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AN ANALYSIS OF WEIGHT REDUCING DIETS
PUBLISHED IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES 1961-1980

BY

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THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts degree in Communication
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.	1
The History of Women's Magazines.	3
<u>Ladies' Magazine</u>	3
<u>Godey's Lady's Book</u>	4
<u>Ladies' Home Journal</u>	5
<u>McCall's</u>	8
<u>Good Housekeeping</u>	10
Summary.	11
Food and Diets in Women's Magazines	13
Nutritional Principles of Weight Reduction.	15
Statement of Research Questions	22
Operational Definitions.	22
Justification for Research	23
Method	23
Results.	24
Discussion	27
Appendix A - Quality Evaluator.	36
Appendix B - Diet Classifications	37
References Cited.	38
Bibliography.	45
Sources of Data Collection.	47

Magazines have provided a forum and a showcase for ideas and products and an in-depth look at an almost limitless number of subjects. Magazines also have affected and reflected their readers' tastes, interests, and beliefs; their pages often debate the social and political issues of the day.¹ Relative permanence and selectivity of audience are two unique qualities which have allowed magazines to perform as a medium for information and influence.²

Women's magazines are no exception in the world of magazines and, in fact, reinforce the patterns typical within the industry. Women have been viewed as a specialized audience since at least 1837 when Godey's Lady's Book appeared. Traditionally, women have been seen as a more homogenous audience than men, and most magazines targeted at women follow the "food, fashion, home" mold.³ The subject of weight reduction has become a very popular topic within the pages of women's magazines; some publications print diets in nearly every issue. In fact, it is estimated that over one hundred diets are published annually by magazines alone.⁴

Women's rights and women's role in society have been debated within the pages of women's magazines since their inception, as pointed out by Robert Stein, editor of McCall's:

We tend to see things in blocks of time as if ideas were new, but that's not so. Those ideas keep coming back, and it's incredible, the diversity of views expressed at any one time or another. There's not a question that Ms. raises today that wasn't asked then; the vote and women's rights in general, questions about raising children—all were points of discussion then.⁵

Although typically directed at homemakers, women's magazines have applied a social force, perhaps unanticipated, in opening the way for women to move into the community in social activities, politics, and the job market.⁶ The impact of women's magazines is further corroborated by Helen Woodward:

To the uninitiated, a woman's magazine may seem merely a powdery bit of fluff. No notion could be more unreal or deceptive. That is just the style in which the magazines express themselves, for if the top layer seems fluffy, the underlying base is solid and powerful. These publications involve a giant business investment, and have an overwhelming influence on American life.⁷

The History of Women's Magazines

The format typical of women's magazines today was established by the first few successful publications for women. Some of those early successes, such as Ladies' Home Journal and Good Housekeeping, continue to enjoy wide circulation at present. By tracing the development of the most notable women's magazines, one can appreciate the powerful impact even the earliest women's magazines have had on today's publications.

Ladies' Magazine

Aside from a few early attempts which soon ended in failure, the first publication produced especially for women was Ladies' Magazine, founded in 1828 by Sarah Hale. Mrs. Hale set forth the pattern of "persuasion, flattery, education, polite command, and useful technical information" that remains in existence today.⁸

A widow with five children, Sarah Hale was unable to support her family with the wages of a teacher. After an attempt at sewing, she wrote a novel which was published with funds from a fraternal organization her late husband belonged to. Impressed with her writing ability, a Boston book publisher offered her a job editing a women's magazine.⁹ Ladies' Magazine was essentially a trade paper for women. It had two specific purposes: to entertain and to promote "female education." A maverick in her time, Hale suggested that women should educate themselves, especially as teachers, doctors, and

female seminarians. Her advocacy of women's rights certainly overshadowed the "sickly, sentimental and domestic" attempts which preceeded hers.¹⁰

Godey's Lady's Book

In 1830, Antoine Godey began publication of Godey's Lady's Book. Having admired Hale's work in Ladies' Magazine, he asked her to move to Philadelphia to edit his magazine. In 1837, after her eldest son graduated from Harvard, Sarah Hale agreed to the move, and Ladies' Magazine was bought by Godey and incorporated into his Godey's Lady's Book.¹¹

Godey was often ridiculed for being the editor of a women's magazine but certainly not by his audience. Godey embodied a "tradition of gallantry" towards women, always capitalizing the words "Lady" and "Love" and calling his subscribers "fair Ladies" or "fair readers."¹² James Wood's observation that

the great success of women's magazines in this country seems to have been due in large part to the acumen of publishers and editors in realizing that they can more profitably address women as women rather than women as people. . .¹³

may have originated with the style of Godey's Lady's Book.

In the 1840's, Sarah Hale began paying her contributors as well as acknowledging their work.¹⁴ Although Godey's acquired several good writers, its fame was not borne out of literary excellence, but rather through a sentimental attachment with its readers.¹⁵ Additionally, a virtual lack of competitors added to the strength and success attained by Godey's.¹⁶

By 1850, Godey's circulation had grown to nearly 150,000,

quelling any criticism of the idea of publishing a magazine for women.¹⁷ In fact, other general magazines realized they could substantially increase their circulations by appealing to women.¹⁸ Imitators joined the market, copying Godey's style. Among them were Peterson's Ladies' National Magazine and "gift book annuals" such as Ladies Wreath and Ladies' Garland which were monthly magazines bound at the end of each year.¹⁹

By the time of her retirement in 1877, Sarah Hale had

. . . affected the manners, morals, tastes, fashions in clothes, homes and diets of a generation of American readers. The magazine did much to form the American woman's ideas of what they were like, how they should act, and how they should insist on being treated.²⁰

Among the list of her accomplishments were (1) making Thanksgiving a national holiday; (2) foundation of the first organization to advance women's wages, promote better working conditions, and reduce child labor; (3) promotion of elementary education for girls, higher education for women; and (4) beginning the fight for retention of property rights by married women, to name only a few.²¹

Hale's retirement and Godey's death two years later were the major factors in the decline of Godey's Lady's Book, although it continued to be published through 1898.²²

Ladies' Home Journal

Ladies' Home Journal began not as a magazine in its own right, but as a column for women which appeared in Cyrus Curtis' Tribune and Farmer. Criticism of Curtis' selections for the column by his wife led him to challenge her to do better. Mrs. Curtis accepted, and Ladies' Home (the word "Journal" was added later in a printing error)

was born in 1883.²³

Curtis' first goal with the Journal was to increase its circulation. Two schemes proved very successful in achieving that goal. One involved subscription "clubs" where four subscriptions could be had for one dollar, whereas the usual price was fifty cents. By enlisting his readers as salesmen, circulation doubled within six months. A second campaign of heavy newspaper advertising doubled circulation again within six months. Knowing he would have to retain his increased circulation, Curtis followed one of Sarah Hale's "formulas" and sought quality fiction writers. He acquired a story from Marion Harland, a novelist and an expert on housekeeping for the then phenomenal sum of ninety dollars. The expense proved worthwhile; by 1886 Ladies' Home Journal had achieved a circulation of 270,000. Being a good businessman, but not a particularly good editor, Curtis abandoned the Tribune in 1888 in order to devote his full efforts to the Journal.²⁴

In 1889, Mrs. Curtis chose to retire to spend more time with her daughter. Curtis filled her spot with a man named Edward Bok who was to become another trend-setter in women's magazines.²⁵

Bok was born in the Netherlands and immigrated to the United States at age seven with his parents. His experience at the time he joined Ladies' Home Journal at the age of twenty-six included work with two or three book publishers, editing Brooklyn Magazine, and the foundation of a newspaper syndicate service. Bok shared many similarities with Antoine Godey, especially his idealization of women. Bok also fell prey to the same "lampooning" as Godey,²⁶ but never

from his readers.

Bok, like Sarah Hale, felt women should seek to elevate themselves in society, although he proposed this be done through community service rather than the advancement of women's rights.²⁷ In 1894 Bok came out against further education for women.²⁸ Despite that view, Bok did much to improve women's magazines through his imaginative editing and a dedication to the concept of serving his readers. Bok pioneered three areas in women's magazines: he strove to improve the "taste" of America, particularly in architecture; upgrade the quality and quantity of writers and public interest material; and he forwarded a wide variety of "causes" though Ladies' Home Journal.

Some debate exists over the push Bok made to improve architecture and interior decorating; some felt his contributions significantly improved America's appearance,²⁹ while others felt his efforts were a detriment.³⁰ Nonetheless, house plans published in the Journal were quite popular.

Bok certainly succeeded in acquiring the works of some of America's best writers. Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Conan Doyle, and Anthony Hope were just a few of his contributors. Bok's innovations went beyond the literary to encompass the musical field. Each issue of the Journal included a sheet of music. Among his musical contributors were Sousa, Strauss, and Pederewski.³¹

The Journal refused patent medicine advertisements, and its actions helped the crusade which eventually led to the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. The introduction of the Curtis Advertising Code which protected readers from fraudulent or extravagant claims and

banned financial, liquor, and tobacco advertisements would later be used as a model by other publications.³²

Bok's innovations were evident in the Journal's increasing circulation; by 1900 circulation reached 800,000, by 1903 it surpassed the one million mark.³³ Bok was responsible for the practice of placing the editor's name on the masthead and editorial material³⁴ as well as the innovation of monthly cover changes.³⁵

Bok retired in 1919 and was followed by a number of editors who attempted, unsuccessfully, to imitate his "feather-dusting" style of writing which introduced some powerful ideas for its day.³⁶ The decline of the Journal continued until 1935, when Bruce and Beatrice Gould took over the reign as co-editors. They reinstalled vitality in the Journal by adding new emphasis to Bok's old idea that women had concerns other than the home, although their homemaking services remained important. James Wood quoted their goal as

. . . to bring our readers not only the most accurate and honest information possible in the traditional areas: health, nutrition, education, and the moral guidance of children; community, social and cultural activities. . . but also to widen the boundaries of her traditional areas of interest.³⁷

By 1947 the gross advertising revenues of the Journal surpassed the combined revenues of Good Housekeeping and McCall's. By 1955, the Journal commanded the lead in circulation and advertising among women's magazines.³⁸

McCall's

The story of McCall's began in 1873 with the publication of The Queen by Mr. and Mrs. James McCall to promote their dressmaking

patterns. The Queen was issued monthly except for two months in the summer. In its early days, The Queen contained very little print; it was composed mainly of illustrations of patterns. In the early 1890's, the name was changed to The Queen of Fashion, and the McCall Corporation was formed.³⁹ The ensuing twenty years led to a gradual change in format with the addition of features other than dress patterns. Circulation increased from 12,000 to 1,250,000, but McCall's remained a "cheap magazine for women."⁴⁰ Acquisition of McCall's by White, Weld, and Company, a banking firm, provided a more solid financial base for the magazine, although editorially it did not gain much ground until 1921 when Harry Burton became editor. Following the tried and true formula of acquiring high quality fiction, Burton sought to make McCall's a national magazine. He even concocted the idea of "McCall's Street," a fictional average American neighborhood which was created to form a sense of identification among the McCall's audience.⁴¹

In 1928, Otis Wiese took over as editor and took McCall's to new heights. He introduced the idea of a "three-way-makeup" or three covers within each issue. The magazine was divided into "Fiction and News," "Home Making" and "Style and Beauty" sections. Wiese also revived the idea of publishing an entire novel within an issue. In a further attempt to increase circulation he began a "youth conference" series. His attempts were successful; by 1940 McCall's had attained a circulation of three million.⁴²

Although prosperous through the 1950's, advertising revenues and circulation began to fall. Wiese developed the theme of "Togetherness" as an attempt to make McCall's a magazine for the entire family.⁴³

Although "Togetherness" produced the desired result of raising sagging circulation figures, it was criticized by some as an "absurd and unrealistic attempt to promote what is actually an idealistic concept."⁴⁴

Herbert Mayes succeeded Wiese as editor of McCall's after leaving Good Housekeeping. His most valuable contribution was "use-testing" products advertised in McCall's. These tests went a step further than Good Housekeeping's "Seal of Approval" by documenting expected wear rather than simply documenting product performance at the time of purchase. Mayes' trademark on McCall's was overall one of more "flash, brash, and splash."⁴⁵

Good Housekeeping

Good Housekeeping was founded by Charles Bryan in 1885 on the same premise as other women's magazines of the era, namely, a trade manual for the household. After Bryan's death in 1898, Good Housekeeping changed owners several times until it was purchased by the Phelps Publishing Company. Phelps established the Good Housekeeping Institute, a home economics laboratory where products advertised by Good Housekeeping were tested. Hearst Publications took over ownership in 1911 and moved the magazine to New York.⁴⁶ In 1912, the Good Housekeeping Bureau was formed, with Dr. Harvey Wiley as its director. Wiley had gained notoriety for his research which provided much of the data used in securing passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act. After coming to fame, Wiley was harshly criticized for his experimentation with human subjects and alleged misuse of funds. However, he had aroused public concern and his scandals were largely

overlooked by the public.⁴⁷

The Good Housekeeping "Seal of Approval" has been praised as a large factor in improving and raising standards for products used in the home.⁴⁸ However, it has also been criticized as a token advertisers receive for buying a given amount of space.⁴⁹ The "Seal" did, either way, give Good Housekeeping more credibility with its readers.⁵⁰

Summary

Women's magazines were the first to achieve the widespread circulations characteristic of mass magazines. They typically developed around a central theme of service to women and the home and provided material to that end.⁵¹ As society progressed, magazines followed, perhaps sometimes leading the way, with more fiction, features, and causes. The causes treated by women's magazines evolved from women's suffrage to the Equal Rights Amendment. But as pointed out earlier, the general formula, and even the questions raised, have not changed that drastically. The 1950's saw the emergence of sex and marriage as acceptable topics for women's magazines. Wood describes the editorial content of women's magazines as "sex in domesticated guise—how to get, train, and keep a husband; why this marriage failed and this one succeeded; how to bring up your children; what to ask the doctor; and all the rest."⁵²

Women's magazines, not unlike any other specialized magazines, have had their share of fatalities. Among the reasons for failure of some women's magazines were (1) too many generalized magazines in a specialized area; (2) the rise of television and radio; (3) the use of color advertisements by newspapers (once a unique feature of

magazines); (4) low-priced reprints and paperback novels which hurt the attractiveness of magazines as a source of fiction; and (5) women's magazines may have simply offered too little for too long.⁵³ Even as early as 1935 the service departments of women's magazines were running out of things to say. For instance, how many ways can one say "brown meat before simmering?"⁵⁴ Helen Woodward goes further in saying, "The majority (of women's magazines) played follow-the-leader and ring-around-the-rosie, relying upon imitations and repetitions, even when it led them toward ruin."⁵⁵

All this is not to say that women's magazines are less of a force; in fact, in 1970 five of the ten best-selling magazines were women's periodicals.⁵⁶ Many of the early pioneers are still among the top, such as McCall's and Ladies' Home Journal. These magazines have had the foresight to change along with American women while maintaining their underlying theme of service to their readers.

Food and Diets in Women's Magazines

Although food has always maintained a strong position in women's magazines, reducing diets originally had little place in the periodicals. Weight reduction was not viewed as a serious problem. Women had corsets, and the notion existed that men liked their women plump. At the turn of the century, a thirty-six inch waist was normal for women, a twenty-six inch waist, a "sex attraction."⁵⁷ The 1920's introduction of "boyish" fashions for women prompted interest in reducing diets. Good Housekeeping began publishing the number of calories and amounts of protein along with its recipes in this period.⁵⁸

By the 1950's, diets were very popular in women's magazines, with Ladies' Home Journal publishing a new one almost every month. As Wood puts it, "The Journal had assumed the moral responsibility for reducing the tonnage of American womanhood."⁵⁹ It would appear that, next to fashion, reducing diets have become the most important feature in women's magazines--each one bantered as a new discovery, a painless way to lose weight. Women's magazines have been influential in arousing public concern about the health hazards of overweight and food additives, as well as the types and amounts of fat in the American diet.⁶⁰ However, Robert Deutsch feels that the advice given by magazines to allay concern or take action is not all that helpful. He states that

with very few exceptions, the nation's media have responded to a sharp growth in nutrition interest with one volley after

another of scientifically invalid ideas for weight control
and better health through eating.⁶¹

Nutritional Principles of Weight Reduction

Dieting seems to have become a "great all-American pastime."⁶² Overnutrition or obesity is the most prevalent nutritional problem in the United States and other technologically developed countries.⁶³ Estimates of the incidence of obesity in the United States vary between one-third and one-half of the adult population. A Gallup poll taken between March 30 and April 2, 1973, revealed that over 50% of the women and 30% of the men interviewed considered themselves overweight. Nearly the same percentage of persons reported they were dieting or exercising to either lose or maintain their weight.⁶⁴

The complex etiology of obesity helps explain its marked prevalence. Psychological, physiological, socioeconomic, and genetic factors have all been implicated in predisposing an individual to being overweight.⁶⁵ Psychological factors, or the use of food for non-nutritive purposes, is probably the main culprit in the development of obesity. When external cues rather than internal, physiological cues of hunger are the main stimulus for eating, weight changes are highly probable. Despite social attitudes which idealize the slender figure, social pressures, emotions, habits, stress, and even the taste of food can lead to overconsumption.⁶⁶ Physiological causes of obesity, such as hypothyroidism, are relatively rare and usually can be treated successfully with medication. Genetic inheritance of obesity is also uncommon, although it is hypothesized as an explanation for the disproportionate amount of fat for weight found in the Eskimo race.

Familial obesity is probably mediated through cultural rather than genetic factors.⁶⁷

Obesity has been correlated with other serious diseases, such as coronary atherosclerotic heart disease, maturity-onset diabetes, and hypertension.* Morbidity and mortality increase by approximately 50% in obese persons subjected to illness, surgery, or trauma.⁶⁸

Treatment of obesity, though theoretically simple, has produced consistently discouraging results, with only 12% to 20% maintaining a long-term weight loss.⁶⁹ Poor success rates in treating obesity are often the result of dietary regimens which are ineffective for the loss of body fat or require such extreme regimens that one cannot maintain them for an adequate period of time to achieve significant weight loss. R. M. Deutsch states, ". . . the truth about obesity is hard to take. It is that, to lose weight, we must eat less food than our bodies use as fuel. However, the threat of hunger is enough to lead millions to suspend their common sense."⁷⁰

~~F~~ad reducing diets come and go, generally utilizing the same claims and techniques, but reappearing each time with a new name. Low carbohydrate diets which have recently gained high popularity were actually introduced in 1863 by a physician, Dr. Wiley. The same regimen resurfaced about a century later as the "Pennington Diet," in 1961 as Dr. Taller's "Calories Don't Count," and again in 1967 as the "Stillman Diet."⁷¹ Low protein diets, such as the "Rockefeller Diet," "Grapefruit Diet," and "Watermelon Diet," to name a few, have followed the same resurfacing trend.⁷² * Fad diets characteristically differ from normal diets by their manipulation of the proportion of

carbohydrate, protein, or fat; or by their use of a limited number of foods, which almost invariably results in a deficiency of one or more nutrients.⁷³ Although these extreme diets may produce results, they are usually short-lived, followed by a gain to the dieter's original or even higher weight. Dr. Jean Mayer refers to this syndrome as the "rhythm method of girth control."⁷⁴

Even more significant than poor success rates are the potentially hazardous side effects of fad diets. Complete fasting carries the highest risk for developing serious disorders. Among them are renal compromise or failure, hepatic dysfunction, gout, severe hypotension, cardiac arrhythmias, polyneuritis, increased susceptibility to infection, and hair loss.⁷⁵ During a complete fast, the body uses its own protein as a source of amino acids for essential protein synthesis and as a calorie source. Nitrogen balance studies have shown that approximately 65% of weight loss during a fast can be attributed to lean tissue catabolism and only 35% from adipose tissue. Lean tissue losses are rapidly repleted when protein is reinstituted in the diet. For each pound of lean tissue rebuilt, three pounds of water are also added, which accounts for the weight rebound which accompanies the resumption of intake. Therefore, a diet which contains 700-900 calories and adequate protein will produce similar fat losses without incurring vast protein catabolism.⁷⁶

The protein sparing modified fast (PSMF) is a diet composed only of protein, usually in the form of amino acids. This regimen was originally developed as an intravenous feeding technique for hospitalized patients to minimize protein losses when oral intake was

not possible but fat stores were adequate. Although appropriate for short-term use in a patient who can be carefully monitored for complications, this regimen is not without side effects and therefore requires careful medical supervision. Lightheadedness, weakness, decreased gastrointestinal motility, fluid and electrolyte imbalances, gout, hair loss, and amenorrhea are among the potential side effects.⁷⁷ Liquid protein diets popularized during the 1970's were especially prone to producing complications and even death in some cases because of the lack of medical supervision and the poor quality of proteins used in the formulations.

Low carbohydrate, ketogenic diets are regimes which severely restrict carbohydrate intake while allowing unrestricted protein, fat, and calories. Complications are similar to those of the PSMF, including fatigue, hypotension, and gout, as well as fluid and electrolyte imbalances. Because fat is also included, hypercholesteremia and hypertriglyceridemia are additional risks.⁷⁸ The "scientific" explanation offered to account for large weight losses despite unrestricted calories states that the overweight person rapidly converts carbohydrate into adipose tissue, whereas protein and fat are "burned up" in metabolic processes and therefore not stored as fat.⁷⁹ Critical analyses of these regimens have found that either calorie intake was in fact decreased below needs or losses were accountable to fluid, not adipose tissue.⁸⁰

In summary, any diet which promises dramatic results, places the burden of success on an "expert" or "gimmick," denies that calories count, or refutes exercise as an adjunct to therapy is almost

certain to fail in producing fat losses and can indeed be harmful.⁸¹

The key words in prudent weight loss are balance and calories.⁸² As discussed previously, manipulations in the proportions of protein, carbohydrate and fat from a usual diet lead to changes in fluid and electrolyte status, often leading to complications or weight loss of fluid, not fat. The recommended distribution of calories in normal and weight reducing diets are as follows: protein-20%, carbohydrate-45%, and fat-35%.⁸³ By maintaining a balanced proportion of nutrients and minimal variance from commonly used foods, chances are greater that the diet will be adequate in all nutrients except calories. A balanced calorie deficit diet also promotes the retraining of eating habits which will help prevent weight gain once the diet is discontinued.⁸⁴

A kilocalorie (calorie) is defined as the amount of heat necessary to raise the temperature of one kilogram of water one degree Centigrade.⁸⁵ In simpler terms, it is a standard measure of heat which has been used to define the amount of energy available from food. Calories can also describe the amount of fuel in adipose tissue. One pound of adipose tissue will yield 3,500 calories. [Simple arithmetic will show that to lose one pound of fat per week, one must decrease intake or increase expenditure by 500 calories per day.]⁸⁶ Weight loss from fat greater than two pounds per week is generally not possible without lowering calories below 1,000 per day. Intakes less than 1,000 calories per day are not likely to be adequate in vitamins and minerals and will produce the malaise and fatigue similar to that in fasting.⁸⁷ Increased energy expenditure, or more simply, exercise, has the overall effect of decreasing the amount of food eaten and

decreasing the frequency of consumption at inappropriate times. It is a common fallacy that exercise merely serves to increase hunger. Animal experiments have shown exactly the opposite: that sedentary lifestyles lead to an increase in appetite and consumption.⁸⁸ Suitor and Hunter cite four effects of exercise on eating behaviors:

(1) those committed to exercise will avoid eating one to two hours before strenuous exercise; (2) the appetite is curbed following exercise due to a decreased blood flow to the gastrointestinal tract; (3) hopes for better performance may provide additional motivation to lose excess weight; and (4) the use of food for non-nutritive purposes may decrease if exercise produces a sense of relaxation leading to a better ability to cope with problems.⁸⁹ Schneider et al. suggest that the exercise program selected should be an aerobic activity, produce a discernable level of fatigue (at least 80% of stress test capacity), last between fifteen and forty-five minutes per session, and should occur at least three to five times per week.⁹⁰

Because balanced calorie deficit diets do not produce overnight results, behavioral approaches to weight control may increase the dieter's ability to maintain the regimen. Behavior modification in weight reduction emphasizes identifying, then changing, behaviors which contribute to excessive intake or inadequate expenditure.^{91,92} Some examples of behavioral techniques are laying down utensils between bites of food, eating from smaller dishes to make portions appear larger, eating only at the table, or not eating while engaged in other activities such as watching television.

Perhaps the most distinct advantage of a balanced calorie

deficit diet is that it need only be modified by portion size or number to adjust caloric intake for maintenance.^{93,94} It is recommended that intake be divided into at least three meals per day.⁹⁵ Decreased glucose tolerance and increased serum cholesterol correlate with infrequent, large meals. Some researchers recommend as many as five to seven small meals per day, while others feel that dividing intake into two feedings is adequate.⁹⁶ In general, the probability of overeating at any particular meal decreases as the frequency of intake increases.

A balanced calorie deficit diet provides the basis for weight loss of adipose tissue with a minimal risk of precipitating complications. Behavioral modification and exercise both enhance the chances for successful weight loss by retraining eating habits and increasing caloric expenditure, respectively.

Statement of Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to analyze and classify weight reducing diets published in the four most widely circulated subscription women's magazines during the period 1961-1980. The research questions posed by this study were as follows:

1. Do the magazines surveyed differ significantly in the quality of weight reducing diets they publish?
2. Do the magazines surveyed differ significantly in the type of weight reducing diets they publish?
3. Are there trends evident over time in the quality of weight reducing diets published in women's magazines?

Operational Definitions

The magazines included in this study were Ladies' Home Journal, Good Housekeeping, Redbook, and McCall's. These magazines have been the four most widely circulated subscription women's magazines during the period 1961-1980.

The quality of each diet analyzed was defined as the raw score obtained through the use of the eleven-item evaluator shown in Appendix A. This instrument was adapted in part from Suitor and Hunter⁹⁷ and Fineberg.⁹⁸

The type of diet was defined according to the following classifications: (1) balanced calorie deficit; (2) high protein, low carbohydrate; (3) high carbohydrate, low protein; (4) fast or modified fast; (5) protein sparing modified fast; (6) one-food emphasis diets;

or (7) other. See Appendix B for specific category definitions.

Justification for Research

As pointed out in the background research section of this paper, the magazine industry claims to influence the eating/reducing habits of Americans, yet the nutritional community claims that the media, especially magazines, contribute to the spread of nutritional fallacies, particularly in the arena of weight reduction. Although substantiated by casual observation, the charges leveled by nutritionists have not been documented in any consistent, methodical manner. This study will partially fill that void by providing objective data on the type and quality of weight reducing diets published by women's magazines from 1961-1980. Further analyses will reveal differences, if any, between magazines and over time.

Unfortunately, the media and the nutritional community have assumed antagonistic attitudes toward each other when their cooperation could produce a fruitful, symbiotic relationship. It was hoped that by providing objective data as opposed to accusations, the groundwork could be laid for mutually beneficial efforts in the future.

Method

A sample totaling seventy-five diets was derived by analyzing the first diet published each year (1961-1980) in each of the four publications included in the study. Diets were not published by Redbook in 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1965; or by Ladies' Home Journal in 1964.

Diets were scored for quality using the instrument shown in

Appendix A. A score of +1 was assigned for each item in the evaluator which was included in the diet. No mention or contradiction of an item was scored as zero. (For example, a diet which claimed "unlimited calories" scored zero on item number one, whereas a 1,200 calorie diet scored one point. Therefore, each diet received a quality score ranging from zero to eleven. Secondly, diets were classified by type, denoted by number, as outlined in Appendix B. Data for quality and type of diet was recorded by magazine and year.

The instrument utilized by this study to rate diet quality was submitted to reliability testing. A panel of three nutritionists each utilized the instrument to rate twelve diets. Their quality scores were compared with this investigator's utilizing the Pearson-r to statistically determine correlation, and thus, reliability of scoring procedures. Reliability testing produced an average correlation of 0.87, revealing a strong degree of agreement among scorers.

Results

Diet quality scores as determined by utilizing the instrument shown in Appendix A were analyzed by magazine and by year. A one-way ANOVA and Neuman Keuls were utilized to statistically compare the quality of diets published by the different magazines. Table 1 summarizes these results. Redbook scored significantly higher and, thus, better than all other other magazines. ($p < .01$). Good Housekeeping scored significantly higher than McCall's ($p < .05$). Ladies' Home Journal was not significantly different from McCall's or Good Housekeeping. A Pearson-r was utilized to test for a correlation between diet quality and time. A positive correlation, significant at the .01 level was

found ($r=.40$); diet quality improved over the period 1961-1980. Thirdly, diet classifications as defined in Appendix B were tallied according to magazine and submitted to a one-way ANOVA and Neuman Keuls. These results are summarized in Table 2. Redbook scored significantly lower and, thus, better than McCall's and Ladies' Home Journal ($p<.01$), but did not differ significantly from Good Housekeeping. Good Housekeeping scored significantly lower than McCall's ($p<.05$) and from Ladies' Home Journal ($p<.01$). Analysis of McCall's versus Ladies' Home Journal was nonsignificant.

TABLE 1

DIET QUALITY: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F
Treatments	66.93	3	22.31	4.38**
Exp. error	361.72	71	5.09	

	McCall's	Journal	Good Hskpg.	Redbook
McCall's	-	NS	*	**
Journal		-	NS	**
Good Hskpg.			-	**
Redbook				-

TABLE 2

DIET CLASSIFICATIONS: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source of Variance	SS	df	MS	F
Treatments	83.26	3	27.75	4.52**
Exp. error	436.26	71	6.14	

	Redbook	Good Hskpg.	McCall's	Journal
Redbook	-	NS	**	**
Good Hskpg.		-	*	**
McCall's			-	NS
Journal				-

* ($p < .05$)** ($p < .01$)

Discussion

The results of this study certainly discount broad generalizations about diets published in women's magazines. The quality as well as the types of diets published by the magazines surveyed differed widely between and sometimes within publications. * Redbook's "Wise Woman's Diet," which has been published in many forms since its inception in 1967, provides the most consistent and reliable weight-reducing information of the magazines surveyed as defined by this study. By publishing only the "Wise Woman's Diet" since 1967, Redbook has adopted what might be termed "editorial policy" towards weight reduction. None of the other magazines surveyed were consistent in the type of weight reducing plans published, thereby creating a sea of confusion for the reader. For instance, in 1969 Ladies' Home Journal published "The Quick Inches Off Diet,"⁹⁹ a very low-protein, low-calorie regimen which suggests that excess muscle tissue can be an obstacle to achieving a slender figure. This diet promotes protein restriction as the key to weight reduction. In 1970, the Journal published "The Nibbler's Diet."¹⁰⁰ This regimen consists of five, 200-calorie "snacks" per day. The composition of the "snacks" is left entirely up to the dieter; the author explains that nutrient distribution is of little consequence and one will select a balanced diet over a period of time. These two diets illustrate the wide diversity of philosophies on weight reduction to which the reader is exposed. Redbook's "policy" of the "Wise Woman's Diet" eliminates such disparity but allows for modifications as new techniques are scientifically validated. In its earliest forms, the "Wise Woman's Diet" was promoted as a fourteen-day, balanced calorie

deficit regimen. The text further stated that the diet was safe for extended periods of time provided a physician was consulted. By 1969, information was added to help the dieter maintain his or her weight loss. In 1974, exercise was added as an important adjunct to decreased intake in a weight loss program. In 1979, behavior modification approaches were also included to further improve a sound weight reduction program.

Some potentially dangerous diets, such as "The Quick Inches Off Diet,"¹⁰¹ "Dr. Stillman's Quick Weight Loss Diet for Teenagers,"¹⁰² and "The Rice Diet,"¹⁰³ were encountered in this survey. "The Quick Inches Off Diet," developed by Dr. Irwin Stillman and mentioned earlier, allows no meat, poultry, seafood, or milk, nor does it attempt to complement vegetable sources of protein, rendering it dangerously low in protein. The stated goal of the diet is to reduce muscle mass, which alone is an undesirable goal because the body does not selectively deplete skeletal muscle. Cardiac and smooth muscle are also targets of catabolism; their depletion can be life threatening. Additionally, very low protein intakes can result in failure to synthesize adequate enzymes and protein molecules in the blood which can also cause severe metabolic aberrations.

"Dr. Stillman's Quick Weight Loss Diet for Teenagers" is a complete turnaround from his "Quick Inches Off Diet," for it recommends unrestricted meat, poultry, seafood, and fats while restricting carbohydrates severely. Although touted as a high protein diet, it is in fact a high fat diet due to the fact that "protein" foods (i.e. meat) contain only 40% protein; the remaining calories are from fat. Research

has documented a 16% increase in serum cholesterol levels after just five days of following this regimen.¹⁰⁴ The implications for such findings include acceleration of atherosclerotic disease and the development of coronary heart disease. Although little research has been done to verify that the pathologic processes involved in atherosclerosis and coronary heart disease begin in childhood, the American Heart Association recommends its dietary modifications of lowering total dietary fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol be instituted in childhood.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, the side effects of any "high-protein, low-carbohydrate" diet—such as fatigue, diarrhea, nausea, and lassitude—have been documented with use of Dr. Stillman's regimen.¹⁰⁶ Efficacious treatment of obesity in adolescents does not differ from that of adults.

"The Rice Diet," published by McCall's, is based on three meals per day, each consisting of eight ounces of fruit juice, three ounces of fruit, and one-third pound of rice. At dinner, one is to include six ounces of vegetables. Water is limited to half a glass per day. This diet is similar to the Kempner Diet¹⁰⁷ which was developed as an extremely low-sodium, fluid-restricted diet to treat hypertension before the advent of effective antihypertensive drugs. Like Stillman's "Quick Inches Off Diet," this regimen is dangerously inadequate in protein as well as vitamins, minerals, and trace elements. A multi-vitamin supplement is recommended, however. The fluid restriction imposed by the diet was appropriate for severe hypertension before medications became available; however, it is marginal at best in providing basal fluid requirements for healthy persons. Dehydration and

electrolyte imbalances are marked risks in this regimen. This diet also claims that one can lose weight on 2,000 calories per day. Initial losses are due to fluid shifts and subsequent losses, if they occur, are due to decreased intake due to boredom with the extremely restrictive choices allowed by the diet.

* Most low-scoring diets omitted important information rather than giving false or unsound advice. [Exercise and behavior modification were often omitted, although these two factors are crucial if one is to achieve and maintain weight loss.] Instructions for weight maintenance after reduction were also missing frequently. Some regimens, such as "The Ten Day, In The Pink Diet,"¹⁰⁸ specified a time frame for dieting, assuming a short-term diet would produce adequate results. Such programs may be sufficient for quick reduction of a few pounds but certainly are not adequate for the truly overweight.

Diets were often labeled with sensational titles, such as "Dr. Frank Field's TV Diet"¹⁰⁹ and "If Diets Don't Work For You."¹¹⁰ Such titles would certainly attract attention but may also draw premature criticism from those in the nutritional community. "Field's TV Diet" and "If Diets Don't Work" scored ten and eight points out of a possible eleven points, respectively; much better than one might assume from the titles alone. The only deficiency of "Field's TV Diet" was a slight imbalance in the proportion of nutrients. The menus offered averaged 30% of calories from protein, 40% from carbohydrate, and 30% from fat. The parameters utilized by this study were no more than 35% of calories from fat, at least 15% but not more than 25% of

calories from protein, and at least 40% of calories from carbohydrate. "If Diets Don't Work" omitted information about exercise, maintenance, and behavioral approaches to modify eating patterns but gave a well-balanced, nutritionally adequate set of menus for weight reduction.

The variation in the type of diets published by the magazines surveyed supports the observation that it is often easier for the dieter to change what he eats rather than only the amounts of what he normally eats.¹¹¹ Fewer high-protein, low-carbohydrate, unlimited-calorie regimens were encountered than expected--only four diets fit this classification, three of those being published by McCall's. Equally surprising was the large number of balanced, low calorie diets, although most of these were published by Redbook and Good Housekeeping. Ladies' Home Journal published only five balanced, low calorie diets; McCall's, only eight. As outlined earlier, a balanced, low calorie diet is the regimen of choice because it is adequate in all nutrients except calories, thereby preventing spurious weight losses while helping the dieter retrain poor eating habits.

X Some diets were targeted to very specific groups, such as "Dr. Solomon's New Seven Day Diet For Women Only"¹¹² to guard against premenstrual weight gains, "How To Lose Weight If You've Stopped Smoking"¹¹³ and "The Expectant Mother's Diet."¹¹⁴ The titles, though probably designed to attract customers, may have actually limited readership due to the specificity of target. Additionally, premenstrual weight gains are primarily due to fluid retention, not adipose tissue, and the principles necessary for post-smoking weight loss would not be different than those for anyone who was overweight. "The

Expectant Mother's Diet" was designed primarily to promote only modest weight gains during pregnancy but did provide an 800-calorie-per-day plan for readers who were not pregnant.

Although it is prudent to consult a physician for a medical check-up before embarking on a weight loss program, a physician is not necessarily the best person to consult for advice on weight reduction. Several diets surveyed were written by physicians, yet these diets often scored poorly. Dr. Irwin Stillman's diets^{115,116} as discussed earlier, scored only six and four points, respectively. "The Hollywood Diet"¹¹⁷ written by Dr. Mark Saginor, assistant clinical professor of medicine at UCLA, scored only three points. Unlike Stillman's diets, which give unsound advice, Saginor errs through omission. Essentially, the diet lists "allowed" and "forbidden" foods with no guidelines for portion sizes or number of servings. Instead, Dr. Saginor suggest "common sense" to guide portions size, which for the obese is a risky assumption. Dr. Neil Solomon wrote several diets, his works appearing in both Good Housekeeping and McCall's. Dr. Solomon utilized the same weight loss plan in each article but claimed different virtues for each. "The Health Diet Book"¹¹⁸ was touted as a high fiber, low-calorie diet. "Dr. Solomon's New Seven Day Diet For Women Only"¹¹⁹ claims to prevent premenstrual weight gains; "Dr. Solomon's No-Fuss Diet"¹²⁰ claims to avoid the boredom encountered with "usual" weight reducing diets; and "If Diets Don't Work For You"¹²¹ claims that food allergies can prevent weight loss. Dr. Solomon's regimen scored eight points, essentially a good program, except that 30% of the calories are from protein, and there are no

recommendations for exercise or behavior modification. Most objectionable are Dr. Solomon's claims for his diet—free from boredom, prevents premenstrual weight gain, and even more ludicrous, that food allergies can prevent weight loss.

In contrast to the above examples, some of the highest-scoring diets were also developed by physicians. Redbook's "Wise Woman's Diet" was originally developed with the help of Dr. Morton Glenn. In 1969, the diet appeared with his name in the title.¹²² Dr. George Christakis, a well-known and respected physician in the nutritional community, took over supervision of the "Wise Woman's Diet" in 1971. In his initial article, Dr. Christakis cited much research to combat common fallacies about weight reduction, then followed with the sound advice of the "Wise Woman's Diet."¹²³ In 1976 Dr. Christakis was replaced by a team of experts, Dr. Myron Winnick, Dr. Jules Hirsch, and Johanna Dwyer.¹²⁴ The program remained essentially unchanged, but included more options in choosing foods and provided advice on how to substitute without compromising nutritional adequacy.

Redbook was not entirely alone in its adoption of a sound weight reduction program. In 1969, Ladies' Home Journal founded a "Diet Club."¹²⁵ The "Club provided a diet plan designed to allow a one to two-pound per week weight loss using an exchange system food plan, weekly newsletters, a monthly magazine, and a "Master Weight Loss Certificate" upon reaching one's weight loss goal. Unlike Redbook's plan, which was published at least semiannually, one had to purchase a separate subscription to the Ladies' Home Journal "Diet Club" in order to receive the plan. The diet was eventually published in 1972

as "The Diet That Worked For 100,000 Women."¹²⁶ The plan scored seven points; its deficits being lack of information on snacks, maintenance, exercise, and behavior modification, although these topics may have been covered in the newsletters or monthly magazines provided by the "Club." Unfortunately, the Journal did not adopt its "Diet Club" as "policy"; instead it continued to publish a variety of weight loss schemes, most of which were unsound.

Programs utilized by weight loss clinics were also encountered in this survey. Weight Watchers^{127,128} and Diet Workshop^{129,130} plans were published by Ladies' Home Journal. Weight Watcher's regimen centers on retraining food habits through diet and group support, whereas Diet Workshop's key is behavior modification. McCall's published "The Greenhouse Diet,"¹³¹ a diet from a famous "fat farm." Typical of such programs, the Greenhouse allows only 850-900 calories per day, certainly not a plan for long-term weight loss. Weight loss programs which provide fewer than 1,000 calories per day often result in fatigue, nausea, and lightheadedness. Additionally, this regimen is so severe that it is unlikely one would adhere to it long enough for adequate results.

Women's magazines offer a wide variety of weight reducing diets, some safe, others potentially dangerous and, at best, ineffective. ^xThe First Amendment protects anyone making dietary claims, provided that a particular food is not misbranded.¹³² [Unfortunately, this protection creates a vast opportunity for extravagant and unscientific claims to reach the public, who are usually not equipped to separate fact from fiction.] Although one could charge that magazines

have been errant in publishing unsound diets, it seems equally valid to charge that trained nutritionists have not met the challenge to provide valid weight reducing information in the popular press. Instead, nutritionists have, for the most part, restricted their efforts to the scientific literature. Examples such as Redbook's "Wise Woman's Diet" indicate that it is indeed possible to utilize popular magazines as a forum for the dissemination of sound nutritional advice.

Although this study has examined diets published in popular women's magazines, it has left untouched a vast number of topics related to nutritional information. Within the realm of weight control per se, paperback books and newspapers also contribute heavily to the popular literature; these too should be examined in a systematic manner for nutritional validity. Vitamin supplementation, which also has become a popular topic in the media, is fraught with inconsistent and unsubstantiated claims. Similar research as undertaken by this study might identify common misconceptions and provide the directions for counterpropaganda and scientifically valid articles.

The time has come for those trained in nutrition to move out of the laboratory and into the public view through the media to replace nutritional quackery with nutritional science.

Appendix A
Quality Evaluator

Score +1 for each item included in the diet; 0 if no mention or contradiction stated in the diet.

Is this a diet which:

1. Will produce a negative calorie balance, but provides at least 1,000 calories per day?
2. Derives no more than 35% of calories from fat, at least 15% but not more than 25% of calories from protein, and at least 40% of calories from carbohydrate?
3. Defines portion sizes (except for foods classified as "free" by the American Diabetes Association Exchange System)?
4. Meets U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances for vitamins and minerals or suggest supplementation?
5. Requires at least three meals per day?
6. Allows snacks?
7. Describes the adjustments necessary for maintenance of weight by increased portion sizes or number of servings?
8. Does not exclude any of the food exchange groups (meat, milk, bread, fruit or fat)?
9. Recommends exercise or an increase in physical activity?
10. Recommends medical supervision if the diet is to be maintained for more than two weeks or if any diseases or medical treatments pre-exist?
11. Includes behavioral approaches to modifying eating patterns?

Adapted in part from Suitor and Hunter¹³³ and Fineberg¹³⁴

Appendix B

Diet Classifications

Type of diet will be defined according to the following classifications:

1. Balanced calorie deficit: at least 40% of calories from carbohydrate, at least 15% but no more than 25% of calories from protein, and no more than 35% of calories from fat.
2. High protein, low carbohydrate: less than 100 grams carbohydrate per day, unlimited protein and fat.
3. High carbohydrate, low protein: less than 15% of calories from protein, less than 30% of calories from fat, remaining calories from carbohydrate.
4. Fast or modified fast: less than 1,000 calories per day with no more than 25% of calories from protein.
5. Protein sparing modified fast: less than 1,000 calories per day with protein providing greater than 25% of calories per day and less than 100 grams of carbohydrate.
6. One-food emphasis diet: requires the inclusion of one or more specific foods at every meal.
7. Other: any diet not encompassed by the aforementioned groups.

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Redbook

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