

University of Wollongong
Research Online

University of Wollongong Thesis Collection
1954-2016

University of Wollongong Thesis Collections

2005

Talking about food and nutrition: women and popular Australian women's magazines

Danielle McVie
dlidgard@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses>

University of Wollongong

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation

McVie, Danielle, Talking about food and nutrition: women and popular Australian women's magazines, PhD thesis, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Wollongong, 2005. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/859>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**Talking about food and nutrition: women and
popular Australian women's magazines.**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the
degree

Doctor of Philosophy

From

University of Wollongong

By

Danielle McVie, BSc (Nutrition), MPH.

Graduate School of Public Health

2005

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Danielle M McVie

Abstract

Review of the literature quite clearly indicates that there is need for a comprehensive review of nutrition messages presented to women. This is important given women's considerable and continuing influence on family food decisions and their reported use of magazines as a source of information in the media. Women frequently cite women's magazines to be an important source of nutrition information, however few studies have investigated this relationship in depth. It is important to understand how women use the information in women's magazines and to what extent they have the potential to influence the food decisions women make on a day to day basis.

The principle objective of this study was to gain insight into the food and nutrition issues considered to be of importance among women and in popular women's magazines. This project aimed to identify similarities and differences in the food and nutrition issues raised by women and those presented in women's magazines in order to provide insight into the role women's magazines have in the provision of food and nutrition information to women. This study was conducted in three parts.

The first study involved focus group discussions with three cohorts of women, that is, teenage girls aged 13-16 years, and women aged 25-34 years and 45-54 years. Nine focus groups were conducted. This study provided insight into women's use and perceptions of women's magazines and aided in the development of the content analysis instrument. Results indicated that participants in this study did not actively seek nutrition information from magazines. Rather, magazines primarily operated as an incidental source of information, and nutrition information acted as a feature that helped to sell one magazine over another. Learning about current nutrition issues was generally not the participants' motivation for buying women's magazines. Participants also

indicated that they did not place a high degree of trust in, and were skeptical of, the information presented in women's magazines.

The second study involved two semi-structured interviews with approximately half the women from each cohort who participated in the focus group discussions. Each woman participated in two semi-structured interviews. The first interview was conducted approximately five months after the focus groups and the second interview four months after the first interview. The interviews provided insight into the food and nutrition concerns of women. The results indicated that participants were not anxious about food and nutrition issues and did not think about food and nutrition in a risk framework. Weight concerns and the desire to lose weight were the most frequently discussed food and nutrition issue among all groups of women. Non-weight concerns were more likely to be raised by women who had current health concerns for themselves or someone in their family.

The third study consisted of a 12 month content analysis of eight popular women's magazines. This study was conducted concurrently with the semi-structured interviews. Magazines were analysed for the food and nutrition content of advertisements, editorial items and cover headlines. This study provided insight into the food and nutrition messages presented in women's magazines. The results of this study indicated that magazine advertising content is largely dominated by advertisements for non-core products (i.e. foods that were not listed as a part of the core food groups according to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (Commonwealth of Australia 1998). Advertisements were also more likely to use consumer related statements as primary promotion messages. The majority of nutrition related statements were related to general nutrition. Results of the content analysis of editorial content highlighted that the predominant food and nutrition messages related to dieting and weight loss, followed by food or product specific articles. The dominance of dieting and weight loss messages was also reflected in magazine headlines. The content analysis

demonstrated clear inconsistencies in the food and nutrition messages they presented to women and were surprising in the limited presentation of food and nutrition issues that could be considered of direct interest to women such as osteoporosis, nutrition and aging or vegetarianism.

This thesis demonstrated a close alignment between the food and nutrition concerns of women and the issues presented to them via the content of women's magazines. Both the women who participated in focus groups and semi-structured interviews and the content of women's magazines content analysed have a very narrow focus regarding food and nutrition issues. Weight concern related to self identity (but not health) was the main concern raised by both the women and the magazines. This close alignment supports the findings of previous surveys where women have self reported that they consider magazines an important source of food and nutrition information. However it is not possible in this study to determine the direction of this alignment, that is, whether the magazines responded to or acted to lead women's food and nutrition concerns. In addition, it was evident from the content analysis that magazines were driven by the commercial imperative to sell products, including food and nutrition products, to women. Interestingly, the women who participated in the focus group discussions identified that women's magazines aimed to sell them products. Despite this, the women who participated in the semi-structured interviews indicated that magazines did raise their awareness of some food and nutrition issues.

This study has highlighted the potential for health professionals to utilise women's magazines to raise a broader range of food and nutrition issues, and to provide the necessary 'expert credence' sought by the women. However, this involvement of health professionals should be within the 'recreational' and entertainment context of the role of magazines in women's lives. The women in this study clearly identified that they primarily buy magazines for the entertainment they provide. It is therefore important that health professionals

learn to position broader food and nutrition issues within an entertainment framework.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to my supervisors Associate Professors Heather Yeatman and Sandra Jones. I am thankful for your support, guidance, advice, encouragement and patience throughout the course of my PhD.

I am thankful to the women who so generously and happily gave up their time and allowed me to intrude on their life to participate in my study.

A special thank you to my peers and now friends Judy Mullan, Lucia Apolloni, Lynda Krifflik, Anne Maree Parrish and Lisa Cheng who have shared an office with me and of course the pleasure and pain of undertaking a PhD. In your own individual ways you have all been an inspiration to me. Also, a special mention and thanks to Kay Kent for always brightening my day.

A big thanks to Michelle Lidgard, Marie Johnson and Naras Lapsy for their research assistance.

To my family, thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me to push myself further than I ever have thought possible. Mum and Dad, thank you for everything from supportive and encouraging telephone calls to financial support. My husband, Douglas thank you for your support and love, understanding and patience particularly during the writing-up stage. Lucy, my precious daughter, you inspire me everyday.

This research project was made possible by the Australian Research Council and Sanitarium Health Food Company through the award of an APA(I).

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	7
Table of Contents.....	8
List of Tables	10
List of Figures	11
List of Abbreviations.....	12
1 Introduction and the Context of the Studies.....	12
1.1 Overview of the Study.....	12
1.2 Study Objectives.....	13
1.3 Value of this Research.....	14
1.4 Thesis Structure	15
2 Literature Review and Background.....	18
2.1 Introduction.....	18
2.2 Health Information and the Media.....	19
2.3 Australia's Current Dietary Practices – An Important Public Health Issue	23
2.4 The Complexity of Food Choice	26
2.5 Women and Food Choice	32
2.6 The Influence of Nutrition Knowledge on Dietary Patterns	33
2.7 The Influence of the Media on Dietary Patterns.....	34
2.8 Nutrition Messages in the Media	37
2.9 Consumers' Perceptions of the Importance of Food and Nutrition...41	
2.10 The Nutrition Messages in Magazines.....	42
2.11 Conclusion.....	49
3 Conceptual and Methodological Framework.....	51
3.1 Introduction.....	51
3.2 Theoretical Framework Used in Previous Food Choice & Media Studies	52
3.3 Food Choice Studies	52
3.4 A Sociological Approach to Food Choice and Media.....	55
3.5 Thesis Theoretical Framework	72
3.6 Conclusion.....	73
3.7 Methodology Framework	74
3.8 Summary	80
4 Focus Group Discussions.....	81

4.1	Introduction.....	81
4.2	Methodology	81
4.3	Qualitative Research and Rigour.....	85
4.4	Results.....	88
4.5	Discussion	101
4.6	Limitations	109
4.7	Summary	110
5	Semi-Structured Interviews.....	111
5.1	Introduction.....	111
5.2	Methodology	111
5.3	The Participants.....	119
5.4	Magazine Reading Habits Results.....	119
5.5	Semi-Structured Interview Results	120
5.6	Discussion	144
5.7	Limitations	154
5.8	Summary	155
6	Magazine Content Analysis	157
6.1	Introduction.....	157
6.2	Methodology – Content Analysis	157
6.3	Validation and Reliability of the Coding Schemes.....	172
6.4	Coding Procedure.....	173
6.5	Data Analysis.....	174
6.6	Content Analysis Results.....	174
6.7	Summary	208
7	Content Analysis Discussion Chapter.....	210
7.1	Introduction.....	210
7.2	Food and Nutrition Issues in Women’s Magazines and Risk.....	211
7.3	Reflexivity and self identity	219
7.4	Editorial Content.....	221
7.5	Expert Knowledge, Risk, Trust and Doubt.....	222
7.6	Magazine’s Role in the Provision of Food and Nutrition Information	224
7.7	Limitations	227
7.8	Conclusions	228
8	Thesis Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations and Implications for Practice.....	230
8.1	Introduction.....	230
8.2	Discussion	232
8.3	Limitations	242
8.4	Recommendations.....	243

8.5	Implications for health promotion practice	245
9	Reference List.....	246
10	Appendices.....	263

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Timeframe of data collection	79
Table 4.1	Participant Characteristics	88
Table 4.2	Participant Magazine Reading Habits.....	90
Table 5.1	Areas investigated in semi structured interview one.....	115
Table 5.2	Additional areas of investigation specific to each age group.....	117
Table 6.1.	Magazine Readership and Circulation in the Top 100 (Magazine Publishers of Australia 2002b; Magazine Publishers of Australia 2002a)	161
Table 6.2	Magazine Readership of Women Aged 13-16, 25-34 and 45-54 years Based on Intercept Survey of Women residing in the Study Region.....	162
Table 6.3.	Description of the Eight Women's Magazines' Characteristics	164
Table 6.4.	Publishers' Promotional Information for the Eight Women's Magazines	165
Table 6.5.	Barr's (1989) Product Groups	166
Table 6.6	Number and Percentage of Food and Nutrition Related Advertisements by Magazine (n = 1161).	175
Table 6.7	Core Versus Non-Core Advertisements.....	176
Table 6.8.	Number of Advertisements Promoting Core Food Items by Magazine and Total for All Magazines.	177
Table 6.9.	Number of Non-Core Food Advertisements by Magazine and Percentage of Non-Core Food Advertisements by all Advertisements.....	179
Table 6.10.	Primary Consumer Related Promotional Statements in Each of the Eight Australian Women's Magazines.....	181
Table 6.11	Primary Nutrition Related Promotional Statements in Each of the Eight Australian Women's Magazines.....	184
Table 6.12	Quoted Information in Advertisements with Nutrition Related Primary messages	185
Table 6.13.	Information Sources Mentioned in Magazine Editorials	195
Table 6.14.	Details Regarding Further Information Provided.....	197
Table 6.15.	Food and Nutrition Cover Headlines ^a of the Eight Australian Women's Magazines.....	199

List of Figures

Figure 6.1 Broad Categories Used for the Content Analysis Coding Scheme for Advertisements	168
Figure 6.2 Broad categories used for the content analysis coding scheme for editorial items.....	171
Figure 6.3 Broad Categories Used for the Content Analysis Coding Scheme for Cover Headlines	172
Figure 6.4 Examples of diet 'tricks and secrets'	192
Figure 6.5 <i>New Idea</i> , June 14, 2003 "Danger Diets" article, pages 32–35.....	201
Figure 6.6. <i>New Idea</i> , June 14, 2003, "Eat like a star" article, pages 48–49.....	202
Figure 6.7. <i>Woman's Day</i> , February 10, 2003, "Diet Riot" page 56	202
Figure 6.8. <i>Woman's Day</i> , September 22, 2003, "Catherine's amazing new diet" pages 10–13.....	203
Figure 6.9. <i>Cleo</i> , October 2003, "Is drinking the new dinner" pages 208-209	204
Figure 6.10 <i>Cleo</i> , November 2003, "Alcohol: it could be the real date-rape drug" pages 111-112, 114.....	204
Figure 6.11. Examples of alcoholic beverage advertisements appearing in <i>Cleo</i> 2003.....	205
Figure 6.12. <i>Cleo</i> , July 2003, "Fact: Diets can seriously ruin your health & looks. Restricting what you eat comes at a price! Pages 108 –111	206
Figure 6.13. Examples of Weight Loss Product advertisements.....	206
Figure 6.14. <i>Dolly</i> , May 2003 "The Dolly 4 week mind and body blitz" pages 107–115.....	207
Figure 6.15. An example of a beverage advertisement from <i>Dolly</i> 2003 (Nestle Milo).....	208

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used with in this thesis.

ADA:	American Dietetic Association
ANZFA:	Australia New Zealand Food Authority
AWW:	Australian Women's Weekly
BSE:	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
CHO:	Carbohydrate
Cle:	Cleo
Cos:	Cosmopolitan
CSIRO:	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
Dol:	Dolly
GF:	Girlfriend
GM:	Genetically Modified
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NI:	New Idea
TL!:	That's Life
UK:	United Kingdom
USA:	United States of America
WD:	Woman's Day