Body Positive 'Healthy' Women: Representations of Health and Femininities in Women's Health Magazine South Africa, 2013-2018

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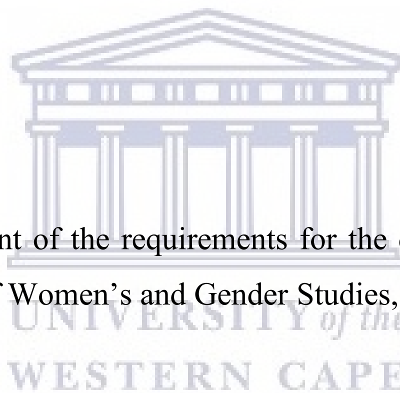

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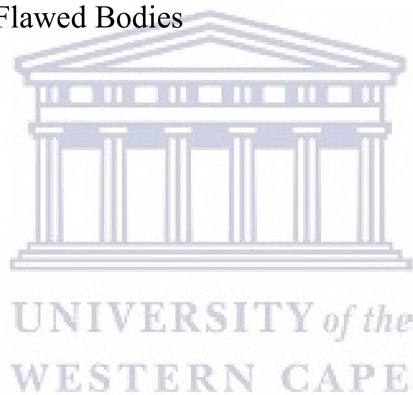
ABSTRACT

This research explores how representations of healthy femininities are constructed through narratives of Body Positivity in the South African version of *Women's Health* magazine from 2013 to 2018. In my thesis, I examine how the magazine romanticises certain bodies and subtly pathologises others. By conducting a thematic analysis, I focus on the magazine's presentation of women's bodies and how these representations are linked to femininities, health, and sexuality. From a Body Positive lens, I argue that the magazine represents certain bodies as normative and 'healthy' and other bodies as unhealthy and undesirable.

Key Words: Health, Women's Health, Body Positive, Gender, Femininities, South Africa, Representations, Ideal Bodies, Flawed Bodies



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The media's representation of women plays an important role in normative standards of health and beauty. My interest and the foundation of my exploration of women's bodies are the messages that are present in media, specifically, magazines. More importantly, my interest lies in how these messages relay notions of Body Positivity and how the media conveys 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' messages of Body Positive femininities. Body Positivity and body image are consistently conveyed in the media since the media's representations of body image have become increasingly influential. Through an analysis of media representations of the healthy feminine body, I examine some of the complex ways in which a South African health magazine relays powerful and magnetic messages around appropriate healthy femininities through Body Positive imagery. I am especially interested in how the magazine uses concepts of empowerment and Body Positivity to transmit what a healthy woman is supposed to look like. Furthermore, in connection with the latter notion, I look at how these messages simultaneously reinforce the pathology of 'othered' bodies, such as the 'flawed' body.

This study deconstructs ways in which *Women's Health* South Africa (hereafter referred to as *Women's Health*) represents 'love your body' messages through health and beauty. It has developed out of my interest to investigate the range of messages available within the magazine's content. Matheson (2017) wrote that what is considered healthy and beautiful is a social construct specific to time and place while ideas about what counts as beautiful have changed over the years. The 'thin' 'white' and European body is, as Sanger (2009) shows, still conveyed as the ideal in contemporary South Africa. These notions have inspired me to

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review South African magazines and explore what kinds of bodies South African women's magazines represent as 'healthy' and 'beautiful' compared to what is 'unhealthy' and 'undesirable'. My interest also emerges out of the ideas of the Body Positivity movement.

Body Positivity is a movement created in the early 1990s but only came to the forefront during the late 2010s. It has established itself as a protest against the unrealistic notions of health and beauty represented in media. The Body Positive Movement, which I will discuss throughout this thesis, advocates for positive body image in all areas of embodiment. According to Metheson (2017), a 'Body Positive' person is somebody who embraces themselves unconditionally. The Body Positive person perceives themselves as beautiful, despite bodily features framed as undesirable in the media. The Body Positive movement and the concepts of health and beauty go hand in hand. Although I use the concept of 'health' consistently in this thesis, I focus on health as a representation of an embodiment in magazines. In other words, I focus on how certain kinds of bodies are represented as healthy, in light of which ones are represented as unhealthy and undesirable. For example, thin bodies, white bodies, and long-haired bodies are repeatedly portrayed as desirable and as healthy in *Women's Health* magazines. This automatically leaves room to assume that other bodies are perceived as unhealthy and undesirable.

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There exists a terrain of feminist studies that have challenged the media's promotion of feminine health and feminine beauty. As such, these research projects have shaped my thinking in a variety of ways. For instance, Susan Bordo's (1993) work entitled *Unbearable Weight* offers insight into how 'healthy' women's bodies have been represented in American magazines. Bordo (1993) is famously known for challenging the norm of 'thinness' as the ideal for feminine health, where she dismantles the romanticisation and fixation of the thin, feminine body in magazines. Her work influenced me to recognize that thinness, as

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represented by women's magazines, is impossible to achieve and maintain, even with good health habits.

Through her analysis of beauty and thinness, Naomi Wolf (2000) highlights that the ongoing representations of beauty in magazines are a ploy to get women to confine themselves within the system of patriarchy. My study pays attention to patriarchal standards of beauty, and since patriarchy is an important component of this study, I look to feminists who define and describe the patriarchal system. Mary Becker (1999) did an extensive paper on patriarchy and what it means to feminism. Patriarchy, is defined by Becker as (1999):

> 'Individuals living in [society] today are encouraged to believe that (only) white men are fully human; and because (only) white men are fully human, society is organized around their needs, the reality is seen from their perspectives, their attributes are seen as most valuable and productive, and they (naturally) dominate politics and culture. Although oppression of women is not the point of patriarchy, a social system that is male-identified, male-controlled male-centred will inevitably value masculinity and masculine traits' (Becker, 1999:24-2).

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Patriarchy thus serves hegemonic (dominant) masculine needs and seeks to show that women are subordinate within society. This study relies on how patriarchy covertly operates in *Women's Health* magazine through so-called notions of empowerment and upliftment. Wolf's (2000) famous work titled *The Beauty Myth* showed how the beauty standards in magazines are 'mythical' and shaped by unrealistic patriarchal notions of what a woman should be. As a result, this is how I associate health with both thinness and beauty. In line with this, Rosalind Gill (2007) expresses that in contemporary media, young women live through a discourse of 'can-do' girl power, but at the same time, their bodies are sexualised and objectified. Gill (2007) is a critical feminist thinker and best known for her work on media studies and the representations of femininities in culture.

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Furthermore, South African critical feminist researcher Nadia Sanger (2009) is another crucial scholar who has shaped my thinking. In her article *New Women, Old Messages? Constructions of femininities, Race and Hypersexualised bodies in selected South African magazines, 2003–2006,* Sanger (2009) argued that contemporary media powerfully shapes the racial perceptions that women of different races should look a particular way to be appropriately feminine. Perceptions of what is fit and healthy are central to the claims Sanger (2009) makes on beauty through her analysis of racialised femininities in South African magazines. These feminists' works are significant for my study as I draw on their work in my analysis of South African women's magazines. They all argue that femininities, in terms of 'health' and 'beauty' is reinforced by women's magazines through messages of patriarchy. I aim to extend their work and ideas by using a Body Positive lens.

As a critical feminist thinker, I understand how messages are conveyed in mass media for profit, as media sell what they believe consumers will consume. As such, I do not focus on how the consumer receives the information produced by magazines. My study is framed within a social constructionist approach that understands the media as a powerful signifier of reality. The media draws on dominant discourses within society so that their discourses resonate with people of society. Mass media exists in many forms, such as TV, magazines, Billboards, and social networks and each form has a marketing niche that is aimed at enticing people to buy what they are selling. Scholarship on popular media is significant in showing how important media is in reflecting and shaping hegemonic societal and cultural narratives. Marshall McLuhan (1964) articulated that dominant media messaging extensively impacts social norms. In his book, *Understanding Media*, McLuhan (1964) argues that media is an extension of 'man' in that it mediates our communities and how we perceive the messages presented in media. Furthermore, according to Hall (1992), as cited by Sanger (2007):

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> ‘Media plays a huge role in defining reality for the public. He explains that the media defines, not merely produces, 'reality'. Definitions of reality are sustained and produced through all the linguistic practices by means of which selective definitions of the 'real' are represented. Representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies that the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of *making things mean.* It is a practice, a production, of meaning: what has been defined as a 'Signifying practice'. The media are signifying agents’ (Cited in Sanger, 2007:67).

Not all media systems operate within a heteropatriarchal healthism discourse. However, many media’s broadcasting systems reproduce and reinforce imageries of ideal health, femininities, and sexuality within the framework of beauty. My intention here is to explore the messages carried by a specific South African magazine. The focus is on how the messaging within the magazine simultaneously reflects and reinforces imagery of health and beauty through systematic but veiled notions of traditional patriarchy. In addition, while magazines are one form of media, research has shown that it has a strong influence on how women perceive messages through influential imagery. Mass media, as an informative institution, has the power to influence how we understand the realities of society. Media has shaped attitudes and the understandings of feminism in a myriad of ways and I use Baker Beck’s (1998) standpoint whereby she shows how powerful media is in shaping people’s thoughts.

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> The mass media play[s] on dichotomies as [it] perpetuate[s] Western codes. When the world is viewed as a series of dualisms, those who do not fit the ‘good’ qualifications (generally, male/white/middle class/Christian) automatically are cast as ‘bad.’ There are no shades of grey in this black-and-white world (Baker Beck, 1998:140).

She writes that many people reject the term ‘feminism’ because of how negatively the media portrays the concept. Moreover, Beck (1998) argues that the media perpetuates the codes by which people live. My study, therefore, posits that media operates as an agent that reinforces and normalises certain understandings of concepts including femininities, health and

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sexuality. In addition, as a shaper of reality, the media tends to reflect how we live in society. Normative discourses of femininities are always mediated by notions of heterosexuality and the notions of health and fitness are consistently built around messages of female empowerment. However, some subliminal regulators, communicate to women how they should appear to be considered 'healthy'. The mass media is an important maker of people's basic beliefs as well as their attitudes, and this applies to normative gendered values around appropriate femininities. Bordo (1993) argued that women have consistently been bombarded with hegemonic beauty and body size ideals over the decades because mainstream media has repetitively romanticised thinness. Added to this notion, Sanger (2009) wrote that contemporary South African media outlets are still currently representing Euro-Western conceptions of health and beauty as aspirational for South African women. These norms reproduce particular understandings of feminine beauty like slimmer bodies that are positioned as more valuable than bodies deemed 'other' such as the 'flawed' body.

In light of the above discussion concerning the media, I explore representations of Body Positive healthy femininities in the South African magazine, *Women'*s *Health.* I intend to demonstrate how the magazine reproduces authoritative discourses and uses particular images in a repetitive nature to disseminate dominant discourses. I aim to consider how the magazine uses marginal discourses, like Body Positivity, and how the magazine shapes Body Positive theory within dominant discourses through health and fitness. I chose this magazine as a medium for my research topic because it provides substantial insights into the dynamics of the embodiments of healthy femininities that claim to embody twenty-first-generation female empowerment through neoliberalism and Body Positivity. One of my main objectives is to convey how *Women's Health* magazine South Africa attempts to promote particular health messages. The study will therefore pay particular attention to how the magazine's depiction

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of the ‘healthy’ feminine body is operating to construct an ‘unhealthy’ feminine body, also known as the ‘flawed’ body within discourses of Body Positivity.

Despite a range of studies on South African media, with work by Sanger (2009) and Masina (2010), there is a lacuna of research focusing specifically on representations of Body Positive and healthy femininities in South African media. Globally, an array of research studies focuses on the privilege of white bodies and the not-so-privileged black body, which is also a significant theme in local South African research. My intention in this study is to add to this body of work by looking at the romanticisation of the ideal healthy body in connection with the pathologising of the ‘flawed’ body through mantras of Body Positivity.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One provides the outline of the theoretical framework that underpins my study. In this Chapter, I draw on the theories that shape my understanding of healthy femininities through promoting Body Positivity. The main aim of this Chapter focuses on the African feminist lens underpinning my Body Positive analysis. Chapter Two is where I review various international and local feminist research on the topic of femininities in magazines. I review how these researchers have employed various concepts like health, beauty, age, Body Positivity as well as ‘flawed’ bodies. In addition, I discuss how I have drawn on this thinking in my analysis.

My analysis is divided into three chapters focusing on themes that show the connection between Body Positivity and representations of healthy femininities in *Women’s Health* South Africa. In the first analysis Chapter (Chapter Three), I look at representations of the cover girl and the various discourses and visual images that construct the perfect healthy girl. This Chapter offers my analysis of how *Women’s Health* employs an idealised healthy body through American celebrity cultures and how these particular bodies are promoted as the

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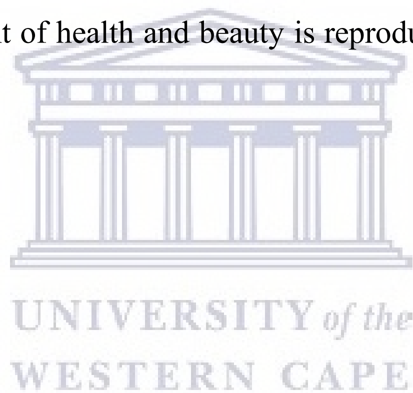
ideal form of healthy body image. I then go on in Chapter Four to discuss the magazine's attempt to change the narrative of its cover girl by using her supposed 'flaws' as a reference to positive body image and mantras of Body Positivity. This Chapter highlights the theme of health through 'flawed' bodies, and how the magazine shows what is presented as ideal as well as what beauty standards should be disregarded. In Chapter Five, I analyse the representation of the 'fat' body and how the magazine uses notions of fat phobia to implement unhealthy habits. In this final analysis chapter, I use a more 'fatphobia' feminism stance and critically examine and reflect on how the magazine uses fat bodies through weight loss narratives as measures of health, fitness, and beauty. All three analysis Chapters consider how language and imagery play within *Women's Health's* covers and its editorial content, discussing how the embodiment of health and beauty is reproduced through acts of ideal and non-ideal femininities.



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CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODS

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter focuses on the theory I engage in as a feminist thinker, whereby I firstly reflect on the feminist theories that underpin my thinking. In addition, I define and describe Body Positivity as a theory and how it has shaped my thought processing for my analysis. The second part of this Chapter engages with the processes I have used to conduct my study.

2.2 Feminist Theoretical framework

My understanding of the representations of women's bodies in media is framed within a feminist Body Positive feminist lens. This is where I challenge the notion of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' women's bodies as constructions of femininities. Feminist theories aim to understand gender inequality in all spectrums, such as the workplace, media and the household. It focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, feminist theories also focus on promoting women's rights and interests. For example, Budig and Jones (2008) wrote that:

> 'Feminist theories are varied and diverse. All analyse women's experiences of gender subordination, the roots of women's oppression, how gender inequality is perpetuated, and offer differing remedies for gender inequality' (Budig & Jones, 2008:1).

Theorising feminism may be viewed as an easy task to undertake since its knowledge and standpoints revolve around the nature of women's rights and women's empowerment. There is a terrain of feminist theorists like liberal and radical feminist theories that focus on women's rights within patriarchal societies. However, a critical examination of society and the dynamics of the world that is rapidly changing, and radical and liberal theories are

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deemed outdated. Thus, the feminist theory relevant to my thinking is African feminism. As a feminist who is interested in African women, I structure myself as an African feminist. While liberal and radical feminist theories are related to shaping the understanding of women's rights and empowerment, it lacks a critical understanding of the African context.

2.2.1 African Feminist Theory

Elida (1999) writes that African feminism references African women's issues. Elida references Aidoo's understanding of African feminism and cites that:

> 'Generally speaking, African feminism gets to the bottom of African gender relations and the problems of African women - illuminating their causes and consequences - and criticises them. In so doing, African feminism aims at upsetting the existing matrix of domination and overcoming it, thus transforming gender relationships and conceptions in African societies and improving the situation of African women' (Elida, 1999:32)

African feminism delves into African history and diversity as it analyses African women's realities and challenges. It is essential to clarify how African perceptions and identities intersect, which can be described through intersectionality. This feminist theory challenges the inevitable and fixed characteristics of gender including heteronormativity and the undifferentiated category of 'woman'.

They argue that the repetition of gendered identity perpetuates gender inequality. African feminism advocates *queering:* blending gendered characteristics and questioning 'normal' forms of gender and sexuality as remedies for gender inequality. They are all synonymous in that they are critical of a status quo in which women are marginalised, and men are privileged. They all agree that gender matters, that gender is an axis of inequality. This shows how various identities of feminism intersect with one another. My research, therefore, revolves around Body Positive, healthy feminine bodies within the context of African media.

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2.3 Intersection Identities of women in media

Intersectionality is a concept that focuses on how various identities of gender, such as race and age intersect. Within media, women are categorised via body shape and sizes, and my thesis focuses on how these categories intersect to emanate the identity of a healthy woman. My study draws on various theorists who explicitly address women's bodily representations in women's magazines. My thesis on how categories of 'healthy' femininities intersect through the narratives constructed by *Women's Health* magazine. I focus on how size and flaws impact how women are oppressed within media. Kathy Davis (2008) argues that Intersectionality is a feminist analytic tool developed by Kimberle Crenshaw to address complexity within feminist scholarship. Davis (2008) further explains that Intersectionality acknowledges that subjectivity and embodiments are constituted by mutually intersecting factors, such as gender, race, age, class, religion, and sexuality, which can complicate what it means to be a woman.

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Since people are defined through intersecting identities, one can also consider that it would be helpful to acknowledge that women are represented in terms of 'body size' and this is especially evident in media. Therefore, Intersectionality as a theoretical tool will allow me to consider the complexities of the representations of healthy and unhealthy embodiment in South African women's health magazines. *Women's Health* magazine intersects thinness with characteristics like beautiful, healthy, and ideal, whereas comparatively, the 'flawed' with unideal and unhealthy.

2.4 Body Positive feminist lens

Body Positivity serves as an academic crutch for my research study. Body Positivity is defined by theorists like Cohen et al (2019) as the burgeoning movement that has been in

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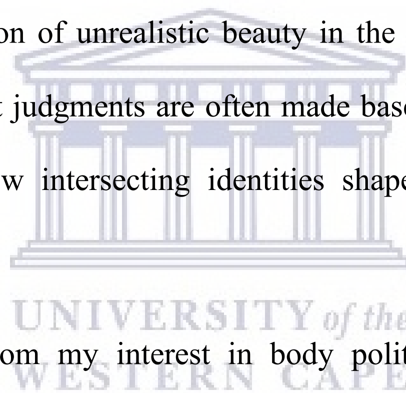
existance since the 1990s, but only came to the forefront of the media during the late 2010s. Cohen et al (2019) writes that the Body Positivity movement has established itself as a protest against the unrealistic notions of health and beauty. In addition, the movement advocates for positive body image in all areas of embodiment. One of the main characteristics of Body Positivity is acceptance of the 'flawed body', and while this applies to both genders, I focus on the 'flawed' feminine body. According to Cohen et al (2019) the Body Positive body, or 'flawed' body, includes bodies that are 'fat', ageing, scarred, in some cases black, and even queered bodies. These descriptions inevitably show how the desired body is the 'thin', 'white' feminine body. Cohen et al. (2019) go further by stating that Body Positivity challenges the media's view of the feminine body, and promotes the acceptance of all kinds of bodies, despite the promotion of unrealistic beauty in the media. To extend this notion, Body Positivity recognizes that judgments are often made based on race, age, sexuality, and disability, further showing how intersecting identities shape the understanding of Body Positivity.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My research project stems from my interest in body politics in media, where various researchers like Sanger (2009), Bordo (1993), Wolf (2000) and Gill (2007) advocate the analysis of women's bodies in various media outlets. Bordo (1993) famously argued that mainstream mass media have consistently 'glamorised' thinness (Bordo, 1993:103). This repeated exposure has shaped health and beauty standards for women who are consistently coerced into believing that hegemonic thin, beautiful bodies are more valuable than bodies deemed 'other,' such as 'flawed' bodies. My research builds on this analysis by using a Body Positive lens to explore how different healthy bodies are reproduced in a specific South African health magazine. Johannsson (2020) notes that Body Positivity is not only a movement but can be considered a theory of practice as she mentions that:

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> 'Body Positivity is to be considered as a set of ideas, notions, and values and as a set of discursive practices performed within and through primarily digital spaces, travelling across national borders in interconnected ways' (Johannsson, 2020:112).

Body Positivity can be viewed as an extension of body image and fat-phobic theories, as it focuses on representing the perceived flawed feminine bodies in media. According to Cohen et al. (2019), Body Positivity advocates the assertion that all people deserve to have a positive body image despite their body shape, size, age, ethnicity or stature. The Body Positive movement has been responsible for the various protests against thin hegemonic culture, and the theory critiques the promotion of unrealistic standards. As a critical feminist thinker, I utilise the Body Positive lens to examine the promotion of women's bodies in *Women's Health* magazine. In particular, I explore how bodies are viewed as flawed and unhealthy, in line with the promotion of beautiful, perfect feminine bodies.

As I have mentioned in my introduction, research on 'flawed' and 'thin' bodies and representations of Body Positivity is a non-existent theme within the South African context. As a result, this suggests that I have to rely on international theorists' works of Body Positivity and critically apply them to my African study. At its core, Body Positivity is a movement that intends to help people accept their bodies exactly as they are 'flawed'. By utilising the Body Positive lens, I view my research as 'flawed' bodies versus perfected media bodies. This is considered by how the media represents these bodies as healthy and unhealthy, perfect and flawed. Matheson (2017) writes that Body Positivity is linked to diversity in media rather than the 'narrow spectrum of people who are considered attractive' (Matheson, 2017:12). Body Positivity looks at women's bodies through the lens of health, beauty, and body image.

I have noted that Body Positivity comprises of 'fat' bodies, yet it extends beyond a feminist fat-phobic lens. Similar to anti-fat research, Body Positivity looks at how media portrays

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bigger bodies in a particular way. The theory places emphasis on all perceived flawed bodies, including but not limited to scars, age, cellulite, and acne. As a critical feminist researcher, I use this specific theory to guide my research to convey how women are promoted in *Women's Health* magazine unequally through discourses derived from patriarchy and body discrimination. I am specifically interested in how feminine health is represented in advertisements, advice columns, letter pages, features, and reporting in *Women's Health* magazine. I analyse how knowledge about the constructions of healthy and unhealthy femininities is promoted and generated through positive and dynamic mantras (texts) and appealing visual images.

2.5 Reflexivity

As an African feminist thinker, I am of the view that it is a requirement to conduct a reflexive account within my theoretical framework. In 1993, Sara Harding proposed that strong objectivity is required within a feminist research project to describe how acknowledging one's perspective can enhance their research, rather than undermine it. According to Harding (1993):

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> 'Strong objectivity requires what we can think of as strong reflexivity. This is because culture-wide... beliefs function as evidence at every stage in scientific inquiry: in the selection of problems, the formation of hypotheses, the design of research (including the organization of research communities), the collection of data, the interpretation and sorting of data, decisions about when to stop research, the way results of the research are reported, and so on. The subject of knowledge – the individual and the historically located social community whose unexamined beliefs its members are likely to hold 'unknowingly' so to speak – must be considered as part of the object of knowledge from the perspective of the scientific method' (Harding, 1993:49-50)

A researcher is a subjective being as their thoughts, experiences, biases, and beliefs inevitably impact the design and implementation of their research project. Good research is where researchers acknowledge their biases. The process of self-reflection is critical as the

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researcher must be as impartial as possible throughout the research process. By being reflexive, I bring forward the reasoning and thought patterns that drive my research. As Harding (1993) writes, reflexivity involves examining and consistently evaluating the preconceptions and sentiments that the researcher brings to his or her project. Since no human is ever a completely objective observer, I must acknowledge my position within this research project.

My study is about the making of meaning. It is essential to briefly situate myself in the work context and share some of how my meaning-making has shaped this research. I am a 28-year-old, straight, coloured passing, 'fat' South African woman who identifies as plus-sized or curvy but, (yes, but!) I am also a fitness instructor. As a plus-sized South African coloured woman who has worked in the fitness industry as a dance instructor for over nine years, this research speaks to my own experiences of South African culture and how dominant heteropatriarchal meanings were reproduced in South African media. These meanings, and how they were produced in the media played an essential role in shaping my understanding of the myself. Growing up, I was socialised or conditioned into believing that I was 'too pretty' to be a big girl which created the impression that 'thinness' is the idealised version of beauty.

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These notions came with people's 'concern' when they told me I needed to lose weight, which also taught me to conflate thinness with health. The most prominent shaper of my reality was print media. I grew up in the 1990s and the 2000s, thus there was no social media at the time, and magazines appeared to offer authoritative advice on becoming a healthier woman. This is one of the reasons I chose magazines as a medium for my study. Nonetheless, I was aware that the magazines' messages around health and beauty was conflicting because they were never achievable for a young woman like myself.

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The messages were centred around 'be yourself', 'you are a powerful woman' and 'own your femininity', and yet, I never saw anyone who looked like me on the covers. Instead, there were always thin, white models. Inside such magazines, the content offered guidance around 'how to look like…', 'be as beautiful as…' and most importantly, 'lose weight fast in one minute'. These notions reinforce social expectations about what counts as healthy and beautiful, and these media messages impacted my understanding of my own body. In comparison, I aspired to meet dominant expectations around appropriate femininity; the size of my body and the colour of my skin collided with my gender to make such an achievement an impossibility.

Nevertheless, despite my acceptance of these messages and their meanings as I grew up, I also challenged them by becoming a dance instructor. According to media standards, I do not 'look the part' of a dance instructor because of my size. My physical body is pathologised as an unhealthy body that is not participating in, or expressive of, the 'correct' healthy femininity. This tension between dominant understandings of appropriately healthy femininity and my own personal lived experience underpins my interest in how popular media messages help shape the realities of how women see themselves. In addition, these messages shape how women's understandings of their bodies are produced in a magazine aimed specifically at women looking for guidance around improving their health and fitness.

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As a 'bigger' dance instructor in the fitness industry, there lies a premise in how I do things. As a 'fat' and 'flawed' body, I am expected (and expect myself) to work harder to prove that I am fit and healthy because it is much easier for my 'thinner' counterparts to see themselves (and be seen) as healthy women. It is since these understandings of appropriate femininity are so dominant that I am exploring how they are produced in *Women's Health.* As a woman defined as 'bigger', 'curvier' and 'plus-sized', my performance in health and fitness did not

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fit the norm of health and feminine beauty. Therefore, my research has developed out of my discomfort with the notion that women need to be 'slim', 'slender', and 'thin' to be perceived as ideally fit, healthy and beautiful. The next section focuses on the data I used to conduct my study.

2.6 Research Data

This section focuses on how I approached my study and the data within *Women's Health* to obtain the answers to my research question. In particular, I was interested in how healthy and unhealthy femininities are represented in the advertisements, advice columns, letter pages, features, and reporting in *Women's Health* magazine. I analysed how the constructions of healthy and unhealthy femininities are promoted and generated through positive and dynamic mantras (texts) and appealing visual images.

2.6.1 Data: Women's Health Magazine South Africa

Many researchers within the South African context have conducted extensive research on magazines that look at beauty and lifestyle, and have conceptualised their arguments through race and racism. My study aims to add to the existing South African feminist literature by looking at the representations of women's bodies through discourses of health and fitness. There is an array of South African health and lifestyle magazines that I could have explored for my research. However, I have chosen *Women's Health* magazine, South Africa. With this study, I contrasted and compared the messaging that exists within selected issues from 2013 until 2018. I intend to explore Body Positivity, femininities and sexuality through messaging of health and fitness. To accomplish this, I unpacked the gendered health, sexuality and beauty messaging present in the magazine. Thus, my research is primarily geared toward an exploration of the messages present in the magazine's cover pages, articles, weight loss segments and advice columns to answer my research question.

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According to Media24 (2012), *Women's Health* is the sister magazine of the popular men's magazine *Men's Health*, and *Women's Health* was first launched in the United States of America (USA) in 2005, preceding its South African launch in 2009. Research shows that *Women's Health* magazine is the most popular in South Africa. For example, in 2017, on their website, *Women's Health* South Africa defined itself as:

> '*Women's Health* is a content brand that has successfully transitioned from just a print magazine to a multi-platform, experiential source of trusted information for South African women. From thriving social media communities to a comprehensive website, interactive events and glossy print products, the brand inspires its audience to make instant, positive changes in their lives and gives them the tools they need to do so. *Women's Health* reaches a loyal audience of women who are driven to live their best lives by looking good, exercising regularly, eating well and taking charge of their health and careers. *Women's Health* readers don't just read, they show up' (Women's Health Magazine, 2017).

According to its website in 2017, *Women's Health* magazine is the top health magazine in South Africa. The magazine has over 15 million readership and 1.5 copies circulated per edition. These stats imply that *Women's Health* magazine is taken seriously by a large number of South Africans. According to the global editors of *Women's Health*, the magazine offers accessible advice on optimal health written by health professionals. As I demonstrate in the Literature Review Chapter, many researchers within the South African context have conducted extensive research on magazines that look at beauty and lifestyle and have conceptualised their arguments through race and racism. My study adds to the existing South African feminist literature by looking at the representations of women's bodies through discourses on health, fitness and Body Positivity. My research considers whether the patriarchal messages noted by other authors of other media are represented in *Women's Health*. In exploring the magazine for five years, I demonstrate how the magazine both conceptualises and relates to the Body Positive movement within its contents and on its cover pages. There are eleven editions published per year, which means that I analysed 55

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magazines for my study. I read and reread all of the magazines for my study, but used a sample size of the 55 magazines. While all 55 editions were helpful in identifying repetitive themes and patterns, I coded some of the editions in my analysis to avoid over saturation within my arguments.

As I read and reread the selected editions of *Women's Health*, I drew on existing research and look for patterns and silences in representations of femininities, health, and sexuality. Influenced by the work of earlier researchers such as Bordo (1993), Wolf (2000) as well as Sanger (2007) and (2009), I mainly focused on narratives that aim to educate women by way of problematizing their bodies. I employed an African Body Positive approach to make sense of the visual and written texts. As a profit-making tool, the magazine caters to the perceived need that South African women have to be ideally healthy. *Women's Health* was, therefore, a suitable text in keeping with the aims of my study. My analysis focuses on the discourses and visuals utilized by the magazine, and the study approaches the data via qualitative thematic analysis.

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2.6.2 Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis as it emphasizes analysing and interpreting themes within qualitative data. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020):

> 'A thematic analysis is a powerful yet flexible method for analysing qualitative data that can be used within a variety of paradigmatic or epistemological orientations. Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of analysis for seeking to understand experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set' (Kiger &Varpio, 2020:1).

This analysis is the most appropriate for my study as I identify patterns in *Women's Health* magazine. I construct how messages are transmitted and produced through repetition. In addition, this analysis is informed by discourse analysis. Wood and Kroger (2000) showed

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that discourses are socially constructed, which suggests that discourses generate particular meanings. *Women's Health* magazine produces meanings through texts and visuals. In order to examine the meanings that are embedded in *Women's Health*, I explore the texts and images that present the dominant themes that emerge around femininities, health, and sexuality.

To conclude this chapter, I show where my thinking derives from and how I have used the theorising to analyse representations of healthy and unhealthy femininities in *Women's Health* magazine. What follows in the next Chapter is how I have engaged with the research reflecting on representations of women's bodies in magazines.

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CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

> 'Women's magazines tell the female readers what an ideal body should be [and] women come to understand that there is always a solution for them to achieve the ideal body' (Xiaowei, 2013:186).

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consider the work of researchers who have explored representations of femininities. I contextualise and locate my research thesis within the broader academic terrain. With this review, I draw on and respond to the variety of international and national research that explores the various messages portrayed in the media. Before reviewing the relevant studies about women's bodies in magazines, I outline the critical insight offered by Laura Mulvey's (1975) discussion of the male gaze, as she is a pointer to the sexualised embodiment of women's bodies in media.

I have categorised the discussion that follows into three themes: first, I write about research focusing on a general overview of women's bodies in beauty, lifestyle, fashion, and fitness magazines. I explore the research on women's magazines from both a global and local context. I specifically review how these researchers critically examine women's bodies regarding beauty, health, and fitness. Secondly, I evaluate work by researchers who have written on Body Positivity and 'flawed' bodies in women's magazines. Lastly, I consider work by researchers who have explored the conceptualisations of lifestyle and health magazines aimed at fat bodies.

3.2 Women's Bodies in media: The Male Gaze

Before exploring the representations of women's bodies in magazines, it is crucial to consider the work of Laura Mulvey, who has contextualised how women's bodies are advertised

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through and for the male gaze. Mulvey's (1975) analysis of 'the male gaze' explains how representations of women in film media are produced from the perspective of the heterosexual man. In addition, she critiques how film media draws on dominant discourses to reproduce and reinforce patriarchal ideas of how women are the object of male desire. Mulvey conceptualises that:

> 'An idea of a woman stands as a lynchpin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, she desires to make good the lack that the phallus signifies' (Mulvey, 1975:8).

What Mulvey (1975) means with this claim is that the idea of 'the male gaze' suggests that female viewers also see themselves through the eyes of the heterosexual male. She suggests that women end up evaluating themselves according to the desires of heterosexual men. An important notion I considered when analysing the contents of *Women's Health* magazine. Mulvey (1975) goes further with her argument by stating that:

> 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between the active male gaze and the passive female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to be looked at' (Mulvey, 1975:11).

Mulvey's (1975) notion of 'the male gaze' remains relevant in contemporary media whereby the heterosexual male gaze continues to dominate the mass media. Thus, Mulvey's (1975) idea of the 'male gaze' has shaped the way I view representations of femininities in the magazines that focus on this study. The next section of this review will focus on researchers delving into how women's bodies are represented in women's magazines.

3.3 Review Of Global And Local Studies On Women's Bodies In Magazines

This section of the literature review focuses on significant research on the representations of women's bodies in the magazine with reference to beauty, health, and fitness. In this section

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of the chapter, I review researchers like Ferguson (1981), Bordo (1993), Wolf (2000), Sanger (2009) and Masina (2010).

3.3.1 Research on the representations of feminine beauty in women's magazines

Marjorie Ferguson (1981) is one of the most prominent British researchers to study magazines' impact on shaping femininities. In her study, *The Cover Photographs of Women's Magazines* (1981), she argues that definitions of desirable femininities are understood by and commercially produced for the female audience. Her study reflects that the purpose of the advertised photographs in magazines is curated to promote certain femininities through visual imagery and ideology. In a later book called *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity,* Ferguson (1985) adds that women's magazines' messages in advice columns are underhandedly prescriptive and essentialist in promoting dominant advice on femininities. She specifically points out that women are heterosexualised and portrayed as the submissive gender. It is important to note that Ferguson's (1985) work adds to Mulvey's (1975) work in that Ferguson (1985) focuses on females being portrayed as the submissive gender. However, unlike Mulvey's (1975) work focusing on film media, Ferguson writes about representations of femininities in women's magazines. Both Ferguson's articles on magazines has shaped my thinking regarding my analysis of *Women's Health* for Chapter Three.

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In supplementing the work of Ferguson, Bordo (1993) draws attention to how American media represents idealised healthy femininities. According to Bordo (1993), the American print media represents a healthy woman who is ideally slim because she practices habits of self-restraint and self-awareness. She argues that these ideas are present in popular culture and trendy American women's magazines, whereby women are instructed to eat less and exercise more to incorporate self-restraint into their lives. In Bordo's (1993) analysis, she

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writes that lifestyle and wellness magazines encourage women to believe that there is some deficiency in their lives and that this can only be fixed if they are thin. Another important author whose research coincides with Bordo's (1993) is Naomi Wolf (2000).

In Wolf's (2000) mainstream analysis of American media, she famously argues that women's magazines advertise themselves as the invisible mentor that guides a woman to her full potential of being an idealised (thin) feminine woman. Wolf (2000) refers to this as *'The Beauty Myth'.* She emphasizes that the relationship a woman has with a magazine is like that of a Fairy Godmother, as the magazine presents seemingly achievable steps to achieve the fantasy of appropriate femininity. Wolf (2000) shows that women care about the messages embedded in the media, as the messages seem authentically written by women, for women. Ferguson's (1981), Bordo's (1993) and Wolf's (2000) research show how dominant messages in the media instruct women to believe that there is something 'wrong' with them. The magazine then portrays itself as the bigger sister or the Fairy God Mother that provides the steps women need to undertake to transform themselves. Bordo's (1993) and Wolf's (2000) work focuses on how women's magazines represent beautiful, thin, and white bodies as ideal. While Bordo (1993) wrote extensively on 'weight' as an issue for women and how weight is defined through media, she did not closely examine how 'fat bodies' were pathologised through these notions. Within the Analysis Chapters of this thesis, there is a focus on Bordo's (1993) and Wolf's (2000) theorising of the thin white feminine body. I critically think about how feminine bodies are represented in current editions of *Women's Health* magazine in Chapters Four and Five of this research thesis.

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In recognizing that there has been a shift in the context of global women's magazines, Gill (2009) identifies that there has been a notable change since the 1990s, which includes the 'dramatic sexualisation of the feminine body' (Gill, 2009:187). Gill analysed the United

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Kingdom (UK) version of *Glamour* in her study and showed how British women's bodies are surveyed through sex, intimacy, and relationships. Gill (2009) puts forward the idea that although women have greater freedom to pursue a career, being sexually attractive is deeply embedded in women's magazines. These magazines, according to Gill (2009), show that women should be encouraged to perform acts of self-surveillance that are structured around the 'make-over paradigm' (Gill, 2009:184). In highlighting how *Glamour* magazines encourage women to police their bodies constantly, Gill (2009) show that the magazine teaches its readers to be 'heterosexually attractive' to have a healthy relationship with themselves and their partners. This focus on self-surveillance is helpful for my exploration of Women's Health magazine. For this reason, I demonstrate how women are taught to practice acts of 'surveillance' with their bodies like dieting and exercising by the magazine.

Various South African studies have focused on magazine representations of race, gender, and sexuality. For instance, Sanger's (2007) doctoral study offers some insight into representations of gender and race. Her research analyses representations of raced masculine and feminine bodies in South African magazines within the post-apartheid context. In her exploration, she examines English-medium magazines including *Femina, Fair Lady, True Love, Men's Health, FHM,* and *Blink* to explore the intersectional representations of gender, sexuality, and race. Sanger (2007) draws on Stuart Hall's (1992) concept of media as both the definer and the producer of realities to contextualise how gender, race, and media intersect. Sanger (2007) thus showed how whiteness is marked as ideal in magazines. Another key scholar is Masina (2010), who showed how South African women's magazines — *Destiny* and *True Love* — had been teaching black women that the media could only perceive them as appropriately feminine if they erased their bodily 'imperfections'. Masina's (2010) study aimed to uncover how the representations of black women in *Destiny* and *True Love* dictated normative behaviours. Masina (2010) showed this by analysing advertisements

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to draw attention to the rewards given to women who can control their bodies through certain products. More importantly, in doing so, the magazines guided women on how to erase the body's 'imperfections' like skin colour, stretch marks, body fat and cellulite. Similar to Gill's (2009) work, Masina (2010) found that complete control was an important theme within magazines. In addition, Masina (2010) wrote that the magazines advocated that a woman with no control is imperfect and not disciplined. The work of these scholars is vital for my analysis of similar processes of representation in *Women's Health.* The following section focuses on exploring health from a global and local context and how the research on health and fitness has been explored in women's magazines.

3.3.2 Research on the representations of women's bodies in health and fitness magazines

A critical body of work is research exploring how 'health' and 'healthy bodies' are represented in women's magazines. This is important to my study since this thesis focuses on the representations of fit and healthy femininities. My thesis aims to contribute to global and South African media representations of healthy bodies. It is essential to review the international studies that have focused on this topic.

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While dated, McCracken's (1993) work is an important contribution to the field as she found that American media reproduced dominant perceptions and definitions of health and fitness. McCracken's (1993) analysis was centred around *SHAPE* magazine in the United States of America (USA). She found that the magazine's content promoted ideal bodies for women that can be achieved through exercise and 'healthy' eating patterns. McCracken (1993) notes that in the early 1990s when her research was conducted, *SHAPE* magazine represented the thin body as the healthiest body a woman can have. In correspondence with McCracken's (1993) study, a decade later, Seale (2003) conducted another American study that explored an

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understanding of health and the media. She uses women's fitness and lifestyle magazines such as *SHAPE* as a case study and shows how health messages are communicated to women through depictions of unattainable imagery.

In her analysis, Seale (2003) found that mass media depictions were significant in defining health. Yet contrastive, Seale (2003) argued that the media's ideas of beauty are derived from 'Patriarchal Truths' (Seale, 2003:656). In other words, what Seale (2003) means is that the dominant narrative about what a healthy body looks like is shaped by magazines according to dominant beauty standards within the patriarchal society at the time. Seale (2003) found that the thin body is still an embodiment of ideal health, even though body image has evolved since the 1990s. A crucial statement to consider, particularly for my study, is what magazines promote at a particular time and what makes this particular body popular enough for people to purchase the magazine. This is a notion that I consider in Chapter Four of this thesis.

In a corresponding study, almost a decade later, Zodsma (2012) analysed the American version of *SHAPE* magazine between 2003-2008, which supplemented McCracken's (1993) and Seale's (2003) earlier studies. Zodsma (2012) showed how *SHAPE* magazine consistently used similar (thin) unrealistic images to promote unrealistic ideals. Zodsma (2012) wrote that these ideals were advertised through advice columns and articles which teach women that health is defined through specific patriarchal beauty standards. These global studies reinforce one another by confirming how 'healthy' women's bodies in magazines are represented in particular ways.

3.3.3 Research on *Women's Health* magazine

The research discussed above considered representations of beauty and health globally, but my study looks at a particular health magazine: *Women's Health.* While the studies of women's magazines discussed above have considered representations of beauty and health,

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there is very little research on *Women's Health* magazines (both locally and globally). A British research study by Lucy-Alexandra Chaplin (2018) is an important exception in that she specifically explored the representations of women's bodies in the United Kingdom (UK) editions of *Women's Health* magazine.

In 2018, Chaplin (2018) wrote her Master of Arts thesis on the representation of women's bodies in *Women's Health* UK. Her research focused on how the magazine's cover girl was represented as the embodiment of health and fitness. However, Chaplin's (2018) method differs from mine in that she examined how UK readers of *Women's Health* perceive the cover girl. My study does not aim to explore how readers make sense of *Women's Health* in South Africa. The first part of Chaplin's (2018) analysis focused on how *Women's Health* UK represents its cover girl in connection with health, fitness, beauty, and sexuality. She found that an overwhelming number of critical terms were repeated, such as 'hot', 'sexy', 'trimmed' 'toned', that encouraged women to improve their physical appearance for supposedly health-related reasons. Chaplin (2018) further shows how the magazine used the terms 'hot' and 'sexy' to encourage women to become heterosexually attractive rather than improving their health. In her analysis of the front covers of *Women's Health,* Chaplin (2018) argued that this magazine is encouraging female readers to 'seek… the approval of the implicit man' (Chaplin, 2018:58) rather than inspiring women and girls to pursue a healthier lifestyle. Chaplin (2018) showed this by presenting how the monthly cover models were photographed in provocative positions involving 'self-touching' and minimal amounts of clothing. Chaplin (2018) also argues that this positioning of the female body explicitly invited the male gaze rather than appealing to the intended readership.

The second part of Chaplin's (2018) analysis drew on a focus group of women in the UK, ranging from 18-40 years of age. She specifically asked them how they felt about the cover

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models of *Women's Health* magazine. Chaplin (2018) found that the word 'perfect' was the most recurring description the focus group women used to describe the cover model. Chaplin (2018) also found that all focus groups recognised the editing involved in photographing the cover girls for *Women's Health.* Hence, while women read magazines, they recognise that there is editing and airbrushing in advertising idealised femininities. Chaplin's (2018) work thus recognises that readers know how magazines edit their images to create idealised female body representations. Chaplin (2018) also argues that it is essential to note that:

> '*Women's Health* is a health and fitness magazine, which therefore demonstrates how the idealised female body has transcended from one genre of women's magazine into another. Standardized beauty ideals remain fixed regardless of the genre of the magazine, indicating that *Women's Health* represents the female body in a way which promotes a certain body type rather than good health.' (Chaplin, 2018:50)

Chaplin's work (2018) points to essential research areas regarding my approach to the South African version of *Women's Health* magazine. For example, Chaplin's (2018) research shows how a healthy lifestyle is represented as one where women are desired by men. Chaplin (2018) also shows how people are not easily persuaded by magazines, that readers make meaning through their paradigms. This claim is important in how I consider my analysis of *Women's Health.* To simplify this claim, different magazines represent women in similar ways precisely because they draw on discourses that are bigger than the magazines, discourses that are circulating widely in society.

3.3.4 Research That Explores Body Positivity and Body Image In Magazines

Body Positivity, as I have discussed earlier, is the acceptance of one's body for everything that it is, flaws and all. The discussion below offers an overview of research exploring how magazines have employed the concept in their contents. An earlier study by Winship (1986) shows how a hierarchy of physical attributes prevails despite the diversification of women's magazines. Over three decades later, Winship's (1986) hierarchy remains relevant to the

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discussion of how female embodiment is represented in women's magazines, both locally and globally. It should be noted that there is a lack of Body Positivity research in South African studies, and as such, I rely on international sources for this section. Researchers like LeBesco (2004), Murray (2008), Murphy (2013), and Johannsson (2020) have explored Body Positivity in women's magazines extensively.

Research by Murphy (2013) and Johannsson (2020) on Body Positivity are both useful for my study. Johannsson (2020) claims that the goal of the Body Positivity movement is to showcase a diverse range of women in all forms of media, particularly magazines. This has the intention to encourage the acceptance of all body types, skin colours and body flaws, especially marginalised and 'flawed' bodies that are often invisible in current society. Body Positivity, at least in theory, includes eliminating unrealistic norms surrounding the female body and deeming them as 'flawed'. Similarly, Murphy (2013) conducted a study on the 'love your body' messages in popular Australian beauty magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo* and *Dolly.* In her thesis, Murphy (2013) makes an interesting claim that:

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> 'The idea of promoting positive messages about women's bodies is in itself not new. Alongside their critiques of difficult mainstream media messages about women's bodies, feminists have also been major proponents of alternative ways of thinking about women's bodies. (Murphy, 2013:24)

Based on much of the work cited earlier, Murphy (2013) argues that while magazines promote 'love yourself', they are synonymously ridiculing bigger and othered bodies. Murphy (2013) shows that while women with bigger and scarred bodies are defined in these magazines as 'real girl bodies' (Murphy, 2013:217), the magazines' incarnation of the 'real' girl also works to sustain cultural ideas about the immorality of obesity. For example, Murphy (2013) found that beauty magazines promote language that supposedly aims to empower women of all shapes and sizes. However, as referenced by Murphy (2013), the magazines still actively promote an ideal beautiful figure which teaches women that they

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should lose fat and drop kilos. Murphy (2013) expands by arguing that the term ‘real’ is significant, where magazines repeatedly insist that the ‘real’ bodies and ‘real’ selves of overweight people can be found beneath the folds of flesh and fat. In other words, according to Murphy (2013), having flesh or fat is not natural according to the discourses in magazines. Her research concludes that ‘fat’, ‘overweight’ and ‘obese’ bodies are still understood or represented as not quite ‘real’ but awaiting transformation. Murphy’s work on magazines and Body Positivity have been important in shaping my thinking regarding how to look at the ‘positive’ messages that *Women's Health* promotes regarding weight loss and self-acceptance.

In 2014, Nobles reviewed advertisements in popular American magazines such as *Life* and *Cosmopolitan* from 1952 to 1995 to focus on the changing appearance of ‘ideal bodies’ over time. This research showed that throughout 43 years, the depictions of women in advertisements found in *Life* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines promoted ‘thinness’ as the embodiment of health. However, simultaneously, these magazines had mantras of ‘love yourself’ as you are within their contents. Nobles (2014) writes that what counts as beautiful changes over time, giving the example that Marilyn Monroe was important in the 1950s for paving the way for ‘bigger’ women to be perceived as beautiful – this has changed how magazines aimed to promote beauty. Nevertheless, Nobles (2014) showed that these magazines still promoted ‘thin’ and ‘smaller’ bodies as embodiments of perfect beauty and health while promoting discourses of ‘accept yourself as you are’. Nobles’ (2014) study is critical because she argued that while magazines say they aim to promote ‘Body Positivity’, they still promote ‘slim’ and ‘slender’ bodies as the ideal. This is an important study for my approach to *Women's Health* and its contents concerning Body Positivity.

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To further reinforce and develop Johannsson's (2020), Murphy's (2013) and Noble's (2014) work on Body Positivity, Matheson (2017) writes that Body Positivity advocates for more diversity in media rather than the 'narrow spectrum of people who are considered attractive' (Matheson, 2017:12). What Matheson means here is that Body Positivity as a concept advocates for more than just the 'fat' body. It advocates for all 'flawed' bodies, which shows that it goes further than the fat feminist lens. In 2017, Matheson conducted an American study on body image and Body Positivity through 'bigger' and plus-sized models in magazines such as *DARE* and *Vogue* from 2013 to 2016. She wrote that in the context of *Vogue*, the women on the magazine's cover barely exhibited differences in appearance. Yet, the magazine pitched a diversity campaign. In her research, she analysed all the covers and only found one example of a cover 'bigger' model, Ashley Graham (Size 16). Matheson (2017) then concludes that size diversity appears as non-existent in many women's magazines and the goal to achieve a 'perfect body' still underlines much of the article and advertisement content. This research coincides with Noble's (2014) attempt to investigate which magazines are using size diversity as an attempt to find if the magazines are practicing what they preach. While Body Positivity studies have not been explored in the South African context, the studies reviewed on Body Positivity have impacted how I approach *Women's Health* in subtly body shaming through discourses of health, beauty, and fitness.

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A critical author, Samantha Murray (2008), has consistently written about media representation of the fat female body and how these representations unequivocally evoke notions of fatphobia. In her popular publication *The Fat Female Body*, Murray (2008) challenges contemporary cultural and anti-fat discourses through the medicalisation of obesity. Murray (2008) advocates that there is a neoliberal system that requires women to maintain their 'health' through media channels that encourage them to discipline their bodies through self-governing behaviours. Murray's (2008) work contributes to the field of fat

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studies but remains important as it acknowledges how fat feminine bodies are represented in magazines, a notion I explore in analysis Chapter Three.

My literature review has revealed that there is a consistent body type that is depicted as healthy and beautiful in women's magazines. In comparison, many studies explored femininities, beauty and sexuality in magazines, but no South African studies considered Body Positivity within the context of health and fitness in women's magazines. The 'flawed' body is usually perceived as undesirable within healthy femininities because magazines aim to advertise what is considered beautiful in society. Sanger's (2009) research reflects how I approach my thesis in terms of looking at markers that are present in South African magazines. While Sanger's (2009) research is geared more toward racialised femininities, her ability to examine the inconsistencies in South African magazines is useful. Additionally, international research suggested that representations of femininities in women's magazines showed that women are placed in hierarchies regarding health and beauty. Various global research focuses on healthy femininities, but they do not focus on Body Positivity as a theory and only examine beauty standards.

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Chaplin's (2018) research matters most to my study as she examines the same magazine, but her study is focused on *Women's Health* in the UK. Chaplin (2018) explores how the cover girl is presented — the main aim of my research for Chapters Three and Four. Although widespread global research has focused on healthy and fit feminine bodies in magazines, there is a lacuna of research on representations of healthy women's bodies in South African media. In particular, there is a lack of South African research exploring the representations of flawed bodies in women's magazines. Thus, my intention in this study is to add to the emerging concept of South African Body Positive femininities. The first Analysis Chapter focuses on how *Women's Health* magazine represents its cover girl to promote notions of

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healthy femininities. The research aims to develop the research field relating to femininities, health, and Body Positivity from a South African perspective.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PERFECT, IDEALISED HEALTHY BODIES

4.1 Introduction

Women's Health magazine promotes idealised healthy femininities through its cover girl. In this Chapter, I focus on how the ideal 'healthy' woman is represented on the covers of *Women's Health* magazine between 2013 and 2018. Two themes were explored in this Chapter, the first theme is centred around the celebrity model chosen for the cover of the magazine and how the magazine represents her as the 'ideal' of perfected health. I explored this by scrutinizing the magazine's depiction of the cover girl on the front page. I demonstrated how *Women's Health* represents its cover girl(s) through patriarchal representations of feminine health, similar to how Mulvey (1975) utilised the notion of the male gaze.

The second theme explored in this Chapter focuses on how the magazine educates its readers on how they can be 'perfectly' healthy like the cover model. In exploring these ideas, I drew on the feature articles as well as the covers of the magazine. This Chapter provides context to how the magazine promotes healthy and fit feminine bodies, and I draw on Chaplin's (2018) work to support this analysis. I foreground three defining ways in which the cover model is presented. The three defining ways include i) heterosexually attractive, ii) successful and iii) ageless or youthful.

4.2 Contextualising the Celebrity Cover Model

The cover girl is the first thing one sees when looking at the magazine. A typical *Women's Health* cover contains a number of taglines and features a cover model who exemplifies contemporary understandings of the appropriately healthy feminine and beautiful body. By

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definition the magazine taps into existing understandings of what is considered as appropriately fit and healthy.

Figure 4.1: Women's Health, July 2013; Figure 4.2: Women's Health, November 2015; Figure 4.3: Women's Health, June 2018

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As shown above, the women in figures 4.1-4.3 show contemporary understandings of healthy and fit bodies as portrayed by *Women's Health.* The three figures highlight the primary intention of the magazine, as how the women are posed in a way that reflects that they are confident with their 'healthy' bodies. Figure 4.1 shows that the cover model portrays self-love because she is hugging herself. Her posture is that of a confident woman as she stands tall and exudes solid feminine energy. Figure 4.2 shows the cover model smiling, with her hands on her hips. This can show that her pose promotes a powerful, happy woman. Figure 4.3 shows a cover model with a more robust and powerful feminine stance. Her image portrays power as she is standing with boxing gloves: which represents she is a fighter. This also promotes a fit and healthy body as the boxing gloves show she engages in supposedly unfeminine physical activities like boxing.

A key theme of my analysis of the magazines was how the images of women on the cover followed a particular trend, with slim, slender, lean bodies foregrounded consistently. The most common element on the covers is that the selected models portray characteristics of the

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Western convention of the slim, toned, white, or fair-skinned woman. The three figures above (4.1-4.3) exemplify how the magazine represents its cover girl. The foremost and prominent characteristic among all the women is that they are 'slim', 'slender', and 'lean' – which the magazine associates with the ideal healthy body.

Figure 4.4: Women's Health, March 2013 **Figure 4.5: Women's Health, September 2015**

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Figure 4.4's model portrayed a woman confident in her skin as she stood with her hips to one side and her hands lifting her t-shirt to demonstrate that she had a tiny waist. This feature corresponds with *Women's Health's* idea of feminine health and beauty. In like manner, the model in figure 4.5 is posed as a powerful, self-assured woman as she stands tall wearing her waist open, showcasing her well-defined abdominal muscles. Abdominal muscles were shown to be a physical attribute of a healthy woman; which *Women's Health* consistently promotes on its cover pages. In essence, figure 4.5's cover girl radiates happiness as she has a smile on her face, which promotes the 'happy and healthy' motif. In exemplifying models displaying stereotypical femininities, the magazine simultaneously devalues different kinds of femininities. This corresponds with Sanger's (2007) argument of *Fair Lady* that mentions

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white femininities being the idealised version of beauty in South African women's magazines. Thus, the choices around whom to put on the cover and how to present those selected for the cover show how the magazine repeatedly emphasizes white or lighter-skinned, slender femininities as more desirable. The idea of the cover girl also coincides with Chaplin's (2018) notion of how the magazine chooses specific models to promote certain ideals of healthy femininities. The next part of this analysis will focus on how the magazine promotes desirability through health concerning feminine sexuality. I consider ways in which the male gaze, as identified by Mulvey (1975), is privileged in a magazine aimed at women readers. I show how the images of women that appear on the covers are sexualised in general and heterosexualised in particular.

4.3 Sexuality, Motherhood and the Cover Girl

Chaplin's (2018) work showed how the women on the cover of the UK version of *Women's Health* magazine were posed to attract the 'invisible' male eye — rather than to show healthy femininities. The recurring message from *Women's Health* SA magazine covers, just like those considered by Chaplin (2018), is that one must be semi-dressed to advocate for sexiness and health. As I show below, the magazine consistently represents the models proudly parading half-naked to exhibit ideal torsos, slim legs, and strong glutes. The magazine highlights specific body parts of the cover girls — such as the abdominal muscles, legs, arms, and buttocks — and then creates inspirational narratives that offer the female readership the possibility of developing a similar look. This look demonstrates how heterosexual attractiveness is conflated with health.

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Figure 4.6: Women's Health, December 2013

> 'Elsa, 37, is admittedly a fitness junkie, and her fabulous rear view is a welcome side effect' (Women's Health, December 2013:60).

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To justify my claim, the *Women's Health,* December 2013 edition featured *Fast and Furious* actress Elsa Pataky, who posed in a tiny black tank that showcased her waist and tiny, red bottoms that accentuated her 'favourite body part' (p1): her glutes. The magazine chooses to accentuate the actress's buttocks by having her pose with her buttocks towards the viewer in tiny, red panties. Although the model's buttocks represent that she exercises regularly, her posture is sexualised to entice the reader. For instance, the arrow pointed toward Pataky's glutes is accompanied by cover tags like 'Great Butt' (p.1) in large, bold caps. A sentence goes, 'Shape your booty in just five minutes' (p.1). Additionally, inside the magazine in which Pataky is featured, the article revolves around how the actress keeps fit and has an 'enviable bum' (p59). After that, the line 'the *Fast and Furious* star shares her workout' (p61) functions to persuade readers that 1) there is a problem with their current glutes and that 2)

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there is hope for them to improve, as a celebrity is sharing her workout. This shows women how they can be viewed as heterosexually attractive to the male gaze.

In addition to Pataky's sexualised glutes, the cover of November 2016 displayed the 'sexy' (p1) Australian Instagram star, Tash Oakley (Women's Health, November 2016). On the magazine cover, Oakley is wearing a golden and black bikini, with an arrow pointing to her buttocks and the tagline, 'how the influencer got her booty'. *Women's Health* again represents a 'sexy booty' as the embodiment of feminine health. The images reveal that *Women's Health* uses 'sexy' or 'attractive' femininities as representations of health. To promote its notion of health, the magazine uses feminine parts to conflate feminine health and heterosexuality. Thus, the stereotyping and pathologising of (hetero)sexuality effectively work to advance heteronormative femininities within the magazine. A notion that coincides with both Mulvey (1975) and Ferguson's (1983) work on how women are represented to entice the male gaze.

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The heterosexualisation of the female body is a recurrent theme throughout the magazine covers. The magazine attempts to show that there is a way for women who are not generally considered attractive can be seen as attractive to the male gaze. For example, women whose bodies are no longer stereotypically desirable, such as women who are mothers. Similar to Wolf's (2000) argument on women's magazines acting as the 'Fairy God Mother' to its readers, *Women's Health* magazine promotes itself as the reader's assistant to educate mothers on how their post-partum bodies can still be perceived as 'sexy'. For instance, in May 2013, actress Kate Winslet posed for the cover of *Women's Health,* and the magazine foregrounded how the actress had managed to juggle a professional career, being a single mother and still maintaining control over her 'sexy body' (p99). The magazine goes on to describe Winslet as an 'iconic' mother because:

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> 'She is that rare thing in Hollywood — a serious, multi-award-winning actress who regularly tops "The Most Glamourous" lists. This is why Kate Winslet has managed to carve out a career that straddles both enormous mainstream Hollywood roles… And she's done this while raising children (Women's Health, May 2013:100).

While the magazine describes Winslet as a 'sexy' busy career woman, it also allows the magazine to reiterate how the actress remains sexy while being a mother. In her feature, Winslet claims that her 'children are [her] life… so [she] only works when [her] children are [home for the holidays]' (p101). The subtext shows that she is portrayed as a 'proper' woman as she puts her children first, a way in which successful men rarely get portrayed. The magazine connects Winslet's enormous Hollywood roles' with her ability to be 'sexy' and a mother and describes this as her being the ideal type of mother. The connection the magazine makes between Winslet's 'sexy' body and being a mother shows that there is no reason why the average reader cannot be a sexy mother. The magazine is, therefore, actively trying to educate its readers that being sexy is having a body that is a certain shape and size, and being a mother is easy to maintain for even the busiest of women. A similar pattern transpired in May 2015, when Canadian-American actress Colbie Smulders posed topless for the cover issue. The actress was captured wearing a pair of denim shorts with no bra, and she is posed to the side with her hands over her breasts to showcase her 'small waist'.

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Figure 4.7: Women's Health, May 2015 **Figure 4.8: Women's Health, May 2015**

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The magazine interviews Smulders and discusses how 'unsexy' motherhood can be. However, the magazine uses her body to contradict the idea that a body that has given birth can no longer meet the criteria for sexiness. In other words, the magazine uses Smulders as an example of 'motherly' sexiness by defining her in a particular way:

> 'Bombshell number one: Colbie was pregnant with her second child while filming two movies, and she gave birth earlier this year… Bombshell number two: She was shot by us topless and rocked it for her cover fewer than two months after popping out a kid' (Women's Health, May 2015:35).

These characteristics are used to describe the 'sexiness' of the celebrity through discourses of motherhood. The magazine represents the weight gain associated with motherhood and pregnancy as undesirable. For instance, Smulders was pregnant during filming, but the fact that she did not look pregnant was a wow factor for the magazine. This shows that if Smulders can look 'sexy' while pregnant, she is an ideal feminine healthy mother-to-be. *Women's Health* uses the actress's feature to portray how speedily mothers should shape up after pregnancy since she was able to pose topless soon after pregnancy. For example,

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Smulders is an ideal embodiment of motherhood by the magazine because her body 'bounced back' immediately after giving birth. The magazine, therefore, displays Smulders as a 'thin' and 'sexy' mother who is 'admired' for posing topless for a health magazine.

The data shows that *Women's Health* magazine creates the impression that motherhood is no excuse for having a body that is not perfect/heterosexually attractive. Women cannot use motherhood as an excuse to display feminine bodies that are not appealing to the male gaze. To that end, the magazine decisively dismisses anything to do with the ordinary activities of motherhood like childbirth, sleepless nights, and child raising – except for attracting the male gaze. In addition, these notions are accompanied by 'positive phrases' like 'hot shot' (p34), 'brave' (p35), and 'powerful' (p35) to show that the magazine advocates for positivity and women's empowerment. The magazine teaches its readers how to be the 'best' mothers by advertising celebrities who are 'sexy' mothers as the embodiment of good health. The data also shows how the magazine still utilise fitness and beauty through the characterisation of motherhood. In other words, celebrity women have busy, hectic lives professionally and personally, yet they stay in shape, revealing a subtext that women have no excuses for having imperfect lumpy bodies. The next part of this discussion will focus on youthfulness and how the magazine advertises being youthful as an idealised part of feminine health.

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4.4 The Youthful, Healthy, Older Cover Girl

Another important theme emerging from my analysis is how the magazine represents older women who embody youthfulness. Sanger (2009) wrote that youthfulness was an important component of beauty – especially for white women in South African women's magazines. Sanger (2009) has shown that age and, more specifically, youthfulness is represented by magazines to promote health and beauty. I show how *Women's Health* uses age and the absence of the appearance of ageing to promote notions of feminine health.

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In April 2017, *Women's Health* featured American Actress Gabrielle Union, who spoke about her 'fear' of ageing. The magazine presents Union as being insecure about ageing when she mentions 'I dye my hair and people say, "you look young", but my grey hairs are saying, "she is old as F*CK"'(p38). Union's statement adds to the magazine's notion of how 'scary' ageing can be and that the solution is to do as much as possible to remain 'youthful'. As I discuss below, American fitness trainer Jillian Michaels (43); movie stars Gabrielle Union (45) and Gwyneth Paltrow (45); as well as South African personality, Unathi (40) were presented as examples of older women by the magazine.

Figure 4.9: Women's Health, October 2016 **Figure 4.10: Women's Health, April 2017**

The magazine aims at Body Positivity by showing how celebrities are confident about ageing. For instance, in May 2015, *Women's Health* magazine featured 42-year-old actress Gwyneth Paltrow on staying young as a 42-year-old woman. According to the magazine, Paltrow is admired for her 'abs and lean body' (p34) and how she maintains her enviable physique 'despite' being 42 years of age.

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> 'Raise your hands if you are with Gwyneth on this one: "I feel way more comfortable in a bathing suit now than I did 20 years ago". Exactly. Much of the 42-year-old's shape can be credited to her trainer Tracy Anderson.' (Women's Health, May 2015:35)

The magazine portrays Paltrow as a woman who is more comfortable in her forties than she was in her twenties. This shows that the magazine aims to inspire its readers by showing that 'even' 42-year-old women can be perceived as beautiful. Added to this, having 'abs' at 40 is portrayed as a victory for Paltrow. The magazine tries to convey that everyone can have abs if they work as hard as Paltrow, and if the person does not have abs, it creates the perception that they are lazy. In other words, the subtext is that if a woman does not have abs, she does not have willpower and will not age gracefully. This suggests that there is no excuse for the average 40-year-old reader to have a 'lumpy' or 'bumpy' body, even if they work full time or are a mother. To extend this example, on figure 4.9, Jillian Michaels stands proudly in a revealing swimsuit to showcase her '20 year old looking body' (p39) to convey that she is confident with herself at the age of 40. *Women's Health* magazine uses Michaels' body as an indication of healthy femininity to promote that while Michaels is 40, she still looks 'amazing' for her age. This technique is used to construct ideas of how women should (or should not) age. The April 2017 issue (figure 4.10) featured Union on her '#1 secret to looking good at 44' (p1). Union stands with her buttocks towards the reader to showcase her smooth, youthful, wrinkle-free skin to advertise desirable ageing. Like all the younger models featured on the cover of *Women's Health* throughout 2013 and 2018, the 'ageless' models demonstrate no signs of belly fat, cellulite, or fine lines. To add to this claim, in 2018, Unathi was praised for looking like a 'super fit goddess at the age of 40':

> 'Unathi Nkayi is giving us serious body goals. She's also as real as they come and firmly rooted in her sense of self. The Singer, Songwriter and *Idols* judge levels with us about her no-qualms attitude to ageing, her healthy relationship with food and how she gets her waist so snatched' (Women's Health, October 2018:34).

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The South African television personality is praised in her feature for epitomising 'body goals' (p34) at 40. Discourses on ageing femininities in the magazine are thus entrenched with patriarchal connotations which influence notions of health and fitness. The examples above show how *Women's Health* magazine presents older, more mature women as 'empowered' and 'healthy' femininities by emphasizing on their ability to look younger than their age. This shows that, on one hand the magazine acknowledges that ageing is a normal process. On the other hand, this is also connected to consumer cultures that advertises that if you could buy the right product, you could look like a celebrity. Contrastingly, through its feature articles and word choices for the cover girls that reveal that 40 is 'old', the magazine shows women how they can modify the ageing process so that they can be considered 'hot' and 'fit' at any age by the magazine.

The data on health and femininities show that the magazine reinforces the stereotype that good health is centred around heterosexual attractiveness or beauty rather than maintaining healthy habits. In the first section of the analysis, I have shown how the magazine uses certain body types to promote health and wellness to its readership. While the models chosen were of different profiles like race, age and ethnicity; the magazine subscribes to thin, lighter-skinned beautiful models and presents these models that match its ideals. To extend this view, in the attempt to promote healthy femininities, the magazine utilised sexuality through various models to unpack the ways in which sexuality and healthy are conflated. As a result, it is women's work to fix themselves, rather than fixing the cultural value system that devalues older bodies. Lastly, the magazine reinforces the stereotype a 40-year-old body is an old body — and that old is neither desirable nor sexually attractive. However, youthfulness at 40 is attainable, as celebrity culture reinforces that 40-year-old women can look like 20-year-old women, as reaffirmed by *Women's Health* magazine. The next Chapter focuses on how the magazine uses 'Body Positive' and female empowerment as mantras to supposedly teach

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women how to accept themselves unconditionally through their rendition of the Body Positive movement.

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CHAPTER FIVE

FLAWED BODIES THROUGH BODY-POSITIVE MARKETING

5.1 Introduction

Murphy (2013) wrote that magazines teach women to ‘love’ their bodies, yet ‘hate’ them at the same time with their inconsistent beauty messages. In light of Murphy’s (2013) research, I explored how *Women’s Health* magazine teaches its readers ‘love your body’ messages with the subtexts of selling unattainable standards of ‘health and beauty’. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, *Women’s Health’s* cover girl conveys a representation of a healthy and empowered feminine ideal. The perfected model was presented as a youthful, slim, white, and beautiful representation of health. This, therefore, suggests that ‘othered’ or ‘flawed’ bodies were automatically declared unhealthy and undesirable. By reading the magazine’s content, and as I show below, ‘flawed’ bodies are bodies that include ‘undesirable’, but natural bodily human features. These features include, but are not limited to ageing, scarred, bigger and or bodies of colour. This Chapter focuses on how the magazine uses conceptualisations of the empowered ‘flawed’ body through the narrative of Body Positivity.

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The first theme pays attention to how *Women’s Health* uses its own version of Body Positive messages to show readers how to accept themselves, despite their supposed ‘flaws’. There will be an exploration of the magazine’s Body Positive campaign, which teaches women how to accept themselves by referencing celebrities and their perceived ‘flaws’. The second theme explores the way the magazine presents inconsistent messages of Body Positivity within its contents. In other words, while the magazine created its own version of Body Positivity content, this section of the Chapter analyses the marketing the magazine uses to teach women how to fix the ‘flaws’ they were told to embrace. I connect this Chapter to the work of Bordo (1993), Sanger (2009), Murphy (2013) Matheson (2017) and Johansson (2020) to substantiate

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my argument. My analysis in this Chapter aims to add to this international scope of Body Positivity by drawing on *Women's Health's* representations of the 'flawed' and Body Positive feminine body. This Chapter also aims to start a conversation on the representations of 'flawed' bodies and Body Positivity within the realm of African studies and media.

5.2 Women's Health and Body Positivity

As discussed in my Literature Review, American feminists like Matheson (2017) and Johannsson (2020) have extensively explored health, beauty and the Body Positive movement in American women's fashion and beauty magazines. They specifically argued that the representations of beauty according to size and race, present limitations of femininities in the fashion and beauty industry. *Women's Health* magazine claims to be an exception to the 'limitations' of women's bodies by implementing its own version of Body Positivity within its contents. This is utilised through a special yearly edition the magazine refers to as *The Naked Issue. The Naked Issue* is a structured yearly edition of *Women's Health* whereby celebrities bear and embrace all of their perceived 'flaws' through the concept of being 'bare' and 'naked'.

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5.3 About The Naked Issue

Body Positivity, a topic I discussed extensively in my theoretical framework, centres around embracing flaws such as scars, body size, skin colour and other natural parts of a woman's body. A study conducted by Sanger (2009) exposes that the dominant body of work within magazines tends to normalize whiteness as the ideal representation of beauty. According to Sanger (2009), this is done by magazines rarely exploring different races or other figures (like bigger or scarred bodies). However, contrary to Sanger's (2009) argument, *Women's Health* South Africa created a special Body Positive yearly edition, referred to as *The Naked*

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Issue which incorporates acts of Body Positivity like unconditional self-acceptance. Before describing *The Naked Issue,* I discuss how *Women's Health* defines Body Positivity.

On the *Women's Health* online magazine website in 2017, the global editors wrote extensively on Body Positivity, and they defined the movement as follows:

> 'Body Positivity is a way to embrace feelings of appreciation for one's body rather than commanding absolute bodily love… It's wanting to embrace the female form of all its glory that inspired *Women's Health* to create a movement of its own in 2014. Health is not a body shape; it's a lifestyle' (Women's Health, 2017).

The Naked Issue is an edition of *Women's Health* magazine that highlights representations of Body Positivity through celebrities who are 'raw' and 'unfiltered' as an embodiment of being bare. While the celebrity is not completely naked on the cover or within the contents, they are posed by the magazine in a strategic way that conceals their sexual body parts. Since the conceptualisation of *The Naked Issue* started in 2014, and this thesis analysed *Women's Health* magazine from 2013-2018, I only analyse *The Naked Issues* from 2014 until 2018. There is only one issue per year, except for 2016. I will therefore analyse four *Naked Issues* and how it magnifies the imperfection of the selected American celebrities who posed for this edition. This includes an analysis of the contents of *The Naked Issue,* as well as the cover. According to the website, *The Naked Issue* is defined as:

> '[A] themed issue [that] celebrates the female form in all of its glorious shapes, sizes, colours, and nuances around the world with a cover uniting the brand's international editions. It's wanting to embrace the female form in all of its diverse glory that inspired *Women's Health's* very first Naked Issue back in 2014, for which actress Zoe Saldana fronted the magazine's cover in the nude. (Women's Health, 2017)

Figure 5.1 below is extracted from the *Naked Issue* of September 2017 (Women's Health, September 2017). This issue features American actress Sofia Vergara, who 'boldly' expresses her insecurities.

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Sofía Vergara hastily swallows a gulp of jasmine tea before her hearty cackle fills the room. "It was awful!" she roars, recalling the moment she was invited to front *Women's Health's* inaugural Global Naked Campaign. Er, surely she means flattering? Gratifying? An honour? Nope, that's not how Sofia rolls. "I told my assistant, 'I'm going to be 45 years old! Can you just please let me age with some dignity? Why do I have to be f*cking naked at 45?'"

If Sofia is guilty of anything (aside from having a penchant for prolific swearing), it's quite possibly her tendency to question the obvious. Yes, she's 45; she's also in possession of one of Hollywood's most naturally stunning bodies – isn't that killer figure something to be celebrated?

Happily, it seems we timed our request just right, catching Sofia in an acquiescent "in for a penny, in for a pound" mood. Just one week before our shoot, the self-confessed nudity-phobe disrobed in front of an entire film set of bystanders to rehearse a shower scene for her new spy thriller *Bent*. Practice obviously makes perfect. For all the mock outrage, her assistant confirmed that of course she would strip off for *Women's Health* covers across the world – and so Sofia finds herself naked in front of the camera for the second time in as many weeks.

The modesty that has kept Sofia largely under wraps – until now – is arguably at odds with the gregarious persona for which her fans adore her and, perhaps more significant, the remarkable achievements she can quite happily tick off her to-do list. Sure, she's an actor first and foremost (the highest earning female on TV – $1.2-million per episode – thanks very much), but the Vergara ambition wasn't going to stop at that.

Sofia is also a co-founder of Latin World Entertainment, the largest Hispanic talent management and marketing firm in America; the face of global brands including Diet Pepsi, CoverGirl and Kmart and has this year launched an underwear range.

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Figure 5.1: Women's Health, September 2017

On the cover feature, Vergara is posed with surrounding 'Body Positive' taglines like 'body confidence' and 'body love'. Inside the feature, Vergara was portrayed by the magazine as 'honest' and 'raw' about her two main insecurities: her busty figure and her age. The magazine uses strategic poses to show how the celebrity is vulnerable and 'insecure' about her perceived 'flaws'. Nevertheless, while Vergara mentions that she has insecurities about ageing and not being athletic, she ends off by saying that '[she] don't think [she] needs to be a model with the perfect body, [she is] 45' (p.36). This shows how the magazine presents Vergara as being 'Body Positive' by acknowledging she has 'flaws', but loving herself 'unconditionally' and accepting them. Within the context of *The Naked Issue,* the featured

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celebrities are represented as having insecurities and the focus of the articles is on how they manage to embrace their insecurities as Hollywood celebrities. According to the website in 2017, *The Naked Issue* aims to promote these perceived 'flaws' as beautiful and teaches women to embrace themselves.

With the above narrative, *Women's Health* claims to assure its readership that 'all' women can accept themselves fully, no matter their size, shape, or colour they are. To be more particular, the magazine expresses that all women could and should love and accept themselves unconditionally. In September 2017, Danielle Weakley, the editor of *Women's Health* magazine South Africa described *The Naked Issue* in full detail. According to Weakley, the magazine perceives the special issue as 'an opportunity to celebrate women, but also to celebrate how [they] feel [their] naked bodies' (p8). In doing the feature justice, as claimed by Weakley, the 'naked' celebrity expresses her insecurities to the readership to demonstrate that celebrities struggle with insecurities and 'imperfections' — just like the magazine readers.

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5.4 Portrayals of Flawed Celebrity Bodies in The Naked Issue

Matheson (2017) writes that Body Positivity advocates for more diversity in media, rather than the 'narrow spectrum of people who are considered attractive' (Matheson, 2017:12). With this claim by Matheson (2017), I noted that *Women's Health* attempts to create 'diversity' and 'relatability' through the celebrities that are featured in *The Naked Issue.* All models that are featured are conversing about their 'flaws', and the sample size models subscribe to 'diversity'. The magazine show here, that the models they are using the do not subscribe to the slim, white, long-haired narrative of 'outdated' ideas of beauty in this particular movement. Within the contents of *The Naked Issue,* celebrities were represented as having insecurities but powering through them as figures who advocate Body Positivity. For

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example, in the first *Naked Issue* (Women's Health, September, 2014) I analysed featured actress Zoe Saldana. In *The Naked Issue* 1, the magazine portrays Saldana as expressive about her insecurities regarding her changing body. In her feature, Saldana states that despite her body being 'less toned' than what it was ten years ago, she still loves herself enough to not be too hard on herself to subscribe to perfection. This statement has the function of influencing the reader to believe that there is nothing wrong with the 'less toned' body. The magazine conveys the message that being imperfect is beautiful. Saldana further mentions in her interview that '[she's] been training [her] whole life… But this past year [she] started to let go a bit (p32)'. Saldana's statement, as cited by the magazine shows that despite her body changing, the actress will not resort to disordered behaviours to maintain a standard. A message of Body Positivity is utilised here by the magazine through the Saldana's narrative. Moreover, the magazine writes that when Saldana looks at herself, she sees things that she does not want to see and feels things shaking, things that '[she] has never felt shaking, but it doesn't stop [her]' (p37). With this description, the magazine shows how Saldana is Body Positive, as the actress feels 'soft' and not as 'toned', but still embraces herself. This portrayal of Body Positivity was present throughout my analysis of *The Naked Issues. The Naked Issue 2* (Women's Health, October 2015) demonstrated a similar message:

> 'It's what one quiet Sunday evening made her part of the global Instagram movement of Women posting pictures with their stretchmarks… I used to get comments about being athletic or too skinny and now they say I am too box-shaped or not skinny enough' (Women's Health, October 2015:42).

The above quote highlights American model Chrissy Teigan's way of embracing her flaws. in *The Naked Issue* 2, Teigen was described as 'bold' and 'confident' for embracing her changing body along with her stretch marks. The magazine shows here that the celebrity endures negative comments throughout her daily life to represent aspects of 'struggle'. One moment the media says she is 'too boxed shaped' then the next, 'too skinny'. The narrative

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shows that even women in the industry endure body criticism and pressure to conform. This is how the magazine shows evidence of relativity through a celebrity. Teigen further expresses in her feature that '[her] family is not naturally thin as [they] put on weight quickly' (p42). With this message, the magazine presents Teigen as both Body Positive and relatable, as stretch marks and changing bodies are something the average reader experiences on a regular basis. Additionally, Teigan's Body Positive narrative shows that even as a Hollywood celebrity, she still gets negative remarks about her body. Here, the magazine successfully employs a relatable narrative to entice the reader about their Body Positive movement. As I have demonstrated above, there are many ways in which the magazine lives up to its claims of promoting Body Positivity through women empowerment and embracing one's 'flaws'. The subtext of *The Naked Issue* shows that *Women's Health* magazine describes ageing, having stretchmarks, not being ideally toned as well as not being genetically thin as 'flaws' and 'imperfections', and these ideas are exercised through the selected models that posed for the *Naked Issue.* Yet, as I will show below, the magazine still idealizes the body of the celebrity in a variety of ways.

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5.5 The Idealised Imperfect Bodies

Dating as far back as the 1990s, Bordo (1993) writes about women's weight in lifestyle and beauty magazines and foregrounded that the magazines are created as a marketing strategy to make money for investors. What sells is reinforcing women's insecurities by making women feel both empowered and inferior at the same time. In light of Bordo's (1993) claim, I found that despite *Women's Health* promoting Body Positivity through accepting one's flaws, the magazine still actively idolizes the celebrity. In 2014, *Women's Health* highlights a 'less toned' Zoe Saldana, but still claims that the actress has a 'body of proof' (p31) which according to the magazine, suggests that she is an ideal, flawless body figure. To add, the

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term ‘body of proof’ as cited by *Women’s Health* places emphasis on the supposed ‘flawed’ actress ‘A-List Booty’ (p33) as an idealised body part that readers should aspire to. The article features an exercise program that readers can make use of to attain an ‘A-list booty’ like Zoe Saldana. This suggests that when combined with embracing imperfection and idolising perfections, the magazine contradicts itself through the flawed body narrative.

While Chrissy Teigen was vocal about her insecurities in her feature, the magazine strategically dismisses Teigan’s ‘imperfections’. For example, the magazine modulates her flaws, with phrases like ‘Chrissy’s minor imperfections’ (p41). The term ‘minor’ serves as a function to show that the magazine believes that Chrissy is exaggerating her imperfections, and then moves slightly away from the idea that she is ‘imperfect’. To add to Chrissy’s narrative, the same thing is done in September 2017 with Sofia Vergara’s narrative :

> ‘It’s difficult to believe that Sofia is hung up on her age. Toned and taut, with curves more commonly found on Barbie dolls than on breathing humans she’s forever riding high on our most-sexiest list’ (Women’s Health, September 2017:36).

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In September 2017, the magazine also idealised Sofia’s ‘bravery’ with the explanation that the actress is an embodiment of ageing gracefully with statements like ‘It’s difficult to believe that Sofia is hung up on her age’ (p36). The magazine further articulates that Sofia is not an embodiment of imperfection by using statements such as ‘toned and taut’ (p36), and ‘curves more commonly found on Barbie dolls than on breathing humans she’s forever riding high on our sexiest list’ (p36) in her feature. This throws an imbalance of the Body Positive movement and dilutes the magazine’s claim of implementing a Body Positive section in its contents. This correlates with Murphy’s (2013) and Nobel’s (2014) statement that magazines aim to both empower and create feelings of inferiority. The next section shows in more detail how the magazine contradicts itself through narratives of inconsistent Body Positivity.

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5.6 Inconsistent Themes in The Naked Issue

Chaplin (2018) mentions that readers are being aware that magazines sell what is enticing to the consumer and that 'perfection' sells, as 'normal' bodies would not sell as much as idealised bodies. As a result of Chaplin's (2018) statement, the pathologising of bodies that were present in *Women's Health* magazine was more present than their mantras of Body Positivity femininities. On one hand, women were told to embrace their bodies through *Women's Health's* '*The Naked Issue*', with the idea that celebrities also have imperfections. Yet, on the other hand, women were still taught to 'change' the very flaws that they were told to embrace. For instance, while there was a Body Positive naked celebrity on the cover, the taglines still represented the traditional magazine taglines.

Figure 5.2: Women's Health, September 2014 **Figure 5.3: Women's Health, October 2015**

For instance, in *The Naked Issue 1*, Zoe Saldana spoke about how her body is changing and becoming softer. However, on the cover, her body is associated with taglines like 'The Denim Diet, & Pieces that will lift and Tone'. This presents the subtext that while a celebrity is expressive of how she is 'less toned', it doesn't matter as the magazine is still educating

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women on how to be perfectly toned. While *The Naked Issue 2* show Chrissy Teigen embracing negative comments about her stretchmarks and her body, the cover of *The Naked Issue 2* (Figure 5.3) presented a paradox. To justify my claim, on the cover in large caps and big black, bold font, the caption says 'love your body', but other taglines comprised of messages like 'Tone every inch: Lift to get lean'. This creates the subtext that women are taught to problematise their bodies in an issue that promotes unconditional self-love and acceptance. *Women's Health* South Africa shows how they sell what's 'popular' and 'relevant', and not what is aimed at helping South African women with health and fitness.

In an attempt to convey messages of Body Positivity, the magazine contradicts itself in a variety of ways. *The Naked Issue* 4 (Women's Health, October 2018) portrayed inconsistencies compared to *The Naked Issue* 1, *The Naked Issue* 2 and *The Naked Issue 3,* particularly its cover and its contents.

Figure 5.4: Women's Health, October 2018

The magazine uses 'motherhood' to promote Body Positivity in October 2018. While the magazine attempts to show how motherhood has 'changed' the actress's body, it was a challenge to find Body Positive dialogue or messaging in *Naked Issue 4. Naked Issue* 4 featured American actress Jenna Dewan on motherhood and her 'changing' body. Within the Dewan feature, Dewan speaks about being a mother in terms of 'sexuality' and embracing

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her ‘motherly’ figure. Motherhood changes a woman’s body and Dewan speaks about motherhood and how her body has changed since being a mother. Dewan is represented as claiming that even though she struggled with the appearance of her ‘new motherly figure’ (p44) as she was no longer skinny. It took her a while to realise how freeing the experience has given her a ‘new positive outlook on life’ (p44). According to the magazine, nudity is something that Jenna Dewan has no ‘qualms about’ (p45) as Jenna expresses that she is not shy cause she ‘has always been a dancer’ (p44) and not even motherhood can change her perception. The fact that the magazine state that she has ‘no qualms’ about nudity, shows that the magazine expected her to have qualms. Her message contrasts the other three models, as Dewan’s feature radiates confidence in all aspects. The actress and dancer go on to express in her feature that she wishes all women were this comfortable in their skin, even after having babies because ‘the best thing a woman can do is give birth’ (p45). This is the biology discourse in that various feminists challenged a woman to have a baby to be fulfilled. The magazine portrays itself as a source of empowerment but portrays an outdated dialogue of patriarchy. While Dewan mentions her ‘changing’ body, there was no particular depth to that discussion like stretchmarks, scars or being ‘less toned’. Very little is mentioned about Body Positivity or ‘imperfections’ and ‘flaws’.

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Murphy (2013) wrote that women’s magazines are teaching women how to love their bodies. However, at the same time, these same women’s magazines use discourses that teach women that their bodies require change. *Women’s Health* magazine generally use upbeat language to sell the idea that women can have flaws. As a result, my data show that *The Naked Issue’s* features and articles attempt to show celebrity flaws, but to an extent, romanticize the ‘flaws’ that make the celebrity seem synonymously desirable and relatable. In other words, the magazine promotes that if the readership wants to be Body Positive, they should age just like Sofia Vergara, eat like Chrissy Teigen, be less toned like Zoe Saldana and be an insecure

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mother like Jenna Dewan. These women were presented as making ‘flaws’ and ‘imperfections’ look perfect. The magazine aims to persuade its readers to buy it by offering them something aspirational, perhaps the possibility of an all-rounded healthy body but by presenting it in contradictory ways. Firstly, by advocating that the perfect body isn’t perfect, just look at these ‘models’ in *The Naked Issue*. Secondly, by promoting the idea that you have to have the perfect body, much like the celebrities that are featured in *The Naked Issue*.

This Chapter demonstrated how the magazine promotes Body Positivity through a special edition that indicates that all kinds of ‘flaws’ should be embraced. The magazine utilises concepts, phrases and movements to show readers that they are about embracing the full feminine form ‘flaws and all’. However, as I have shown above, in that same breath, the magazine is still educating women to be ‘perfect’ through its cover tag lines. In particular, the magazine claims that *The Naked issue* is known for advertising to ‘regular’ and the ‘average’ woman that having scars, cellulite, stretchmarks, a less toned body, and ageing is okay. Additionally, the magazine shows that these perceived ‘flaws’ should be embraced because even celebrities have insecurities and imperfections. The magazine sets up narratives of ‘flaws’ that readers don’t need to worry about by promoting celebrities as people who also struggle with ‘scars’ and other imperfections. The next Chapter focuses on how the magazine represents the ‘fat’ feminine body.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE PATHOLOGISATION OF THE UNHEALTHY 'FAT' BODY

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous Chapter, *Women's Health* claims that its contents promote concepts and practices of Body Positivity. This includes embracing one's body despite its 'flaws'. This Chapter expands on that argument by looking at the characterisations of the 'fat' body by the magazine. I analysed 'fat' feminine bodies through the lens of the weight loss narrative that is present in the magazine. This Chapter consists of two main themes. In the first theme, I show how *Women's Health* compare and contrasts the 'bigger', 'fat' body and the 'smaller', 'thin' body through weight loss narratives. I pay attention to the ideas of how 'fat' bodies emerge in the texts by examining the patterns of covert discrimination through words and phrases that are conceptualised around notions of 'fat' and feminine bodies. In my discussion, I show how the 'previously fat' women is consistently associated with characteristics like sad, misery, unhappiness, and stress. In contrast, I also show how the magazine juxtaposes the fat feminine narrative with the thinner version of herself.

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The second theme shows how the magazine presents the 'fat' feminine body through the male gaze. I pay attention to how the featured women are portrayed through patriarchal standards of beauty. Self-proclaimed 'fat' feminist researcher, Samantha Murray (2008), has consistently written about media representation of the fat female body and how these representations evoke notions of fatphobia. In her publication *The Fat Female Body*, Murray (2008) challenges contemporary cultural and anti-fat discourses through the medicalisation of obesity. In light of Murray's work, as well as the work of various feminist writers, including Bordo (1993), Wolf (2000) and Sanger (2009), my analysis in this Chapter adds to this work.

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6.2 The Fat Feminine Body and Weight-loss in Women's Health

Murray (2008) explores fatness and women's experiences with fatphobia in her publication the '*Fat' Female Body*. Murray (2008) argues that because of the dominant cultural imaginary that views 'obesity' as morally inferior, diseased, and aesthetically displeasing, it is 'crucial for fat people to see themselves reflected in art and to see their bodies as struggles' (Murray, 2008:1). Before I start analysing the embodiments of 'fat' and thin bodies, I shall contextualise *Women's Health's* representation of 'fat' feminine bodies in their weight loss segment called *You Lose, You Win.*

You Lose, You Win is a weight loss segment that is present within the health columns of *Women's Health* magazine. For this Chapter, I analysed all the weight loss narratives from 2013-2018; my sample size comprised 78 stories, with five of them being featured by local celebrities. For this Chapter, I only used 12 examples. The data was repetitive, and I avoid over-saturation with my arguments. By using how the magazines represent these women's stories, I uncover specific themes and patterns that emerged within the segment's contents.

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Figure 6.1: Women's Health, August 2013

The segment functions as an inspirational aspect in the magazine by promoting that weight loss creates an impactful change in a woman's life. To illustrate, figure 6.1 is an extract from *You Lose; You Win* August 2013. A typical *You Lose; You Win* article features a thin woman who was once 'fat'. The narratives of *You Lose, You Win* usually consist of dialogue from a post 'fat' woman. The magazine portrays the woman as describing her past life as a fat-bodied person, and how much better she functions as a now thin person. For instance, the weight-loss segment features Mandy, a 25-year-old woman from Cape Town. The segment shows a thinner version of the woman alongside a positive quote that says 'food is my fuel' (p.66). The quote creates the impression that she has a positive body image and a healthy relationship with food now that she is thin. These women are portrayed as sources of inspiration by the magazine as they currently meet normative standards of healthy, beautiful, feminine bodies. For instance, in July 2018, Gcobisa from Johannesburg stated that once she had lost weight, she was invincible. In her feature, Gcobisa explained that once she had become lighter, exercise had become easier, that 'She'[d] run the full Soweto Marathon' (p59) and '[had] dropped six dress sizes.' The statements made by Gcobisa as referenced by the magazine, suggest that she is more efficient as a thinner person. This plays covertly through language, tones and phrases, but overall, the function of the features is to prove to women that being thin is the all-important element. In addition, the featured women are portrayed as sources of inspiration by the magazine as they are currently thin and fit a standard to achieve anything that cannot be achieved if one is 'fat', as represented by the magazine. As I discuss below, the thin-bodied woman is more valued than the 'fat' bodied woman.

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6.3 The 'Fat' Failure and The Thin Success

Murray (2008) argued that when 'fatness' is viewed as a moral failure, weight loss industries continually capitalize on the conflation of 'happiness' and 'healthiness' with thinness. As I have argued in Chapter Three, *Women's Health* magazine presents idealised thin, toned, and paler-skinned bodies as exemplifying positivity and health. In comparison, other bodies, particularly the 'fat' body, were consistently represented as a failure. This section of the Chapter focuses on how 'fat' feminine bodies are perceived as 'failures' by *Women's Health* magazine. To add, I show how the narrative changes when the featured woman lost weight. I make use of three narratives to substantiate my argument.

Women's Health, as an affiliate of the weight loss industry, utilises two contrasting markers regarding a woman's body size: these narratives are practised through versions of 'thin' 'success' and 'fat' 'failure'. For example, in October 2014, a woman named Tina was descriptive in her feature about her failures as a 'fat' person. According to *Women's Health,* Tina's 'fat' self was written as follows:

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> 'Now that she's no longer lugging around an extra 31 kilos, Tina is healthier, lighter on her feet and full of energy. "When I was overweight, I was always sluggish and tired- since the weight loss, it's so much easier to get up in the morning," she says. Tina used to work long hours and couldn't make time for healthy eating. "My first meal was often at 11:30am" then I'd only drink coffee and smoke cigarettes" In the evenings she preferred going out with her husband over cooking by herself. "I was buying large sizes and avoiding clothes in bright colours- I felt that they drew so much attention to my body". I tried to make an effort with my make-up and jewellery. But it didn't feel right, I didn't feel good" (Women's Health, October 2014:70).

Nobles (2014) wrote that bigger bodies were featured in magazines as sources of obesity and failure. Tina's story in *Women's Health* magazine shows that 'fat' or bigger bodies act as the narrative for the failure that requires drastic change. Although the feature of Tina is very descriptive of how she failed as a fat person and her various failings like only drinking coffee

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and smoking, as well as not being able to get up in the morning was associated with her ‘fat’ body. The negative adjectives for the fat body vs the thin body were opposing. This is a consistent theme throughout *You Lose, You Win* as another named woman Phumizile was perceived as ‘scared’ because of her bigger body that held her back from taking care of herself:

> ‘After numerous failed attempts of fad diets, Phumizile was self-conscious. “I was in a horrific accident and suffered third-degree burns at just three years old. As I grew into a woman, this affected my self-esteem badly. I became an emotional eater”. “At the age of 12, I was wearing a size 40”. Embarrassed by her scared body she was scared to join the gym’ (Women’s Health, May 2015:77).

Here, the magazine is suggestive with its description of the narrative by attempting to foreground that her being ‘fat’ held her back from many things. The before description, however, has little to do with Phumzile’s ‘fat’ body and more to do with her scarring from her accident, the magazine still portrays her fears through her ‘bigger’ body. Her ‘after’ story thus had everything to do with her ‘diet’ and discipline as a thin person and very little to do with her scaring or her accident. For example:

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> ‘Phumizile took stock of her diet, “I knew I could do better. I now have bran flakes with soy milk in the morning. For lunch a shake or chicken salad. And for supper, I’ll have a vegetable Stir fry with chicken or fish”. As her weight decreased, her energy surged and she did something she’d always been afraid of- she joined the gym. She now trains five days a week’ (Women’s Health, May 2015:77)

The ‘after’ narrative characterizes Phumizile as ‘brave’ as she conquered a ‘fear’ of joining the gym, now she’s perceived as ‘unstoppable’ because she trains five times a week. In this context, *Women’s Health* sensationalises as well as emphasizes Phumzile’s capacity for change through the depiction of the ‘fat’ body as a moral failure in various aspects of their lives. Fearing the gym was ‘fat’ Phumizile, but now that she’s ‘thin’, she’s not afraid. This is as if she lost the ‘fat’ overnight and her ‘thin’ body is fearless. The magazine does not

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mention how the thin version of Phumizile feels about her scarring from the accident. All those insecurities were channelled through ‘fat’ Phumizile.

This theme was consistently present throughout my sample as in May 2017, *You Lose, You Win* featured Lerato, who addressed her depression by eating compulsively :

> 'The sight of food triggered Lerato's appetite— even when she was not hungry. "It all started towards the end of 2012. I was so depressed and unhappy with my life, and food became my only source of comfort". In a short period, she gained a significant amount of weight. "I ate junk food like I was addicted to fast foods, sweets, soft drinks, and a whole lot of alcohol. I was too lazy to do anything, even walking was an issue." It got to a point where she could not look herself in the mirror "I was so uncomfortable in my skin". After that realization, she decided to change her way of doing things' (Women’s Health, May 2017:72).

Lerato’s story shows how the comfort eating that addressed her depression only made matters worse by piling on the kilos to the point where she judged herself. She was portrayed by the magazine as ‘addicted’, ‘lazy’ and ‘uncomfortable. However, as presented by the magazine, Lerato made the apparently ‘simple’ decision to change all these ‘dramatic’ labels by losing weight. After her weight loss, her story was represented as much more positive, instead of ‘addicted’, ‘lazy’ and ‘uncomfortable’ she is now represented as ‘proud’, ‘happy’ and ‘hot’. In the after narrative, the magazine showed that people consistently complimented her, and always asked what was her ‘secret to weight loss’ (p72). She proudly mentioned that they would even ask her for advice. As for Lerato, ‘there is no greater reward than dropping kilos like it's hot!’ (p72). ‘Thinness’ is therefore depicted as the best alternative for women to reverse their failures. This correlates with Bordo’s (1993) assessment on how the ‘thin’ body is romanticised by magazines as the best version of health and beauty.

While Phumzile’s, Tina’s as well as Lerato’s personal failures had very little to do with them having a ‘fat’ body, the magazine still depicted their failures due to being ‘fat’ or ‘overweight’. The driving force with the magazine articles was that ‘thinness’ will solve all

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their problems. All their successes as 'disciplined' people were promoted through their weight loss. The magazine, therefore, shows that these women were 'fat' failures. However, now they are disciplined because they lost weight and inhabit a 'thinner', 'smaller' and more 'successful' figure. Even if the messages were to interpret that these women are liberated from believing their body is not wrong, the intention in these articles is to capitalize on a panoptic gaze which reinforces 'thinness' as the preferred body size for doing good or having good things happen. The next section focuses on the conflation the magazine makes with heterosexuality, desirability and thinness.

6.4 (Hetero)Sexuality and the 'Fat' Feminine Body

As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the main reasons women are represented in a particular light is to attract the patriarchal male gaze. To be more specific, this representation is centred around teaching women to see themselves as objects of the male gaze and to view and evaluate themselves through the heterosexual male. This section focuses on how the male gaze is utilised as the determining factor for how the women of *You Lose, You Win* are defined and presented. I use three examples of *You Lose, You Win* to show how *Women's Health* uses different themes of patriarchal messages, and how the male gaze is used to reinforce stereotypical ideas of 'health' and 'beauty'. I reference the work of Murray (2008), Gill (2009) and Chaplin (2018) to substantiate my arguments.

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Gill (2009) states that there is a dramatic sexualisation of the feminine body which conveys her success with heterosexual intimate relationships. Gill (2009), specifically argued that magazines teach women to perform acts of self-surveillance that are structured through the make-over paradigm. Many of the women in *You Win, You Lose* segment in *Women's Health* magazine performed acts of 'self-surveillance' through the make-over paradigm by losing weight to be desired by a 'man'. In May 2013, Unathi, a popular South African television

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presenter, had lost weight because she wanted to be '[her] husband's sexy girlfriend again' (p63). According to Unathi's interview, as presented by *Women's Health:*

> After her sons were born, Unathi realised the extra centimetres weren't going away. "I tend to gain a lot of weight during pregnancy", she says. She packed on the kilos during her first pregnancy and it took more than a year to lose the weight. When she fell pregnant again Unathi hit an all-time high on the scale, having given to her body's carb cravings: toasted sandwiches and potatoes washed down with chocolate milk. The extra weight started affecting how she felt about her body and she desperately wanted to reclaim the figure she once had. "I didn't want to look like my husband's aunty – I wanted to go back to being his sexy girlfriend' (Women's Health, May 2013:63).

The magazine aims to demonstrate that Unathi was unhappy with 'looking like her husband's 'aunty' – she wanted to be desirable to her husband 'again'. The term 'again' suggests that Unathi percieved herself through the male gaze (her husband's idea of beauty) by assuming that she was not desireable to her husband because she was not 'thin'. The magazine shows that Unathi's definition of 'sexy' was contingent on how attractive her husband found her. While the article males no reference to how Unathi's husband percieved her weight, the magazine still shows that the motivation is the male gaze. The critical reflection Unathi has of herself in her feature is presented by the magazine as having more to do with looking sexy for her husband, but at first, this was impossible because 'the centimetres weren't going away' (p63). Unathi is represented as desperately wanting to 'reclaim her figure', which appears to place her within an 'empowering' context. With this narrative, the magazine shows that Unathi adds value to patriarchy, because of her 'slimmer' figure. After losing the weight, Unathi was presented as her husbands 'sexy girlfriend' again, instead of his 'aunty'. This connects with the earlier part of my analysis, whereby women are 'empowered' because they subscribe to heteronormative ideals of healthy and beautiful, things are better for these women, as opposed to when they were 'fat'.

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Part of the pattern is that the magazine is reproducing 'common sense' understandings of fatness as improper, undesirable or 'ugly' to the male gaze. To justify my observation, in the September 2014 edition of *You Lose, You Win*, a woman named Morgan lost weight as a bigger bride-to-be. In the feature, Morgan declared that '[she] felt ugly' (p74) because when her fiancé proposed to her, she was 'fat'. Morgan was represented in the magazine as a woman needing to lose urgent weight because she is a bride-to-be.

> 'Morgan's reasons to embark on a major weight-loss programme were twofold: she was getting married; secondly, she wasn't happy with how she looked. "I felt ugly". My now husband and I knew I wanted to look good on my wedding day. "I didn't want to walk down the aisle and feel fat". On her big day, Morgan wowed her guests, but that wasn't just due to the dress she wore – it was the size of it' (Women's Health, September 2014:74).

Here, the magazine shows Morgan as a woman who sees herself through her future husband's eyes and that she must lose weight, to be his desirable bride. As I have discussed earlier, 'fat' bodies are presented as undesirable by *Women's Health*, and this presents itself in various ways. The idea that Morgan will be undesirable as a 'fat' bride, scared her, which therefore creates the assumption that she will fail as a wife to her future husband. Murray (2008), describes fatphobia as the fear and hatred of fatness and fat people. Murray (2008) further articulates that the oppressive nature of sizeism exists due to a growing 'health valuing culture' which conflates feminine thinness with healthiness, particularly within the patriarchal lens. Thus, Morgan uses the function of how her husband 'might' perceive her and she aims to change his perception to be a desirable wife — somebody who is sufficiently attractive not just for marriage, but will be (hetero)sexually desirable for the rest of his life.

Chaplin (2018) wrote that *Women's Health* uses 'health' and 'fitness' as a tool to show women how to be heterosexually attractive, rather than improving their overall health. Words like 'hot' and 'sexy' and most of all 'perfect' were commonly used by Chaplin's (2018) focus group to describe *Women's Health's* definition of a 'healthy' woman. These are used to

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attract the male gaze, and how women should look to reinforce the notion that men are the dominant gender. To be particular, while men are expected to be the 'bigger' gender physically, women are expected to be the 'smaller', or more petite, gender. This idea was exercised through a woman named Celeste that was featured by *Women's Health* in December 2016. According to Celeste, as written by *Women's Health:*

> '[Her] husband went on a health journey and already lost 70kg. He weighed himself and suggested [she] check. In denial about how big [she] was, [she] got on the scale. To her Horror, she weighed 105kg and her husband weighed 100kg. "How did I allow myself to weigh more than him?" It was the wake-up call [she] needed to join a gym (Women's Health, December 2016).

These supposedly natural differences between genders are amplified by 'diet' and 'exercise' to render women as petite as possible so that men be the dominant gender in terms of physical size. The phrase 'I no longer weigh more than my husband' suggest that her weight dismantles the dynamics of gender. In addition, the subtext in Celeste's interview suggests that the 'fat' woman is not deserving of 'love' because she is 'bigger' than her heterosexual male partner. The article creates a sense of dramatisation of words like 'horror' and 'how did I allow myself to weigh more than him' functions as the 'danger' a woman faces when she is proportionally bigger than her partner. My data, therefore, show that *Women's Health* consistently teaches women how to avoid 'fat' and to look (hetero)sexually desirable by being 'slim', 'toned' and 'trim' not only through its exercise and health content but specifically through its weight loss narratives.

As I have demonstrated, the concept of 'fat' is repeatedly associated with words like unattractive, unhappy, sad, failure, illness, depression, inadequate, poverty, challenges, setbacks, accidents, miserable, deviant, and stigma. Contrastingly, thin is associated with empowering and positive words like fun, happy, famous, successful, opportunities, and possibilities. The 'thin' women from *You Lose, You Win* were represented as happier when

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they were ‘thin’, and miserable when they were ‘fat’ bodied. Furthermore, the weight loss narrative presents a form of patriarchal stereotyping when it is co-opted with notions of empowering oneself by making better choices to become thinner for the male gaze. This Chapter shows how the magazine describes thinness as the best solution for a ‘fat’ woman’s problems, including having successful heterosexual relationships. My findings suggest that, in *Women's Health*, thinness has various positive connotations, and fatness carries negative connotations. *Women’s Health* is not interested in a happy or accomplished ‘fat’ woman who happily discusses her life as a wife, mother, or an enterprising person —as the magazine’s target audience is women who may feel inadequate or as if they do not meet up to ideal health expectations.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

As I have discussed in this thesis, media representations have constantly romanticised thinness. As a result, this has regulated and normalised health standards for women, who are coerced into believing that the media's conception of the thin body is natural - and hierarchically more valuable than bodies deemed 'othered', such as the 'flawed' body. While this study consistently explored Body Positive femininities in *Women's Health* magazine South Africa, there were some limitations I experienced as a researcher. One limitation of this study is that I could have focused on both genders in *Women's Health* magazine instead of just femininities. In this study, I would have liked to explore more magazine titles, such as the South African editorial of *Fair Lady* and *Fitness* magazine. Nonetheless, this study lacked sufficient space to include more titles or a broader focus. This study has opened up space for further research despite its limitation. There has been exponential development on this topic since I conceptualised my thesis. Should somebody look to expand on this study, they can make use of social media as a way of studying Body Positivity in Africa. My study is limited to women's magazines, and social media has an exponential amount of Body Positive content. Another way of expanding this body of work is that there could be an exploration of male Body Positivity in media, since my research only reflects on the representations of feminine Body Positivity.

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I relied on existing research to strengthen my arguments linked to the patterns of how healthy femininities are represented in the magazine. As I read and reread the selected editions of *Women's Health*, I found discrepancies regarding the 'health' messages they sell to women. The patterns were similar to that of Chaplin (2018) and Murphy (2013) whereby *Women's*

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Health sold ideas of rigid patriarchal standards of health through mantras of 'empowerment', 'love your body' and 'Body Positivity'. However, there were some contradictory messages in *Women's Health* that taught women to conform to an outdated patriarchal ideal of health and beauty. My main intention was to implement a Body Positive lens, that derives from the Body Positive movement. The Body Positive movement has been at the forefront of positive body image protests against unrealistic beauty and health standards inflicted by media channels. It advocates that people should be perceived as beautiful and healthy —regardless of body size or stature.

This research analysed the mediated messaging around healthy and unhealthy bodies through the lens of Body Positivity and connect it to healthy feminine bodies in *Women's Health* magazine South Africa from 2013- 2018. I critically examined how health and beauty are associated with Body Positivity within the contents of *Women's Health* magazine. Another aim of this thesis in this thesis was to focus on how mantras of positive body image, or the popularly defined concept; Body Positivity, are tied to discursive representations of healthy feminine bodies in South African magazines. I found that *Women's Health* magazine has consistently indirectly pathologised 'flawed' bodies such as ageing and scarred bodies to sell an idealised version of femininities. While Body Positivity was not explored as a facet of body image in the South African context, my research stemmed from international sources.

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In my first analysis Chapter, I set out to explore how the magazine represents a 'healthy' body through its cover girl, and how messages of 'health' are used and framed around the notion of the cover girl. In my second analysis Chapter, I show how *Women's Health* explore Body Positivity, and how the magazine contradicts its messages around Body Positivity. In my third analysis Chapter, I examined how the magazine represented the 'fat' feminine body in light of Body Positivity and fatphobic messages. Consequently, *Women's Health*

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magazine reinforces the pathologising of 'othered' bodies that do not subscribe to health. In conducting the thematic analysis, the front covers of *Women's Health* there was an overwhelming amount of which encouraged women to improve their physical appearance for supposedly health-related reasons. The magazine uses Body Positivity and 'empowerment' in an attempt to teach women how to embrace their 'flaws', yet this was inconsistent. For example, bodies like the 'flawed' body that is in dire need to change to fit the description of an ideal body. In other words, the average reader who is 'flawed' were taught to be like the flawless 'cover' model. Normative discourses about 'appropriate' performances of femininities are always mediated by (hetero)sexuality through notions of health and fitness, which are built almost steadfast into the messages relayed by the media. Thus, it becomes difficult to critically decipher and extract the 'codes' utilised by these messages.

With this study, I look to particularly start a conversation that focuses on the constructs of 'flawed' bodies. Precisely because it affects people, the general population who may or may not share 'popular' opinions about the 'fat' body as a moral failure or the 'flawed' body that needs a 'fix'. Although this study was unable to address the consequences of body shaming, it reaffirms thin supremacist preferences for bodies that conform to patriarchal ideals of beauty and body size. By doing so, discourses of Body Positivity are controlled by dominant conceptualizations: 'fat' bodies are seen as lazy, 'disgusting', and lacking 'control' – and scarred, or ageing bodies are seen as in need of particular workout regimens to 'fix' their problem areas.

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