eating entirely of her own volition.

Notably, every ad in this category comes from *Family Circle*. This is logical based on the nature of the products advertised, and the way the ads communicate with women about food and eating. *Family Circle*, the overwhelming provider of food advertisements for this analysis, is also the only one of the three magazines used in this study to include ads that target a woman in her role as the family’s primary grocery shopper. These ads marketed a cereal to women that is clearly for her child’s consumption, and as the younger readers of *Glamour* and *SELF* are less likely to be mothers—or less likely to be reading those publications for child-rearing information—it follows that such advertising would be absent from those periodicals.

Magazines commonly portray women as the “emotional referee and relational workers in the family” (Corrigan, 1997, p. 88), and the majority of the food advertisements in this category follow suit, especially when it comes to building a happy relationship with her children. In a series of black and white Polaroid snapshots, women and their children make various desserts with Kellogg’s Rice Krispies cereal. The nostalgic-looking ads encourage women to “Carve out some time with your little pumpkin” (October, 2011, p.112) to make Halloween treats and “Don’t let summer days melt away” (July, 2011, p. 138) without spending this quality time with her two small children. The warm, homey scenes evoke childhood memories, and call women to make new ones with their own kids, using food as the catalyst for interacting.

Similarly, ads for Skittles and Starburst candy show mothers lounging on the couch with their children sharing the sweets because “they’re only kids for so long” (July, 2011, p. 13). Mother and son toss the Skittles in the air, defying the ‘don’t play with your food’ rule, while Mom and daughter make bracelets out of Starburst wrappers. The mother-daughter ad reads, “Finally a fashion statement the two of you can agree on” (August, 2011, p. 93)—a highly gendered message assuming and reinforcing several stereotypes: that women are concerned with fashion and appearance, and that mothers and daughters feud and judge one another on their sartorial choices. While women are being encouraged to see food as a means of memory-making with their children, these ads also return to questions of when and with whom women can eat. The only time a woman is *about* to eat candy—or any sweets at all—she is with her son and the Skittles are falling toward her mouth, but when she is with her daughter, neither is even about to take a bite. It is only implied that they did. These circumstances repeat in an ad for Banquet’s individual frozen pies, or as Mom sees them, “Homework bribery in a warm, flaky crust” (January, 2011, p. 39). Mom and daughter sit at the kitchen table with their pies, forks poised, but again neither is actively eating. The daughter looks incredulous, obviously unaware that dessert was coming with a caveat, while Mom looks on with an amused but authoritative gaze.

Food, in addition to being a way of bringing children and parents together, is also framed as an essential component to good parenting; the products a woman chooses for her children indicate what type of parent she is. For example, the iconic “got milk?” ad campaign describes celebrities like Angie Harmon and Sofia Vergara as ‘role mothers’ for serving their children milk, and doing their job of setting the right example by

drinking it, too. Similar to the advertisements that suggest a woman can “Be amazing” by serving pork, these ads suggest that a woman can become a better mother based on the products she supplies for her children. The most potent and emotionally charged examples of this theme are the two-page Gatorade spreads. The ads feature mothers cheering or crying from the stands at her child’s sporting event while their son or daughter makes a winning play. The intense text of the ads, “I’ve memorized your playbook, I’ve made these bleachers my second home, I’ll do whatever it takes to help you BECOME” (January, 2011, p. 41), oozes with virtue and self-sacrifice—a cultural expectation placed on mothers. Gatorade, positioned as *the* product to provide the adolescent athletes, ultimately takes a back seat in these ads that are selling women a particular version of motherhood that includes absolute selflessness and deep dedication.

### *Food Glory*

Motherhood is not the only role in which food advertising asserts women should excel: women are encouraged to show equal devotion to the whole family through their cooking. In turn, advertisements in this subtheme also suggest that women earn appreciation, praise, and a sense of achievement from the food they prepare. Many ads in this subtheme come complete with a recipe printed on the page, aiding women in realizing their full potential as their family’s meal preparer. For example, an ad for Johnsonville sausage includes a rigatoni recipe at the bottom of the promotion, while explaining “The second helping. It’s how your family says ‘Thanks, Mom’” (February, 2011, p. 85). Another ad for Velveeta features a chicken recipe, and a woman wearing an apron that reads, “Trust us, this cook will be kissed,” (December, 2011, p. 169). Not only do these ads imply that a woman garners gratitude from her family because of food, but

how her family responds to the food she prepares should be taken as a serious and valid indication of how they feel about her. Pepperidge Farm pastry shells guarantees that women will “eat up the praise” while her family eats up her appetizers (December, 2011, p. 31); Campbell’s soup ads, providing more recipes for her repertoire, reassures that “compliments? You’ll get ‘em” (November 29, 2011, p. 79) and promises “you’ll be soaking up compliments” (February, 2011, p. 173). It is interesting that these ads tell women to “eat up” flattery rather than food, suggesting that a woman feeds off the compliments she receives on her cooking—that her sustenance comes from keeping her family happy and fed. Again, women may be positioned in an eating situation, but she is meant to get satisfaction and enjoyment as the provider of the meal rather than a consumer of it, and thus is never shown actually eating. And again, these ads create a highly gendered, deeply traditional discourse on cooking, blatantly assuming that women are the family meal preparers and that food is a female subject matter.

While some ads guarantee food will generate praise and appreciation for women, other ads talk to women from ‘behind-in-scenes’ to help ensure their success. Another Campbell’s soup ad helps women “give your meat and potatoes guy a meat and potatoes dinner...for around \$4” (December, 2011, p. 65) while another provides her with a “fool-proof recipe” (September, 2011, p. 192). Equipping women with ultra-economical recipes and husband-pleasing dinner ideas, these food advertisements position themselves as women’s allies, eager to aid her in earning those compliments and feeding her family. Just like women’s magazines, these ads adopt the intimate and informal tone of a friend; and just like women’s magazines, food ads also take liberties with this tone, not-so-subtly suggesting that women need all the help they can get in the kitchen. Sprinkling sliced

almonds on the asparagus she is serving her family lends her “instant culinary credibility” and “sudden sophistication” (April 1, 2011, p.105) that she was previous lacking. That this ad is another installment in the California almonds ad campaign is likely unsurprising, given their tendency to criticize women’s food choices as a means of promoting their product. Campbell’s Soup, a moment ago speaking to women in a supportive tone, now offers women a simplistic taco recipe that “requires: one skillet, no skill” so the untalented in the kitchen need not fear (November 29, 2011, p. 27). In an ad for Crystal Farms hash browns, a woman sits in a meeting at work, though she is not participating: she is busy grating potatoes. “Who has time to make cheesy hash browns?” asks the ad, then answering “You do” (April 1, 2011, p. 113). Absurd and gendered to the hilt, this ad unashamedly insinuates that a woman would be more focused on cooking than on her career *while* at work; the subtext implies that her career keeps her out of the kitchen, so she requires the pre-shredded potato product to maintain some semblance of work-home balance. Food advertisements like these are perfect examples of how “advertisers...[construct] women as independent and in control, but only thanks to particular commodities” (Corrigan, 1997, p.74), using the results of feminism to further the reach of consumerism. The more successful a woman becomes, the more advertisers can lure her into relying on material goods to manage all of her responsibilities. The same concept of feminism that fell short of inclusive, true empowerment in *Family Circle*—based on a woman’s busyness and ability to juggle multiple roles—recurs in these ads, demonstrating how penetrating such ideas can be, infiltrating every corner of a woman’s magazine with the potential to reach beyond.

### *Grocery Getter*

Another nuance in the women-and-food narrative emerges when food advertisements assert a woman's reliance on consumer products and combine that with messages of what it means to be a good mother. In other words, the food advertisements in this subtheme merge the two previous concepts: a woman's worth as a mother is determined by the food she serves *and* a woman must purchase certain commodities in order to achieve successful motherhood status. Targeting women as the family grocery shopper, these ads directly address women as mothers, presupposing both of these roles, and clearly asserting that both are virtuous feminine pursuits. Women get the message from these ads that not only is grocery shopping a distinctly female job, but overseeing their child's nutritional wellbeing is also squarely on her shoulders. The overt gender bias in these ads, even though only a fraction of them actually depict an adult female, makes it impossible to imagine any of them appearing in a men's magazine.

As with all of the ads that encourage women to think about food as a motherhood and family matter, all but one of the food ads discussed in this subtheme hail from *Family Circle*, and while they do not communicate with a woman in terms of her own eating—not even her participatory consumption as discussed in the previous section—they are still an important part of this analysis as they construct and perpetuate a concept of female consumerism as it relates to food. Also, the sheer amount of advertising that addresses women not as an eater but as a purchaser of food makes it impossible to ignore these ads, and how they advise women to think about food: not as sustenance for themselves, but for enjoyment and nourishment of others.



For example, an ad for Eggland's Best eggs, one of the few ads that pictures a woman, and the only one that comes from *SELF*, reads "For my family, only the best nutrition" (*SELF*, June, 2011, p. 113) and women are encouraged to "treat your family" to "the best" Bob Evans pork (*Family Circle*, December, 2011, p.110). Less than twenty of the 347 unique food ads appearing in *SELF*, *Glamour*, and *Family Circle* in 2011 picture males, and three of them are included in this subtheme. Father and son play video games in a Coca-Cola ad, have a water fight in the yard in an ice cream ad, and playfully fight over a hot dog in an ad for Oscar Mayer. Without the help of written instructions, these ads clearly communicate that women should purchase these products to create these experiences for the male members of the family. Though she is not taking part in the scene, the fact that the ads appear in *Family Circle* amidst many other ads that more directly connect the woman with grocery shopping and providing the family with food-centric moments reinforces the idea that the woman is responsible for stocking the home with the soda and hot dogs for the men's enjoyment—and that in turn should bring her pleasure. From guardian of the family's health to provider of memory-making snacks, these ads suggest that what a woman puts in her grocery cart says just as much about who she is as a mother and wife as her family's response to her cooking does.

While grocery shopping for the whole family is plainly important, the number of food advertisements promoting children's products to women suggests that a woman's children are of primary concern when heading to the grocery store. In these ads, women are largely invisible, save for the cartoon renditions of Wilma Flintstone, though they carry the crucial responsibility of feeding their children nutritiously *and* making their childhoods blissful. The one human woman seen here hovers in the background while her

children run for their waffles: “Nutrition has never had a tastier disguise” than the whole wheat hidden in the Eggo’s (*Family Circle*, December, 2011, p. 61). A small boy, unlikely but gleefully, clutches a bunch of broccoli as the Chef Boyardee ad tells Mom “Until this happens, keep the secret” that the pasta is stuffed with a serving of vegetables (*Family Circle*, March, 2011, p. 165). Part of enacting superior motherhood, then, involves successfully deceiving one’s children into eating well without encroaching on their fun. Numerous ads for Kellogg’s kid’s cereals gives women “an easy and FUN way” to make sure her children are not among the nine out of 10 who lack fiber-rich diets (*Family Circle*, September, 2011, p.176) or the energy they need to get through their “big days” at school (April 17, 2011, p. 44). An ad for cereal bars lets a woman simultaneously be a “cool mom” and a “smart mom,” giving her kids a colorful, chocolaty snack they will want, while sneaking in extra vitamins (March, 2011, p. 135). By providing her children with Lunchables, a woman really gets them “ready to light up the world” (September, 2011, p. 54), just like buying Gatorade helped them “Become.” These ads once again suggest that women rely on purchasing the right products to be good mothers.

Reinforcing rigid gender roles related to grocery shopping and childrearing, these food ads contribute significantly and uniquely to the discourse on food found in women’s magazines. Acting as the primary food purchaser for the whole family, especially the children, a woman further demonstrates her value as a capable mother. The ads analyzed in this theme present food as a way for women to show her children love, create fun family moments, enact positive parenting, and receive recognition and confirmation of her self-worth. That these ads do not address women in terms of their own eating sets

them apart from the discourse created by other ads in this analysis, such as those that position a woman's food in relation to exercise; still, they develop a critical commentary on how women should approach food. Food is the medium through which women are told to express and prove themselves, and ultimately accomplish an idealized version of femininity.

### *Other*

Amidst the hundreds of food advertisements in this analysis that use arresting visuals and powerful words and contribute to the discourse centering on food and eating in women's magazines, other food advertisements did not present content with an emotional charge or gendered hook. After repeated observation and inquiry, these standard advertisements did not align with any of the aforementioned themes that emerged from this critical textual analysis. From pretzels to frozen vegetables, lunchmeat to grape juice, these ads offer a visual tour of the local grocery store without communicating a strong subtext about how, when, where, or with whom a woman should consider eating. The ads in this category are basic promotions, announcing a new product, or reminding women of what is available for purchase. Though they present commodities and at times attempt to demonstrate the value of a product, the ads do not send the message that women *require* these food and beverage items to achieve anything more than a fuller fridge and pantry. For example, an ad for Twining's tea displays the brand's family of flavors, and the text explains how their tea is brewed. The scene has a relaxed appeal, and a sense of richness in choices, but does not attach the tea to any cultural context or incite an emotional response. Other ads introduce new products like a California Pizza kitchen frozen pizza and appetizer combo "now in your grocer's freezer"

(*Glamour*, June, 2011, p. 230) or new soup flavors from Campbell's. With minimal text and large, inviting photos, the food products are simply displayed in the ads, which occasionally tout the product with nondescript adjectives like 'tasty' and 'fresh.'

The majority of food advertisements seen here come from *Family Circle*, which again coincides with the magazine's food focus, and propensity for ads that target women in their roles as mothers and family grocery shoppers. Piggy-backing on the ads that get women in the store to purchase products that make them good parents and spouses, these ads expose women to brand names and products that may catch their eye again at the store. Ads from *Glamour* tend to feature convenience items like individual frozen pizzas, crackers, and Starbucks coffee products, effectively targeting single women who are far more focused on trends, men, and their young careers than cooking and grocery shopping. Two ads from *SELF*—and the only two from that magazine that did not overtly associate food with diet and exercise in 2011—announce a new flavor of La Croix sparkling water, and remind readers of the “all natural ingredients” used in Rold Gold brand pretzels (*SELF*, May, p. 133). Straightforward food advertising may not be exclusive to any one magazine in this study, though ultimately the highly gendered and subtext-laden ads stand out far more in each publication. An ad for Stouffer's frozen lasagna may be eye-catching with the picture-perfect farmland as the lasagna's backdrop, but is easy to page past without giving it a second thought. Like a television commercial seen dozens of times, these ads are immediately recognizable as just another piece of marketing in an already oversaturated landscape—easy to pass by, barely catching the product's name. Relying on visuals to make a fast impression, these ads may use bright, fresh fruits and vegetables that pop off the page, but do not draw readers in with any

intrigue or strange association, like a yoga mat in a carton of egg whites or a jelly bean's reflection in the mirror. They lack emotional engagement, cultural cues, and commentary on how food operates in a woman's life, quite different from the other ads in this analysis that actively encourage women to relate to food in certain ways. The presence of these ads in women's magazines does further communicate food's importance in a woman's life; without directly persuading her to buy the product for her family, her diet, or her self-enhancement, these ads do reinforce that food is central and ever-present in a woman's day-to-day life. Though the ads in this category are largely unremarkable in terms of how they communicate with women about food and eating, they still add to the sheer amount of food exposure women get in these publications, and further suggest that women are thinking, planning, and seeking information about food.

### *Summary*

Food advertising in women's magazines constructs a complex and highly nuanced narrative on how women should think about eating across different contexts and responsibilities in their lives. From fitness to family, escapism and childrearing, food is framed in these advertisements as an active ingredient in the life of a female, and the vehicle that drives her success as a mother, wife, and woman. Women are encouraged to see food in multiple ways that often do not have to do with her engaging in the act of eating, but feeding and providing food for others. Largely taken from *SELF* magazine, a set of food advertisements build a firm connection between eating and exercise, sending women the messages that food is workout fuel and exercise is a prerequisite to eating, and eating is an acceptable follow-up to exercise. Other advertisements tell a story in which food fulfills women's fantasies, from offering a more glamorous lifestyle to

evoking sensual and emotional pleasures. Still other food ads address women as mothers and grocery shoppers, reinforcing not only traditional gender roles by assuming that women fulfill these family responsibilities, but also the social expectations that women *are* mothers in the first place.

Women are funneled down different avenues of thought when it comes to eating based on who they are with and what they are doing, though only one woman is actually *shown* eating, and the phallic symbol and blatant sexual connotations in the ad control the message. According to food advertising, eating is a way for women to socialize, achieve the ideal body, spend time with their kids, and fuel a workout. Food is a way for a woman to express love, engage in sexual fantasy, and demonstrate her good motherhood. Food takes on an impressive range of capabilities in advertising, not the least of which is directly communicating with women on the various aspects of her life and how food fits in. Liberal feminism recognizes the uniformity in these messages that hold women to a certain physical ideal and seek to control the female form by influencing what a woman eats and how she relates to food. Also, liberal feminism challenges the traditional gender roles displayed in many food ads that depict the female as responsible for her family's food gathering and preparation. Broader cultural elements, visual cues, and exacting language all combine to make multilayered messages that extend beyond a woman's eating habits and critically comment on her body, her personality, and ultimately her self-worth.

*Disappointed today after a conversation with my friend Ellie—the friend who has somehow liberated herself from the cult of thinness, the one I can mentally lean on when I feel the urge to suppress my hunger, run an extra two miles, enumerate every calorie*

*I've eaten today.. Ellie, only a few years older than I, has courageously been through the body image jungle many times. Sometimes I see her snack on edamame and almonds; other times, a large Twix candy bar. Sometimes, she wants to jog together at 7am on Saturdays; other times, she wants to lounge unproductively all day and get together for burgers and fries later. No matter what mood she is in, Ellie does things to feel good—someone who taught me through conversation and example that 'skinny' is not a character trait, relentless exercise is not a justifiable form of corporal punishment, and eating is not a sin. In her eyes, we are here to relax, enjoy, and indulge.*

*How many times I've heard her say "Who cares?" while laughing off another Saturday night of pizza and ice cream? How often have I listened in peaceful awe at her wisdom that makes what I'm feeling seem like less of a crisis, and a lot less lonely. Ellie's stories give me hopeful assurance that I, too, will exit this 'phase' and stop thrashing through the body-bashing bayou.*

*And here she was, as I ate my veggie-hummus wrap, Ellie eyeing my lunch with a subtle smugness all too familiar to me, and telling me she has been eating only 1,200 calories a day, going to spin class twice a week, and having an apple—if anything—for dinner. Ellie has lost four pounds in the last 10 days. Her glee is palpable; her current surge of willpower effortlessly tramples over any hint of desire for my latte.*

*At a loss for other words, I offer her eager countenance the congratulations and praise it greedily seeks, gently tell her to not eat any less than she is, and, against my will, tell her she should "ride the wave" of motivation while she can, watch the scale number drop. Secretly, a part of me deflates: the part of me that looked up to Ellie, idolized her sunny outlook on life's enjoyable bounty, and sought support from her rock-*

*like sense of self-worth, feels that rock start to crumble beneath me. Even Ellie, with her upcoming wedding and summer abroad, cannot always resist the call to calorie confession in the name of losing weight. Even Ellie still trudges through the jungle.*

- Researcher's personal journal, 3/15/2011



## CONCLUSIONS

*Passing magazines back and forth at coffee shops, on trains, at the office, women exchange them like friendship currency. When I was an intern, a coworker with a dozen subscriptions would smilingly drop a whole stack on my desk for me, like homework. Here: read, study. Learn what it means to be a woman in America. What to buy, how to dress, what to cook, how to look. Their inviting covers, smooth skin, alluring headlines like promises from a magical elixir, we must have them. They are an item of accessible privilege, an affordable extravagance, no more necessary for survival than a bag of M&Ms. Even as we joke, "Here's some trashy reading for you," we deliver these (anti-care) packages to one another, unintentionally endorsing their messages. A passport to womanhood, and an ambassador of friendship, we justify them by our collective acceptance, and the magazine escapes criticism and suspicion.*

*What we need from feminism now—what we need from each other—is the gift of that 'soul sleep' where we retake our energy, and learn what no magazine, no high school health class, no internship teaches us: to nurture ourselves. We need to bond with the word 'no,' reject the impossible beauty standards that only distract us, and ask ourselves if wifedom, motherhood, and homeowner are roles we truly want. Right now, our glossy pamphlets inculcate us with the very messages that make us tired, disguised by new headlines. It's like the old parable: if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. We buy each other coffee, join gyms together, cover for one another when we are behind on projects. We give each other stop-gaps, band-aids for the gaping holes of our energy drains. We feed each other—for a day.*

*But, if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.*

*We need to teach each other to live.*

While in the final days of drafting this work, a tremendous movement took place that not only underscored the importance of studying women's magazines, but offered the brightest ray of hope for the future of women and their relationships with their bodies. The MissRepresentation organization, producer of the documentary film by the same name, partnered with other media activist and feminist groups to run the three-day KeepItReal Challenge. Mobilizing women via social media—Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, a photo-sharing website—millions of women around the world blogged, posted pictures, and sent messages to women's magazines, challenging their editors to commit to printing one un-retouched image per month. Women called for magazines to do more to help curb the negative discourse on the shape, size, and significance of women's bodies. *Vogue*, *Marie Claire*, and *Lucky* magazines responded positively to the movement, though none made outright commitments to it. But the most motivating and hopeful part of this online movement was reading the inspiring words of women shouting out to the world that they love their bodies and want other women to love themselves, too. The network of support weaved by this massive exchange of experiences, thoughts, and affirmations felt like a certain and unstoppable dawn in the darkness of women's battles with dieting, food, and their reflections. Women declared their beauty, not in spite of their "flaws," but because of their uniqueness. Women chose to express gratitude for all their body lets them do, rather than lament what it does not look like. Women rejoiced.

In a culture where "fat talk," degrading one's body in conversation, has become a social norm (Britton et al., 2006), the deluge of positive, body-loving messages from this

movement was particularly breathtaking. Research shows women feel they are *expected* to self-degrade and bad-mouth their bodies in conversation. Communicating body dissatisfaction regularly has become a symbol of femininity, a sign that a woman is a part of the club. With vigilance, perhaps this can be reversed if women continue to recognize and openly reject the media's perpetuation of a thin-ideal that breeds dissatisfaction, disease, and a diminished quality of life for all of us.

Movements like the KeepItReal Challenge not only affirm the necessity of continual media study, but also anecdotally confirm the substantial existing literature on women's body image and media exposure. Countless studies point to the media, women's magazines and advertising in particular, as culprits of body dissatisfaction in women—a precursor to excessive dieting or exercising, disordered eating, or in extreme and potentially lethal cases, clinical eating disorders. How a woman feels about her body in comparison to the images of other women she encounters everywhere, everyday, directly impacts her relationship with food as she struggles to sculpt her shape and size to the propagated thin-ideal.

Psychologists, sociologists, and physicians alike will confirm that “it is not possible to talk in any meaningful way about...women who feel unhappy with their bodies without acknowledging the connection between women's experience of their bodies and their eating patterns” (Blood, 2005, p. 123) as women use food to control their size. Some women overeat to distance themselves further from an ideal they know they will never reach; others pick at crumbs and spend hours on the StairMaster to reach it (Martin, 2007). Whatever way it manifests in a woman's life, the issues of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating hinder, distract, and burden their potential. In the

words of Naomi Wolf, “if a woman can be made to say, ‘I hate my fat thighs,’ it is a way she has been made to hate femaleness” (1991, p. 197). From a liberal feminist perspective, this is a matter that deserves resources and attention, as still more women than men suffer from disordered eating. The goals of feminism in this case are not to redistribute obsessions with food and body size among men, but to put an end to a cultural discourse that dictates the thin-ideal to women in an attempt to control the female form, places iniquitous value on a woman’s appearance, and continues to perpetuate traditional and biased gender roles. Ads that connect eating with sin and transgression reinforce the idea that a woman’s unwieldy appetite must be controlled in order to maintain a slim figure; ads that connect food with dieting, calorie-counting, and exercise do the same, while suggesting that women select and eat certain food products with dieting at the forefront of their minds. Finally, many food ads display women as the grocery shopper, meal planner, and cook of her family’s food—responsible for taking care of and pleasing others through food. No ads in this analysis depicted men taking part in these activities. The messages in ads that food is the ‘woman’s realm’ emphasize conventional gender biases, and adhere to traditional family roles for men and women. Liberal feminism thus supports the idea that these food ads are part of a broader culture issue: women’s enduring inequality in terms of media representations and assumptions made about women’s interests and roles. Also, that a woman’s food choices can be linked to her self-worth is a construct rejected by the liberal feminist perspective which asserts that a woman’s worth be unstipulated by her appearances or other outward indicators. In order for women to achieve equality, women must not be subject to judgments and

stereotypes, like the ones made by food ads that comment on a woman's body or her parenting in relation to her food choices.

Women's magazines continue to be a subject of scrutiny for feminist scholars as well as media researchers and activists. As feminist scholar Angela McRobbie (1997) asserts, continual monitoring of these periodicals is of utmost importance to keep abreast of the messages being sent to women and how their lives are being socially constructed. Keeping an eye on these magazines requires examining the *whole* magazine, including the relatively unexplored subject of food advertising. Given the sensitivity of the subject for women living in a weight-obsessed culture, such advertising has gun-powder potential for influencing how women think about and relate to food, and consequently how they conceptualize of and treat their bodies.

As seen in this analysis, food advertising largely aligns with the publication in which it appears: food ads in *Glamour*, while few and far between, communicated to young women that food is less important than celebrity gossip, and joined *SELF* in mainly advertising diet food products. *SELF*'s food ads associated eating with working out, the magazine's activity of choice for women—the supposed source of female empowerment. Ads in *Family Circle* targeted women's mothering and homemaking responsibilities, and suggested that food was the path to giving and receiving love, taking care of husbands and children, and at times, the way to realize her own fantasies. Food advertising targets women just as the magazine's do: first, the ads identify a woman's needs, desires, roles, and problems; then, the ads offer themselves—food—as the panacea, taking on multiple shapes to be more than just food. Through the compelling

diction in these ads, women are encouraged to see food as a tool for carving the ideal body, for escaping, for sinning, and for being redeemed.

When food advertisements do more than market available products, reaching into women's lives to comment on the size of their thighs, the energy in their personalities, and their parenting skills, then food has been given a very loud and potentially dangerous voice. Millions of women, myself included, already live with a body-criticizing, food-conscious tape continuously playing in their heads. Most of us need food to have *less* of a say in our day-to-day lives, not more—and especially not in magazines already brimming with images of the ideal body and endless articles on how to get it. Women have enough to do without also living up to food advertising's version of appropriate motherhood, or ideal workout regimen. Past research findings have come to the consensus “that advertising creates unfair expectations in women because ads hold up an unattainable beauty ideal” (Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005, p. 67), most frequently in the form of a specific body type, but may also exploit a range of women's insecurities. Food advertising proves to be no exception (Bordo, 1993; Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999), and if its voice grows louder, more nuanced, and more ingrained with the already-influential and powerful themes found in women's magazines, it will require continual observation as a part of the media landscape women must traverse, negotiating and balancing their food, bodies, and lives.

*This morning when I woke, for several long moments, I just lay. Marveling at how well I felt...how whole I am, an immense appreciation and sense of wonder flooded over me. I pictured my closely-packed organs, humming about their business, my heart pumping leisurely and cheerfully. I felt my relaxed muscles flowing around my bones,*

*ready for action, content just as they are. I thought about all the hard work going on—while I just lay!—looking at the light breaking in through the curtains my mother made. How. Amazing. My body working so hard for me, completing a million miraculous tasks a minute. I thought of a quote from architect and philosopher Alain de Botton: “Astonishing and unnerving that our hearts haven't had a single break, not one, since many months before we were born” (2011).*

*While I complain about how much I need a rest, I have never given a thought to how much my body might really like a break from ye old taskmaster-me. And it does not even get a say! I control the voice, too. And how often I use it to say—no, not right now. I'm busy, go away.*

*But that is not the worst offense. Just for a moment, just a glimmer—I slam into the utter absurdity that I have spent so much time criticizing, verbally and mentally disparaging this unimaginably intricate body that silently follows my every command, facilitates every thought and ambition.*

*This body that lets me run, swim, dance, sing badly, laugh loudly— that makes it possible for me to walk my dog, hug my father, listen to my grandmother, kiss my boyfriend. This body that has tasted Italy, climbed Montana, and soaked in the Atlantic.*

*Just for a moment...just a glimmer—but it was there! A glimpse into a life spent loving this body, and living in humble gratitude and wonder for all it does. All it lets me do. I start to wash away the stains of criticism from my mind. I start packing up the junk the body image beast moved in with, scales, calories, and inadequacies based on false realities. I let the marks from my pinching fingers fade from my skin, and I find there is another way to be.*

- Researcher's Personal Journal, 5/5/2012

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