

**UNDER PRESSURE: *WOMEN'S HEALTH* AND THE SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCTIONS OF AGING**

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## Abstract

This thesis project explores social constructions of aging women within *Women's Health* magazine. There is limited scholarly literature on representations of aging women within popular health/fitness media, such as magazines. The limited current research which does exist suggests that aging women are subjected to negative stereotypes and gendered myths within our societal and cultural values with respect to aging (Vertinsky, 1994). Media representations are strong and pervasive reflections of societal norms and expectations and may impact the way women view themselves. I therefore undertook a Foucaultian discourse analysis of *Women's Health* magazine to examine if/how gendered constructions of aging are functioning within representations of health directed to women of all ages. I found that *Women's Health* reproduces aging women as useless, failures, problems to be managed, and other to normative femininity. *Women's Health* reinforces that aging can and should be managed through the consumption of anti-aging products, procedures, and surgeries endorsed within the magazine.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Women, Theories of Aging, and Representation**

Understandings of aging are constructed and reinforced by social institutions. Social institutions that influence aging include, but are not limited to, the media, the medical profession, and the family (Jamieson, 2006). Social institutions reproduce dominant discourses of aging and are reproduced through day-to-day interactions, judgements, gender socialization, media representations, and professional knowledge. The experience of aging is influenced by dominant discourses and can reproduce social norms and expectations. Both men and women inevitably experience aging, women may face a more significant social disadvantage due to common perceptions of menopause and aging as other and in direct opposition to normative femininity. There is limited scholarly literature on representations of aging women within popular health media, such as magazines. The limited current research that does exist suggests that aging women are subjected to negative stereotypes and gendered myths within our societal and cultural values (Vertinsky, 1994). Media representations are strong and pervasive reflections of societal norms and expectations and are significant because the way women are represented within social constructions of aging may impact the way they view themselves, their abilities, and thus, their health. Combining my previous interest in media representations of women in sport and fitness with a new interest in aging, my project examines if/how gendered constructions of aging are functioning within representations of health and fitness directed at women.

## Aging as Only a Biological Process

There is a significant amount of literature on the biological process of aging. While this is an important aspect of aging, which influences our understanding of the aging process through medical knowledge, I am focusing on the cultural process of aging. There is no predestined social discrimination within the biological process of aging, but there is discrimination within social and cultural implications of aging especially for women. Foucault (1979) states that the sick body can be objectified through medicalization. Arguably, the aging body is objectified in a comparable way. In many ways the aging body and the sick body are understood through similar medical discourse and social normalizations. Gannon (1999) discusses how aging is viewed as a disease or medical condition that is specific to females, even though males may go through similar physiological and hormonal changes after mid life. Gee & Kimball (1987) argue that within our society, women are commonly defined through biology and reproduction. Growing old for women can imply losing the crucial component of female reproduction. According to Singer & Hunter (1999), language used to describe aging includes physiological regression and failure. Gee & Kimball (1987) acknowledge that aging can be viewed as a biological loss of reproductive capability, thus leaving females feeling useless, incapable, and unfeminine. Biological decline as an aspect of aging is significant to acknowledge, but is not the focus of my project. Rather, the pervasive understanding of aging as a significant biological process positions my project. Biological conceptions of aging influence how we understand the aging process as a cultural phenomenon. Biology is seen as a hard science that is objective and true, therefore aging is also seen as a naturally objective process despite different portrayals of aging in diverse cultures. The

dominant biological view of aging is very important to the social construction of aging because biological beliefs of aging are conveyed into social and cultural beliefs. I am specifically interested in discursive productions of aging women within media representations of health and physical activity due to the pervasive nature of the media within today's consumer society and the link between biological and social beliefs of aging. How is the social construction of aging reproduced through a societal institution such as the media and how might this influence aging subjects?

Lorber (2005) describes how women may experience aging in a different social climate than men, due to the socialization and normalization of dominant gender discourses. Gender discourses are used in day-to-day language and assumptions. Discourses around aging are reliant on an individual's assigned or assumed gender and the performance of gender acts. According to Lorber (2005), gender acts are not natural or biologically inherent; they are learned and reinforced through a lifetime of socialization. Dominant discourses rely on cultural norms and expectations and may change over time. In order to examine social constructions of aging I draw from Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall to outline a discursive theoretical approach.

#### Foucaultian Discursive Theoretical Approach

A Foucaultian discursive theoretical approach analyzes constructions of discourse and discursive subjects through examining what discourses appear with regularity. Discourse is not necessarily just language as it is much more complex than simply what people say. Hvas & Gannik (2008a) describe how discourse manifests itself in all representational forms of language, including everything written, spoken and visualized and can be analysed through social interactions. It is important to note what discourses

are apparent within text, language, or speech acts because discourse constructs the objects/topics of conversation within society. In examining what discourses are appearing with regularity it becomes possible to analyze social relationships and societal norms affected by them.

According to Foucault (1980), discourse is an essential part of life because nothing exists outside discourse. Poststructural thinking suggests we cannot escape discourse because discourse constructs and shapes reality, but this does not mean that reality is any less real (Usher and Edwards, 1994). According to Hall (2001), “since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do - our conduct - all practices have a discursive aspect” (p. 72). Discourse is important to examine, because discourse helps provide the appearance of stability and continuity.

Foucault, however, illustrated that when one examines a scientific book or the works of an author or an academic discipline or even his own works, that there are contradictions, gaps, confusions and oppositions. This recognition encouraged Foucault to argue that the totality of statements within a given science or book only appear to have continuity due to the workings of ‘discourse’. (Markula, 2006, p. 29)

Our social reality is subjective, based on subject positions and understood through discourse and language. Therefore, knowledge is produced and reproduced through discourse.

### *Discourse and Knowledge*

Knowledge is produced through discursive practices that can be used to regulate conduct within society (Hall, 2001). According to Hall (2001), “Foucault argues that since we can only have a knowledge of things if they have meaning, it is discourse- not the thing-in-themselves- which produces knowledge” (p. 73). Dominant discourse can determine which knowledge is rejected as false and deviant from the norm and which

knowledge is accepted as normative. Hall (2001) describes how knowledge holds a significant amount of power due to its ability to make itself seem “true” and be seen as natural. Discourse can carry meaning and power because it is accepted as truth due to the production of discursive knowledge.

According to Smith & Riley (2009), discourse “can be thought of as a way of describing, defining, classifying, and thinking about people, things, and even knowledge and abstract systems of thought” (p. 116). Discourse and the discursive knowledge produced within it enable socially acceptable norms and ideals. In doing so, they also limit what is acceptable by establishing what is deviant from the norm. Hall (1997a) discusses how “[t]hese discursive formations, as they are known, define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to a particular subject or site of social activity...” (p. 6). Thus, discourse can enable and limit all levels of social life. Smith & Riley (2009) describe how dominant discourses are “implicated in and arise out of the power/knowledge relationships between groups of people that the discourses themselves constitute and regulate” (p. 116). Enabling and limiting discursive norms are reinforced through social institutions that reproduce dominant discourses, for instance, particular gendered bodies.

Discourse is seen as natural due to what is said and what is left unsaid within statements. Hall (1996) states that while it is important to note what is said within discourse, it is also important to note the unsaid and common-sense assumptions within discourse. According to Foucault (1972),

all manifest discourse is secretly based on an ‘already-said’; and that this ‘already-said’ is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written, but a ‘never-said’, an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath...The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the

repressive presence of what it does not say; and this 'not-said' is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said. (p. 25)

This is significant because discourse produces a process of inclusion and exclusion.

Silences or unsaid assumptions prop-up what is said and thought to be true through discourse. If the unspoken or unsaid was proven to be unnatural or untrue the dominant discourse would unravel. Therefore, what is said and what is left unsaid within discourse shapes knowledge, truth and power.

### *Truth and Power*

Discourse shapes what we as subjects understand as truthful and meaningful within social practices and societal expectations. According to Foucault (1980), "each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements" (p. 131). Discursive truth is produced through discursive statements and the knowledge that they hold. The "truth" that Foucault discusses is not absolute but rather it is based on what everyone believes to be true within their social interactions and cultural meanings. Hall (2001) argues that this truth regulates social expectations therefore the conduct of subjects are regulated through the power of authority. According to Markula (2006), for Foucault "there are relations between history, discourse, bodies and power in an attempt to help to understand social practices or objects of knowledge that 'continue to exist and have value for us'(Foucault 1977c: 146)" (p. 32). Therefore discursive truth and power can create subjective knowledge that is understood as truthful.

According to Smith & Riley (2009), for Foucault "power was a fundamental and inescapable dimension of social life" (p. 117). Through poststructural theory, power has

undergone a transformation that originated with sovereign power based in physical punishment and torture. This power then shifted to disciplinary power through regulation, surveillance and monitoring social behaviour, and finally power within society transformed to a power, which is not repressive, but rather productive in nature (Smith & Riley, 2009). Dominant discourses reinforce a productive power that influences social expectations and norms. Discursive power is not enforced through top down oppression rather it circulates and can be imposed by anyone. Smith and Riley (2009) suggest that for Foucault,

power circulates within institutional and discursive contexts... [H]e tends to see power as something that resides in the system (not individuals) and enables it to produce certain outcomes. Foucault's emphasis is on the productive ways that power works by shaping positive ideas about selves, desires, and institutional goals rather than on the ways that it works, by blocking or repressing a "true" self or utopian vision. (p. 119)

There are certain subjects that hold more discursive authority based on the perceived knowledge and truth of subject positions. Hvas and Gannik (2008a) argue "[b]y way of their right to define truth, some persons are ascribed more power than others, and power is thus a central concept in discourse analysis" (p. 160). It is important to note who has legitimacy to speak and speak with truth, and who is excluded from speaking truth based on their subject positions.

### *Discursive Subject*

All subjects are constituted through discourse and discursive formations. Hall (1996) describes how identities are "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (p. 4). Discursive subjects are both subjected to discourse and understood through it. Hall argues that subjects are produced within discourse, through the marking of difference and the process of exclusion and

inclusion. According to Hall (1996), “discourses construct subject positions through their rules of formation...” (p. 10). These rules of formation are used to prop up certain knowledge and practices and thus the normalization of particular subject positions within society. Hall (1996) discusses how rules of formation “offer a formal account of the construction of the subject positions within discourse while revealing little about why it is that certain individuals’ occupy some subject positions rather than others” (p. 10). Subject positions are influenced by social institutions such as popular media because they can produce and reproduce normative subject positions and inform which discursive subjects are acceptable within society.

### *Discourse and Media*

Social institutions produce and shape dominant discourse and reproduce who has power within society. Social institutions such as family, religion, education, medicine, sport, and media support and prop up discourse through the production and reproduction of knowledge, truth and power. I am specifically interested in the social institution of popular media and the discourses that it re/produces. The media is a particularly powerful social institution within today’s increasingly globalized and commercialized society. Dominant discourses are both produced and reproduced as legitimate through popular media representations. Media representations influence and inform what is viewed as accepted behaviours and societal norms. For example, with respect to aging, Bernard, Chambers and Granville (2000) describe how we are bombarded by negative media images of growing old and strategies for preventing the “disease” of aging. Singer and Hunter (1999) argue that media representations and health marketing reflect the aging process as evoking fears about aging, socio-cultural and sexual power and youth. Media

representations are all around us within our consumer driven society. Advertisements are even in places where, in the past, it would seem too private to share messages of consumption, such as in public bathroom stalls. These ads are focused on potential consumers of all ages including untapped target populations such as children. Media images can have a huge influence on how we interpret those around us and how we make sense of ourselves. We may become our own worst critic and begin to self-surveil our own behaviour and appearances to fit within media representations of the ideal subject.

### *The Panopticon*

Discourse, and the reinforcement of dominant discourse, is implicated within the process of social surveillance. Foucault (1979) argues that within society there is a figurative prisonlike panopticon that uses self-surveillance to control social subjects. The panopticon is a metaphor for an architectural figure used in prisons where the guards are monitoring from a tower within the middle of the prison and inmates are all around the tower, but they cannot see inside the tower. The inmates do not know when they are being watched due to the inability to see inside the tower, but they know that they could be watched at all times, thus inducing obedience and discipline. Foucault (1979) discusses how surveillance is significant because it feels as though it is imposed permanently even if it is discontinuous in action. Prison inmates begin to self-police their own behaviour due to the possibility of being watched by others at all times. Foucault (1979) argues that the panopticon creates a power relation in which subjects discipline themselves due to a fear of constant visibility. This produces a discipline and power over citizens from within (Foucault, 1979).

The metaphor of the panopticon can be used to understand many social institutions and interactions. According to Foucault (1979), “[t]he Panopticon... must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men” (p. 205). The panopticon can be used as a disciplinary strategy to control large populations within society with little to no actual punishment. Anyone can be an observing guard within the social panopticon through everyday interactions. Friends, family, acquaintances, strangers, and even media representations can all become observing guards. Foucault (1979) describes how within society, power can be exercised by anyone and everyone, even people who have power imposed on them can also impose power on others, because we are all active participants within society.

Some women self-surveil to judge their own embodiment in relation to the ideal embodiment of others within day-to-day interactions. Powell et al. (2006) argue that individuals become objects of their own gaze in order to participate in body projects such as exercise and cosmetic use. This pushes them to commit to their physical training and/or beauty regimes to achieve the ‘norm’ within dominant discourse. For example, with respect to aging, Hvas & Gannik (2008b) argue when an aging woman understands herself and takes herself up through a discourse, she positions herself as a subject within that discourse, thus, disciplining herself within the roles and stereotypes of the discourse. By accepting a role through self-surveillance, stereotypes around normative behaviour become reinforced. Poole (2001) argues that some aging women internalize and normalize “discourses that female bodies should be taut, slim, and youthful looking” (p. 307). How is the subject affected when this discourse is internalized and normalized?

Winterich (2007) suggests that

A main constraint for those who have internalized the belief that their self-worth is based on their bodies' appearances is that they spend more time and money complying with ageist standards...They [do] not seem to question cultural standards about femininity; they characterized weight gain as an individual failure and gray hair as something to hide, rather than unreasonable standards. (p. 65)

Subjects are influenced and affected by discourse through internalization of social expectations and norms. If subjects do not fit into this narrow discourse they may use self-surveillance to compare themselves to the social norm, and in the process come to understand themselves as deviant or other.

Self-surveillance as described by the metaphor of the panopticon reproduces discourse through social institutions including the media. The consequences of representation within popular media become a significant concern. This is why my research project will be structured within a discursive theoretical approach which focuses on the consequences of representation. Specifically, Hall (1997a) explains that a discourse analysis, "examines... how the knowledge that a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines that way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied" (p. 6). Some discourses are produced as legitimate through popular media representations while others are marginalized. This is significant because discourse regulates conduct and reflects social normalization. Helstein (2002) states that "given the power of representations to communicate, legitimate, and reify certain types of knowledge and identity, representations are significant texts that need to be explored for their politics" (p. 38). The way aging women are represented within popular media may

impact the way they view themselves, their abilities, and thus their physical activity involvement.

### Social Constructions of Aging

A number of social constructions of aging are perpetuated in popular discourse including aging as physical and mental decline, as a problem to be managed, and as a drain on society. These popular social constructions of aging have been examined within academic literature. Social constructions of aging influence both women and men and influence them at all stages in their lives because aging is an ongoing process that cannot be avoided except by death. In the pages to follow I will briefly highlight these social constructions of aging, which previous academic literature has identified as circulating with regularity in society.

#### *Aging as Physical and Mental Decline*

McGoran (1995) argues that as a person ages there is an assumption that physical and mental decline are unavoidable and that therefore independence must be lost with aging. Jamieson (2006) discusses how aging carries cultural dread because aging is associated with physical decomposition, frailty, weakness, death, and loss of identity. Similarly, according to Clarke & Griffin (2008), “[a]geist stereotypes depict later life as a time fraught with physical, financial, and social dependency, loss of mental acuity, senility, personal inflexibility, asexuality, impotency, and unhappiness” (p. 654). Vertinsky & Cousins (2007) also describe how the perception of an inevitable physical decline due to aging, suggests a withdrawal into dependence and passivity. Powell et al. (2006) argue that “[t]he characteristics of biological aging as associated with loss of skin

elasticity, wrinkled skin, hair loss or physical frailty perpetuates powerful assumptions that help facilitate attitudes and perceptions of aging” (p. 10).

Dionigi (2006) argues that biological decline and disability are common images of aging populations. The social construction of aging as disability is a popular stereotype through which people feel that disability and aging go hand-in-hand. According to Vertinsky (1994), “although old women might be in perfect health, old age alone signified disability” (p. 98). Zitzelsberger (2008) describes how disability is often viewed as an inevitable consequence of aging and is frequently stereotyped as expected and anticipated. This anticipation of disability may leave some people feeling helpless and as though they are not part of the normative body. Vertinsky (1994) discusses how “[a]dvanced old age, which had earlier been regarded as a manifestation of survival of the fittest was now denigrated as a condition of dependency and deterioration...” (p. 96). Dumas & Turner (2006) argue that aging bodies are represented as a problem within society’s standards of a normal functioning body. However, as McGoran (1995) argues, physical decline and disability are myths that are not inevitably linked to aging. “While it is true that chronic disease and moderate-severe disability are more common after mid-70s decline in muscle strength and exercise capacity is not an inevitable part of aging” (p. 40).

The perception of aging individuals as lacking in mental and physical ability perpetuates stereotypes faced by seniors, circulates through popular media representations, and reflects “aged” citizens as unable to participate in day-to-day activities. However, this stereotype may only be true for the minority of the aging population. Powell et al. (2006) describe how these powerful assumptions can

homogenize disempowering experiences as natural and universal. This social construction of aging discriminates against aging populations and can contribute to the internalization of passivity under the assumption that it is inevitable. McGoran (1995) argues that the assumption that mental and physical decline is inevitable is largely a myth. For example, she uses the case of memory loss because it occurs throughout life stages, not just when someone is “aged”. Memory loss can be associated with social factors, rather than just physiological and mental decline. According to McGoran (1995), “[b]rain function can be maintained and improved by continued learning and mental activity” (p. 40). Mental learning and development can occur at any age and life stage.

#### *Aging as a Problem to be Managed*

The social construction of aging as a problem to be managed can be seen as a direct result of medical institutions and has been reproduced through medical terminology. According to Dumas & Turner (2006), “[i]t is when medicine started to treat disease as a series of symptoms that the ‘aged body’ became a symbol of differentiation from other age groups and a problem for science and society” (p. 148). Aging is portrayed as unnatural and therefore a problem to be managed, even though aging is inevitable and natural. Medicine and the medical field may be associated with treatments for aging and possible preventions of the aging “problem”. The medical field reinforces and encourages treatments, both safe and dangerous, to ward off the “problem” of the aging body. Aging as a problem to be managed can also be reinforced/reproduced through popular media representations.

Medical knowledge and terminology have historically understood aging as a problem within society and now popular media are also portraying aging as a problem.

Dumas & Turner (2006) discuss how past academic research found that through discursive practices, aging bodies are negatively constructed, and therefore the aging body is a social ‘problem’. Media representations (including those within movies, commercials, advertisements, and television) are one such area of social life. Media reproduces and reinforces aging as a problem to be managed and avoided due to negative repercussions and negative stereotypes. “Aged” women are often seen in movies as physically unattractive, dependent, and/or evil characters (Dumas & Turner, 2006). Older women are dominantly viewed in commercials for products such as *Depends* (adult diapers), hair-dyeing products (to hide grey hair), anti-wrinkle creams, calcium supplements for osteoporosis prevention, and more general disease prevention medications. Senior women are not commonly portrayed as healthy, happy and/or attractive within popular media representations. This may lead to a re/production of the necessity of capturing women’s youth and warding off aging through consumption.

Seeing the aging body as a problem to be managed is very apparent within our modern consumer-driven economy. Finkelstein (1991) argues that a social goal within our culture is transforming the body into a commodity. Managing the problem of aging is thought to be achieved through consuming products to treat or prevent unwanted aging processes. Consumption can be seen as a strategy to ‘control’ the problem of aging through buying beauty products, anti-aging products, and elective surgeries. Health is misconceived as associated with physical appearance and youth, therefore consuming age-preventing products can be seen as “good” for one’s health despite possible health risks, dangers and even fatality.

### *Aging as a Drain on Society*

In western culture privilege is given to youth because youthfulness is seen as the only way to contribute to society and to be a productive citizen. Sontag (2004) argues that within a North American perspective “[t]he revaluation of the life cycle in favour of the young brilliantly serves a secular society whose idols are ever-increasing industrial productivity...” (p. 270). Vertinsky (1994) describes how in the past there was a perception that “[t]he old must therefore be treated differently from the young for they were now viewed as less likely to be productive, creative or agile as they aged (Quetelet, 1842)” (p. 96). Within western society, elderly women and men are viewed as a drain on society because they do not directly contribute to the economy and in fact are seen as an economic liability. van Norman (1995) asserts that the stereotype of aging populations as a drain on society is due to the perception of them as a burden on the health and social welfare systems due to a loss of productivity and independence. The perception of aging individuals as inescapably becoming a burden on the healthcare system is not based on reality and is disempowering for all ages. According to Vertinsky (1994), conceptions around aging in the nineteenth century were influenced by “the machine paradigm and the idea that an old and less efficient apparatus was of little use to society (Bazaar, 1907)” (p. 88). The social construction of aging as a drain on society is mainly seen as an economic drain due to the professional retirement of “aged” citizens. Elderly populations contribute to society in many different ways, such as volunteer work and child care of grandchildren, but these tasks are not seen as important in our highly competitive globalized economy. McGoran (1995) argues that seniors can be more productive than their younger counterparts due to their contributions of knowledge, experience and skills.

## Gender and Aging

Social constructions of aging as physical and mental decline, as a problem to be managed, and as a drain on society impact both men and women, in the paragraphs to follow I will briefly highlight how women are impacted differently than men by dominant social constructions of aging. Vertinsky (1994) argues that “until very recently, although many social historians have focused upon the experiences of ageing white men, ageing women have been neglected by establishment scholars and feminists alike” (p. 89). This leads to aging and ageism being described in masculine terms and through masculine experiences rather than general terms and experiences, and sometimes altogether forgetting about women. Some recent academic literature such as Shoebriidge & Steed (1999), Hvas & Gannik (2008), Poole (2001), Winterich (2007), and Singer & Hunter (1999) specifically examine and explore women’s experiences of aging. Howson (2005) argues that women’s knowledge can be viewed as challenging medical and traditional knowledge because women’s embodiment and experiences are not seen as authoritative or normative and thus have too often been dismissed.

### *Social Construction of Gender*

In order to examine how women are impacted differently than men by social constructions of aging it is necessary to explore how gender is socially constructed and reproduced through day-to-day interactions. Gender and gender roles influence the social climate in which an individual lives based on cultural assumptions around biology. Parker & White (2007) state that “[i]n this view, nature interacts with nurture to define a person’s identity and social role. Sex is, thus, inextricably linked to gender because of the discourses and discursive practices that are premised in society around both sex and

gender” (p. 9). Discursive practices interact with gender and gender expectations and shape how gender is viewed and normalized. According to Butler (1997), gender can be viewed as the performance and embodiment of acceptable acts. Gender often refers to bodies and what they do. Bodies are expected to perform through normative gender acts within day to day activities. Giddens (1997) argues that “[a]ccording to theories of social construction ‘differences in the behaviour of men and women develop mainly through the social learning of male and female identities of masculinity and femininity’”(p. 91).

Gender is not a natural occurrence because gender norms depend on societal expectations and cultural practices. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) argue that

[a]lthough there is a tendency to examine bodies and think of them as ‘natural’, it is vital to recall that what you are viewing is not wholly natural but is a social *effect* of cumulative purchases, internalized cultural norms, interactions with others, and social practices. (p. 15)

West & Zimmerman (1987) discuss how individuals in society “do gender” through socially acceptable performances and roles,

‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’. (p. 126)

According to West & Zimmerman (1987), acknowledging the “doing” of gender within society is significant because “[w]hen we view gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas” (p. 126).

Gender norms of masculinity and femininity are learned through a lifetime of socialization created by social institutions such as family, schools, sport, and media.

According to West & Zimmerman (1987), “[d]oing gender means creating differences

between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (p. 137). Gendered embodiment is socialized into children at a very young age. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) argue that toys influence gender socialization of children and expectations around masculine and feminine norms. GI Joe and Barbie can be viewed as idealized, yet unattainable gender ideals that may influence the way children view themselves and, thus, their performance of social roles. Social roles and acts have been performed since childhood when children are rewarded for acceptable gender behaviour. Butler (1997) discusses how individuals act their gender through performing what is expected of them. If someone does not act accordingly they are stigmatized as deviant. Acting one’s gender is socially sanctioned and reinforced through social interactions and social institutions. West & Zimmerman (1987) argue that “to ‘do’ gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at risk of gender assessment*” (p. 136).

Teaching an appropriate gendered embodiment at a young age produces bodies that are homogenous and stereotypical. Gender can be socially constructed through physical education by the exclusion of individuals from specific sports and activities as well as differing expectations based on gender. According to Petrie (2004),

It is commonly agreed by researchers that sport and physical education are powerful sites for the visible demonstration and social construction of male and female differences (Brown, 1999; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Scraton, 1992; Shilling, 1993; Talbot, 1993; and Wright, 1996) and are historically masculine institutions. (p. 30)

The social institution of sport/physical activity is traditionally and historically a masculine domain, thus situating women who participate in sport as deviant. Phrases such

as “throw like a girl” imply that girls cannot throw a ball or participate in masculine sports at the same level as males due to a natural inferiority. Stereotypical phrases can encourage girls to participate in passive feminine activities and discourage active masculine activities, such as sport. Young (1980) discusses how activities such as throwing are gendered and socially constructed. According to Young (1980),

girls tend to remain relatively immobile except for their arms, and even the arm is not extended as far as it could be. Throwing is not the only movement in which there is a typical difference in the way men and women use their bodies. (p. 142)

This difference in physical skill and technique is not just a biological difference, but rather a cultural difference. Young (1980) states that

girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys to develop specific bodily skills (Duquin, 1977). Girls’ play is often more sedentary and enclosing than the play of boys. In school and after school activity girls are not encouraged to engage in sport, in the controlled use of their bodies in achieving well-defined goals. (p. 152)

Many female athletes are ruled out as feminine due to muscular body types and their use of too much space with their body movements. While such body types and actions are necessary within sport to be a successful athlete they are perceived as masculine. Some female athletes may be too aggressive and assertive to be seen as feminine because femininity is traditionally linked with passivity. Helstein (2007) argues that

Conventionally, one looks at a passive, gentle, pretty, white woman and says, “she is feminine” and thinks or knows that this is a legitimate statement. If one, however, looks at a very strong, muscular, female body builder, for example, and says, “she is feminine,” the statement does not make sense. It is unintelligible to say that such a woman is feminine because a discourse of normative femininity (like all discourse) is ‘a particular vocabulary and grammar that permits the making of choices only within its own rules. It decides what can and cannot be said, done, or represented’ (Miller, 1993, p. xiv). (p. 83)

Butler (1997) argues that gender is not a natural occurrence, it is a historic consequence based on patriarchy that positions women`s bodies as unnatural, inferior, and unacceptable. With that being said few resistant bodies are produced because not only is gender socialization introduced at a young age, but also because of the pervasiveness and significance of gender hierarchies. Winterich (2007) discusses how “[h]egemonic masculinity is linked with power, while femininity is subordinate to masculinity” (p. 54). The femininity that is most valued in our society is seen as subordinate to and in opposition to masculinity. Young (1980) describes how “[w]omen in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns to us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified” (p. 152). Women are expected to reproduce the norm of sexually attractive, toned, thin bodies by engaging in body work and body improvement. Winterich (2007) argues that ideal femininity is an attractive, thin, young, heterosexual, white, middle-class female body. If your body does not fit into this narrow culturally normative stereotype you are viewed as masculine, due to the perceived dichotomy of gender. Beauty is described in feminine terms and in order to be viewed as beautiful you must possess a feminine embodiment. This patriarchal hierarchy is upheld through the exclusion of deviants within the reinforcement of gender norms. If one does not fit into the narrow category for gender one is not perceived as the norm and her sexuality is called into question.

Complex bodies are interpreted through embodiment and what is deemed as morally acceptable bodies. Loon and Rockwell (2001) define embodiment as “the active incorporation and reorganization of habituated experiences carried out in speech,

movement, thought and feeling, that guides and remembers human activity” (p. 41).

Bodies are commonly considered a site for individual representation and interpretation of the authentic identity (Burnett & Holmes, 2001), but bodies do not objectively reflect individuals’ identities or personalities because bodies are socially constructed and subject to classification through gender hierarchies.

Within these gender ideals women are traditionally defined as mothers and caregivers and are viewed as “naturally” nurturing, through reproduction and the raising of children. If there is a young woman who does not wish to have children, there is the assumption that there is something wrong with her biologically and that she is a failure as a female (Howson, 2005). Mothering and care giving are viewed as selfless tasks that women should wholeheartedly fulfill without question. According to Dillaway (2006), childcare should be child-centered, immeasurable, and the primary responsibility of the mother. The “good” mother is selfless and all-giving and only cares about others, rather than herself. If a mother cannot successfully nurture and raise children she is seen as defective. Women’s subject positions are disadvantaged due to the conception that mothering is a selfless priority, where all the energy is given to the offspring rather than women themselves being the priority. Viewing women only as mothers and caregivers leads to gender hierarchies where women are disadvantaged due to their traditionally “selfless” roles and priorities. Singer & Hunter (1999) argue that women tend to be viewed as worthless as they age because they are no longer able to reproduce. In summary, femininity is socially constructed and narrowly defined and most women cannot fit into narrow classifications that hold up the gender hierarchy where women are subordinate (Parker & White, 2007).

### *Gendered Constructions of Aging*

The expectations produced by binary gender hierarchies frame aging women as useless failures, problems to be managed, and abnormal/other to normative femininity. I will now discuss each of these social constructions of aging that are specific to women and the possible repercussions and consequences of each. Vertinsky (1994) argues that “[f]or a woman, the physical stigma of ageing were often seen not only as the harbinger of infertility but also the end of social usefulness” (p. 88).

#### *Aging women as useless failures.*

Aging women may be viewed as failures due to the perceived circumstances and consequences of menopause. Gannon (1999) discusses how menopause is viewed as a disease or medical condition that is specific to females, even though men may go through similar physiological and hormonal changes after mid life. According to Vertinsky (1994), the biological process of menopause can be characterized by a loss or crisis “even though medical authorities could not help but observe that women often lived through it, lived longer than men and generally survived in better health than their elderly male counterparts” (p. 90). Menopause is perceived as a sign of old age due to the female body losing its crucial reproductive component. According to Singer and Hunter (1999), language that is used to describe menopause includes physiological regression, a failed system, and failure in genital organs. Vertinsky & Cousins (2007) discuss how the female “problem” is rooted in and begins with menopause because “[p]hysical decline, bodily and mental disorders, and diminished functions were all emphasized as the general characteristics of menopausal development (Currier, 1897)” (p. 158).

Representations of menopause are infused with disease and illness terminology, which produces women as patients (Gannon, 1999). Menopause is dominantly viewed as a disease or negative disorder and something that can be managed through medication, treatment and medicalization. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) discuss “the ways in which contemporary capitalist culture is infused with notions of ‘health’ and health promotion that reveal assumptions about normality, well-being, and morality (and are not necessarily healthy)” (p. 11). According to Riessman (2003), the process of medicalization refers to “medical practice becom[ing] a vehicle for eliminating and controlling problematic experiences that are defined as deviant, for the purpose of securing adherence to social norms” (p. 48). Hvas & Gannik (2008b) argue that the biomedical discourse reinforces menopause as a deficiency, thus constructing aging women as passive medical patients. Gannon (1999) discusses how dominant discourses that surround menopause reinforce stereotypes of aging women as physiological failures and as biologically useless. Stereotypes of menopause, such as these, can lead to the oppression of aging women due to socialization and normalization of gender hierarchies. Medical professionals can be viewed as holding the knowledge, truth, and power of aging, whereas women themselves feel powerless as they do not hold significant professional knowledge, truth or power (even though they are experiencing the natural process of aging). Some women may feel completely helpless and objectified through the medicalization of their “diseased” bodies.

The onset of menopause disrupts the construction of woman as primarily defined through reproduction and motherhood. Due to this disruption of the “mothering as

natural” discourse, menopausal women are reproduced as useless and against normative femininity. Vertinsky (1994) describes how

if the primary meaning of a woman’s life was achieved through maternity, then once her childbearing capacity was lost a woman’s world was characterized by a loss of meaning. Menopause meant an end to womanhood, an end to productive life and to primary sexual identity that was inextricably linked with motherhood. (p. 89)

Inevitable life cycle changes due to aging, such as menopause, are associated negatively with aging and reinforce the “uselessness” of an aging woman. Representations of the menopausal woman often portrayed a passage to becoming an ‘unperson’ (Vertinsky, 1994). There is a high value put on women’s reproductive capacity and when women experience menopause there is a perception that their social status is reflected in the portrayed failure of their bodies (Vertinsky, 1994). Menopause can be viewed as a physiological and psychological crisis that carries excessive stigma that is a result of failed motherhood (Singer & Hunter, 1999). Menopause, when viewed as a biological loss of estrogen and reproductive capability, situates woman as useless, incapable, and unfeminine (Gee & Kimball, 1987).

The negative menopausal discourse within Western culture primarily evokes fears around loss of social, cultural and sexual power (Singer & Hunter, 1999). The social construction of menopausal women as asexual, unfeminine, unproductive, and of little value often conflicts with women’s own experience of no outward mental or physical change (Singer & Hunter, 1999). Women’s own experiences of menopause may be completely different from discourses within media representations. According to Singer & Hunter (1999), the experience of menopause is based on individual experiences and

may be viewed as a positive stage in women's lives, a time when they are free from the inconvenience of menstruation and the burden of reproduction.

*Aging women as a problem to be managed.*

Ferraro et al. (2008) argue that women tend to lose status as they age due to the link between social status and physical appearance, beauty, and youthfulness. As a result aging women are viewed as failures whereas men tend to gain social and economic status and power as they age. According to McCormick (2008), value is placed on women who maintain youthful thin bodies which devalues and threatens aging women's health and wellbeing. The "forever young" discourse reinforces the notion that women should be pretty and youthful at any age and that this should be attained at any cost including cosmetics, plastic surgery, moisturizers, hair dye, and clothing (Hvas & Gannik, 2008b).

According to Poole (2001), the body has become a project where,

[i]n a commodity culture, individual lives have been personal projects revolving around lifestyles that can be bought in the marketplace. This is a culture in which individuals are constantly on display; we are both the watched and the watchers. The higher our approximation to idealized images of youth, beauty, fitness, and radiant health, the higher our exchange value in society. (p. 301)

Aging women may also be viewed as "letting go" of their bodies because the aging body is a problem to be managed through self-discipline and body projects (Poole, 2001).

Within media representations women's aging is often seen as a time when one's body is out of control and is, according to Perz & Ussher (2008), a "battle to be won" (p. 294).

Dworkin & Wachs (2009) describe how for globalized multi-national corporations

profit is sustained from continually developing new ideologies of 'body lack' for both men and women...[F]lesh or fat on the body has been framed as a signifier of excessiveness and being out of control, but it is also a particularly strong devaluation of the feminine, and is viewed as failed individual morality needing earthly discipline. (p. 107)

Women's bodies are perceived as "out of control" due to the physical appearance of aging which is in direct contradiction to normative femininity. Poole (2001) describes how "[s]igns of aging such as wrinkles, sagging flesh, bulging bodies, and gray hair are all signs of our bodies' betrayal" (p. 302). Many individuals, including doctors, believed that when a woman reached menopause she was no longer attractive, feminine and was virtually not a woman. According to Vertinsky (1994), "[p]ost-menopausal women were seen as ... highly masculinised (drooping breasts, sunken bones, fleshy skin, facial hair)" (p. 93). Anti-aging products are portrayed, within media representations, as an essential strategy to avoid the physical decline of aging and as a way to manage aging bodies at any financial or physical cost. Clarke & Griffin (2008) argue that "[t]he pervasive obsession with youthfulness and physical attractiveness in contemporary society has resulted in a proliferation of products and services that older adults, particularly women, are increasingly compelled to utilise" (p. 653).

*Aging women as other/abnormal.*

Aging women are represented as abnormal and "other" to normative femininity within popular media representations. Female athletes may be seen as deviant to normative femininity in a similar way as aging women. As described previously by Helstein (2007) female athletes and females participating in sport are viewed as "other" to normative femininity due to the physical appearance and state of their bodies. Dominant discourses of femininity are understood as true when a woman is passive and physically small. Athletic bodies are traditionally masculine and are constructed as being in direct contradiction to femininity. Strong female bodies are not viewed as complying with normative femininity, and therefore are seen as deviant and "other". Aging women

are judged by youthful beauty that is reinforced through media representations as the “norm” for women of all ages. If one is an aging woman (as all women are) who is unable to avoid the ‘decline’ of aging, one is seen as abnormal for not living up to society’s expectations of being a female (both in terms of beauty and reproduction). Winterich (2007) states that ideal femininity does not resemble “the ages and body sizes of a major part of the population’s” (p. 52). Most women’s identities are rooted in social constructions of femininity (in which youth and reproduction are central) and thus as they age they may be left to feel othered or deviant.

### Representation, Women, and Physical Activity/Sport

As I have previously stated, media representations are important because the media is a social institution that is very visible within our globalized market and which creates and reproduces dominant discourses and societal expectations. Representations of aging women are apparent within popular magazines, advertisements, television, movies, and more. There is little variation in media portrayals on aging women because they are stereotyped as “other” and oppressed within society. These representations often reinforce an undesirable, unattractive, and unfeminine image that is seen as avoidable through consumption. Media stereotypes that surround aging women include an emotional, mental and physical decline, despite the lack of medical evidence of such an aging “syndrome” (Singer & Hunter, 1999). Aging women may be viewed as useless and worthless due to these common misconceptions about female aging. Representations of aging women reinforce menopause as an illness to be feared and as a site of physical decay. Shoebridge and Steed (1999) analyzed women’s magazines in Australia for ten years and found that “[w]ith few exceptions, discourse about menopause drew on and

reinforced schemata of ill-health, psychological disturbance, vulnerability, decrepitude, biological determinism and discourse management” (p. 477). Shoebridge & Steed (1999) describe how many women had very little knowledge about menopause, but had expectations of ill-health. These negative expectations, despite the lack of knowledge about menopause, may be due to media discourse and the stigma attached. The dominant discourses that became apparent to Shoebridge and Steed (1999) may not accurately reflect women’s aging and their realistic experiences.

Dworkin & Wachs (2009) state “contemporary media produce body panic not only through idealized imagery that invokes individualized feelings about the body, but also through a process of what is included as content inside the media text” (p. 12). Dworkin & Wachs (2009) go on to describe how body panic is illustrated through “what signifiers are used- and what is, by extension, left out” (p. 12). Health magazines that create this ‘body panic’ by excluding certain body types reflect these bodies as abnormal and unhealthy. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) argue

processes of inclusion and exclusion within media frames and processes of blame obscure the relationship between gendered bodily practices and health. That is, what is being sold or promoted within the health and fitness industry is not necessarily a healthy body, but a body that looks and enacts gendered ‘health’ through sufficiently gendered signifiers. (p. 174)

Within popular media representations, aging women are often excluded from normative femininity and are therefore unhealthy. This is problematic because some ‘aged’ women are very healthy and active. Normative ‘healthy’ gendered bodies are perceived as natural and can be achieved through consuming products. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) discuss how

consumption is vital to understanding ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ bodily ideals because advertisements, dominant cultural trends, and contemporary health and fitness practices merge to form the popular assumption that fitness ideals ‘speak to all’ while quietly and inevitably including some bodies and excluding others.

Once gendered ideologies are internalized, the resultant sexed body frequently gets tagged as 'natural'. (p. 10)

Gendered ideals and normative bodies within media representations create a feeling of 'lack' within individuals who do not possess the normal body. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) describe how advertising produces a 'culture of lack' and provides the necessary solution through the consumption of products to fulfill the body lack.

According to Winterich (2007), "media play a central role in distributing an ageist ideal of femininity and beauty through their over-representation of young women. These images normalize cultural ideas about attractiveness based on young, white, thin, heterosexual, middle-class bodies" (p. 51). In a study by Dennerstein (1996), two thousand middle-aged women reported that they felt confident, useful, clear headed, and optimistic. These discourses resist and contradict dominant discourses of aging women as dependent, frail, weak, and in mental and physical decline. While a growing body of literature examines representations of aging, there is little academic literature that examines representations of aging women specifically within health, fitness, or sport magazines. However, there is a significant body of literature on representations of women generally in health/ fitness and sport magazines.

Sport sociology literature primarily focuses on representations of active women, with little or no focus on aging. Many sport and fitness representations portray female athletes in passive, sexual, infantilized, heterosexual poses (Robinson, 2002; Bernstein, 2005; Knight & Giuliano, 2003). An example of this is professional tennis player Anna Kournikova. She is perceived as the tennis-pinup girl due to her looks rather than her tennis skill and athletic ability (Berstein, 2005). Camera angles, commentary, body positioning, and facial expressions represent a dominant discourse that reinforces women

as passive and feminine even though they may challenge traditional femininity through their sport involvement. Women are often portrayed as toned, not muscular, and as sexy and feminine, not strong and athletic. When pictures of women do not conform to the discursive norm they are understood as deviant, and the women's femininity and thus sexuality are called into question. Some argue that for many women, physical activity is widely seen as a means to achieve a sexy, feminine body type, rather than as part of a healthy lifestyle. These messages are apparent within health and fitness magazines. According to Markula (2001), popular media representations construct women's ideal health and beauty as unrealistic and unattainable for the average women. This is due to the narrow classification of normative femininity and its associated body type that most women do not fit. Markula (2001) states that "[r]esearch on this oppressive discourse (Duncan, 1994; Eskes, Duncan, & Miller, 1998; Markula, 1995) suggests that the magazines are founded on the premise of providing exercise and diet advice for women who struggle to achieve this unattainable body" (p. 159). In summary, images of unachievable idealized femininity are displayed as the norm within media representations and when this norm is not reached women are positioned as failures and deviant from dominant discourse.

While there is little academic literature on representations of aging within sport/fitness magazines, there is some literature which highlights how Masters level female athletes might help to resist dominant discourses of aging. Vertinsky & Cousins (2007) describe how people were shocked to hear that Ivy Granstron was a top finisher for the Vancouver Sun Run, even though she was over eighty years of age and legally

blind. Granstron's physical ability and athleticism can be seen as resistance to dominant discourses of aging women and their abilities. Vertinsky & Cousins (2007) argue that

[t]hese portrayals of fitness, vigour, and sporting behaviour shown by female and male elders alike contradict the persistent and all too common belief that aging is essentially an unavoidable process of physical decline requiring withdrawal into sedentary habits, passivity, and dependence. (p.155)

Vertinsky and Cousins (2007) suggest that Masters level female athletes are not represented in popular media, such as television shows, movies, and women's fitness and health magazines, and consequently do not challenge the dominant discourses within popular media of health, women, and aging.

It is necessary to acknowledge the one study which most closely resembles the research I will undertake. Barnett (2007) presented a conference paper on *More* magazine, which is a health magazine targeted toward middle-aged women. Barnett (2007) examined, through a textual analysis, how a magazine that is targeted to women over forty frames aging, health and femininity. Barnett (2007) found that there were mixed messages between the textual articles and the pictures. The text of the magazine discussed how to challenge stereotypes of aging for women, while the pictures reflected pictures of young women, blurred bodies and faces, or detached body parts. Within *More* magazine Barnett (2007) found that aging women's experiences and lives were central to the magazine's focus and that traditional medical knowledge can and should be challenged. This is a significant piece of research in an area that is largely unstudied. I hope to add valuable knowledge and insight to this small body of research through my thesis work.

Specifically, I would like to take this research a step further and examine how aging is discussed and represented in *Women's Health*, a magazine directed at all ages,

because stereotypes of aging influence women before they are ‘aged’. In conducting a discursive textual analysis of *Women’s Health* I aim to address questions such as: how is aging being represented to women of all ages interested in health and fitness? Within a fitness and health magazine, do we see similar gendered constructions of aging as those identified within the academic research I have described? How does the magazine function in terms of how aging is framed in relation to women and health? This research is significant because popular media representations reinforce truth and legitimacy of some discourses while marginalizing others. If we can pinpoint the dominant discourses of aging, normative femininity, and health/fitness that are being portrayed to women, we may be able to challenge and resist discourses that alienate aging women from the norm. Resisting dominant discourses related to aging in a women’s health magazine is important because discourses that appear with regularity may impact the way women feel about themselves, their physical appearance, their abilities, and their physical activity involvement.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Methodological Framework**

#### Poststructural Theoretical Framework

My methodology is positioned within a poststructural theoretical framework. Therefore, before speaking specifically to my methodology I must briefly explain the basic tenants of postructuralism that are significant to my understanding and methodological use of representation and discourse analysis. Poststructuralism can be difficult to define but there are common fundamental assumptions that poststructuralists share. According to Weedon (1992), “while different forms of poststructuralism vary both in their practice and in their political implications, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity” (p. 20). Weedon (1992) argues that within poststructuralism, language constitutes social reality rather than just reflecting an already existing reality. Poststructuralism challenges the epistemological assumptions of modernity because it highlights the impossible nature of concrete truth and general all encompassing knowledge (Weedon, 1992). According to Usher & Edwards (1994),

The epistemological stance which sees scientific method as producing value-free and therefore ‘true’ knowledge is no longer so readily accepted. There is an increasing recognition that all knowledge-claims are partial, local and specific rather than universal and ahistorical, and that they are always imbued with power and normative interests. (p. 10)

The epistemology that knowledge is partial and local is supported by differing social subject positions, changing norms, beliefs, and cultural expectations that allow for a shift in knowledge through discourse (Weeden, 1992).

### *Language within Poststructuralism*

Weedon (1992) describes how “[f]or poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is language” (p. 21). According to Weedon (1992), the founding insight of poststructuralism is that “language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us. Neither social reality nor the ‘natural’ world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses” (p. 22). Language is particularly important because it can be understood as competing discourses that imply differences of social power (Weedon, 1992). Discourse allows us to communicate and make-sense of social knowledge and meaning. According to Hall (2001), for poststructuralist theory discourse is not only about language, it is also about practice. What one does is equally important to what one says within discourse.

### *Meaning within Poststructuralism*

According to Hall (1997a), creating meaning is an essential part of socialization because “[m]eanings... regulate and organize our conduct and practices—they help to set the rules, norms, and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed” (p. 4). According to poststructuralist thinking, meaning is not reflected by language rather it is produced within language and therefore “language [is] social and a site of political struggle” (Weedon, 1992, p. 23). Language helps create social norms, practices, and customs within a specific moment in time. Weedon (1992) describes how “individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meaning through the language chain and their difference within it from other signs” (p. 23).

Social meanings can change with changing language acts, which is politically important because as meanings change social subjects are influenced differently by norms and expectations. Therefore meaningful things and practices are constructed through discourse, rather than discourse simply reflecting true meanings. Some critics of poststructuralism argue that such claims deny materiality. Poststructural theorists argue that things do have a material existence, but this existence only has meaning through discourse. For example, Foucault (1972) argues that things do have real, physical, and material existence in the world, but that these things do not have subjective meaning outside discourse. Hall (1997a) describes how meaning is “constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part” (p. 3). Within everyday interactions and communication, meaning is created and reproduced. Hall (2001) also argues that these meanings are reproduced through mass media, communication, and complex technologies on a world wide scale.

Weedon (1992) argues that discursive meaning is not guaranteed by the subject or the subject’s intended meaning. Poststructuralist meaning is dependent on discursive formations and subject positions within discourse. Different objects are interpreted as ‘true’ and meaningful depending on the subject position of oneself within dominant discourse, therefore the intended meaning of the object may not be the same as the interpreted meaning. Meanings are dependent on subject positions and discursive rules/norms and therefore may change over time. Hall (2001) explains that

it is discourse, not the subjects who speak it, which produces knowledge. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of the *episteme*, the *discursive formation*, [and] the *regime of truth*, of a particular period and culture. (p. 79)

If someone describes a discourse that is not within the regime of truth, the discourse is not interpreted or believed to be truthful and will not make sense to other subjects.

Therefore the subject alone does not create the discourse.

### *The Subject within Poststructuralism*

The discursive subject is central to poststructural thinking because, according to Weedon (1992), discourse can only have significance and a social effect “in and through the actions of the individuals who become its bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposes and acting upon them” (p. 34). Subjects are important factors within poststructuralism because subjects are created through discourse and discursive formations, consequently reinforcing dominant discourse. Hall (2001) discusses how the

subject *of* discourse cannot be outside discourse, because it must be subjected to discourse. It must submit to its rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge. The subject can become the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produce. (p. 79)

Subjects begin to understand themselves, as well as others, as discursive subject positions through discourse. Within social reality we cannot understand ourselves outside discourse because discursive subject positions do not exist outside discursive language and meaning. Hall (2001) describes how “we-must locate themselves/ourselves in the position from which the discourse makes most sense, and thus become its ‘subjects’ by ‘subjecting’ ourselves to its meaning, power, and regulation. All discourses, then, construct subject-positions, from which alone they make sense” (p. 80). Discursive subjects position themselves within discursive norms and regimes of truths as either normative or deviant. Language, meaning, and discursive subject positions are all

understood in a particular way through poststructuralism and can be examined through popular media representations.

### Poststructuralism and Representation

Conceptions of language, meaning, and subjects within poststructuralism are significant to my understanding and use of representations. Usher & Edwards (1994) argue that “[p]oststructuralism goes beyond anti-realism. It questions representation and the underlying belief of a reality that is independent of representation yet capturable by it” (p. 14). Representation is an important aspect of our increasingly commercialized western culture and shapes how subjects understand themselves and how they conduct their own behaviour within a broader macro-level society. Usher & Edwards (1994) suggest that within poststructural theorizing “representation is not a neutral process, that there is a politics of representation...” (p. 15). Norms and societal expectations are reproduced and reinforced through media representations. We may compare ourselves to representations of normative subjects and adjust our own behaviour and subject positions to fit the norm. What counts as normative subjects within representation are re/produced through discourse and discursive practices and are therefore political.

Following Stuart Hall (1997b) I define representation as “the production of meaning through language” (p. 16). There are different theories of representation based on different understandings of language and meaning. A reflective approach to representation theorizes that language reflects an already existing meaning. An intentional approach to representation argues that language expresses only the meaning intended by the speaker. Finally, a constructionist approach to representation argues that meaning is constructed in and through discourse/language (Hall, 1997b). In the

paragraphs to follow I will briefly elaborate on each of these approaches to understanding representation.

### *Reflective Approach to Representation*

A reflective approach to representation theorizes that a ‘truthful’ meaning of an object is directly mirrored through language (Hall, 1997b). Hall (1997b) describes how within a reflective approach to representation “meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world” (p. 24). According to Hall (1997b), within a reflective approach to representation, language is thought to reflect and imitate a ‘true’ fixed meaning that already exists in the natural world, not a subjective interpretation of a sign. The theory of reflective representation is problematic because codes and conventions of language are necessary for representation to reflect a socially meaningful object (Hall, 1997b). There is a relationship between a representational sign and the object it represents, but language may not directly reflect meaning. The meanings behind objects/events/subjects are based on the symbolic function of the sign and how it signifies/conveys meaning (Hall, 1997b). Some physical objects have differing meanings in different cultures based on cultural norms and beliefs that surround the sign’s symbolic function and therefore cultural meaning.

### *Intentional Approach to Representation*

According to Hall (1997b), an intentional approach to representation argues that the speaker or subject imposes meaning through the language they use. The intended message and meanings are imposed upon subjects from the speaker. Words, within language, mean what the author wants them to mean and are correctly reflected to the

subject they are speaking to. An intentional approach to representation is flawed because language is shared publicly within society and personal intent can be concealed privately. Rules and conventions of language need to be shared in order to communicate through representation and these may not reflect personal intent or meaning (Hall, 1997b).

A critique of an intentional approach to representation can be further explained by the encoding and decoding of media representations. Jhally (1989) argues that encoding involves using codes (social, cultural, and political) to produce a meaningful discourse within representations, and decoding takes place to make sense of these representations within certain social conditions and environments. According to Hall (2000), “[b]efore [a] message can have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’ or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded” (p. 53). The decoding is what produces and reinforces meaning through representations. The intent of the code is not always the same as the decoded message. Individual decoding of a media message will be dependent on consumers own social, economic and political environment.

#### *Constructionist Approach to Representation*

According to Hall (1997c), “[l]ater developments have recognized the necessarily interpretive nature of culture and the fact that interpretations never produce a final moment of absolute truth. Instead, interpretations are always followed by other interpretations, in an endless chain” (p. 42). Hall (1997b) argues that “[r]epresentation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” (p. 15). Representation is essential within our culture and is part of the practice by which meaning is produced and reproduced (Hall, 1997b). A

constructionist approach to representation theorizes that language has public and social characteristics (Hall, 1997b). Hall (1997b) describes how “[i]t acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language... we *construct* meaning, using representational systems-concepts and signs” (p. 25). According to Weedon (1992), “[t]he idea that physical things and actions exist, but *they* take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse, is at the heart of the constructionist theory of meaning and representation” (p. 73). A constructionist approach to representation theorizes that the material world does exist, and that signs and representations may have a physical/material dimension, but that there is a social aspect to language that we use to construct meaning through that representation (Hall, 1997b). Poststructuralist concepts of language, meaning, and the subject, as stated previously, are consistent with a constructionist approach to representation and with this in mind, I will focus on the constructionist approach to representation based in a Foucaultian discourse analysis.

#### Foucaultian Discourse Analysis

I have chosen a Foucaultian discourse analysis because it is consistent with the poststructural/constructionist view of representation I described in the previous section. A Foucaultian discourse analysis is important because it examines how social institutions and dominant discourses are creating power, knowledge, and truth through subjects and social hierarchies (Pennycook, 1994). I undertook a Foucaultian discourse analysis because I aim to investigate what discourses are appearing with regularity within a specific moment in time and how discourses of aging women influence knowledge, truth, and power. Foucaultian discourse analysis looks to “a multiplicity of social, cultural,

political, economic, technical, or theoretical conditions of possibility for the emergence of discourses” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 128). Within my discourse analysis I will not inscribe intent of the discourse nor the social institution that it appears within. Pennycook (1994) discusses how a Foucaultian discourse analysis “avoids an ontological or teleological search for an ultimate determinant such as class, or relations of production” (p. 128). A Foucaultian discourse analysis instead looks at the power relations that are created by particular discursive practices. I am interested in power relations that are created through aging discourses within *Women’s Health* magazine and how this creates political effects for aging women.

#### *Data Collection*

I critically examined a twelve month subscription (2009/2010) of *Women’s Health* magazine. I chose *Women’s Health* magazine because it is targeted to women of all ages, fitness abilities and lifestyles in an effort to provide the average women with a wide range of advice about healthy living. *Women’s Health* states that,

Women’s Health is for the woman who wants to reach a healthy, attractive weight but doesn’t equate that with having thighs the size of toothpicks. We know that exercising and eating well will make you happier and stronger (even if after-work runs can really suck). That looking and feeling good have very little to do with cosmetics and high heels (though they can help you feel glamorous on a Saturday night). And that life can be stressful since there’s never enough time, but balance is achievable (with a little help). (Women’s Health, 2008)

*Women’s Health* describes the magazine as a way for women to improve their lives through balance, fitness/health advice, nutritional tips, and inspiring stories.

I critically examined *Women’s Health* magazine beginning with the March 2009 issue and ending with the February 2010 issue. By analyzing the most recent issues of *Women’s Health* magazine I was able to recognize which discourses are dominant within

media representations at this specific moment in time. This provided me with the most current discourses for my research on aging women within a health magazine. A full year subscription reflects all seasons, special occasion, holidays, and monthly trends that may be significant to my research and supplied me with sufficient data to examine which discourses are appearing with regularity.

### *Data Analysis*

I flagged all pages that draw upon discourses of aging. Within the flagged page, I highlighted the statements that pertain to aging women and health/fitness practices. I am examining which discourses of aging women are portrayed through articles and advertisements within both text and pictures. When I have thoroughly examined the one year subscription of *Women's Health* magazine front cover to back page, I will attempt to answer the following questions: Does *Women's Health* magazine reveal the same discourses that are highlighted as dominant within the academic literature?; Does *Women's Health* magazine resist dominant discourses of aging or reproduce these discourses? My analysis revealed if dominant discourses of women and aging were detectable or if alternative resistant discourses were evident within the popular media institution of *Women's Health* magazine.

According to Hall (2001), Foucaultian discourse analysis includes the analysis of six basic elements. First, Hall (2001) argues that discursive statements provide a specific type of knowledge and understanding about things. Second, there are rules that are prescribed within discourse that include and exclude ways of talking about things. Third, discourse produces a number of different subject positions through which a subject may come to understand themselves (Hall, 2001). Normative and deviant subject positions are

produced through discursive statements and rules. These subject positions have anticipated and expected ways of behaving that are constructed through the discursive knowledge. Fourth, there is authority within the knowledge produced by a discourse in a specific moment in time, due to the assumption of that knowledge is 'truth' (Hall, 2001). Fifth, there are normative practices within social institutions that deal with discursive subjects in different ways based on normative and deviant subject positions. For example, there are particular, socially acceptable, medical treatments for subject positions such as the ill and diseased. Last, discourses are constantly changing and new discourse will arise in a different period of time, thus, creating new 'knowledge', 'truths', 'authority', and 'subjects'. Shifting social discourse over time will regulate social conduct in different ways based on the understandings and social norms of that discourse (Hall, 2001).

*Discursive statements.*

With these elements in mind, I began my analysis by identifying general statements, through words and images, within *Women's Health* magazine. I will reveal how general statements around aging women and health/fitness are portrayed through words/texts and images within *Women's Health* magazine because words, texts, and images all say something culturally significant about aging and women. The images, texts, and discursive unsaid assumptions are all important to examine and analyze because they all reflect dominant social messages, norms, and expectations. All discursive statements (including pictures) say something important about aging women within *Women's Health*. Discursive statements that consistently occur may become dominant discourses and may produce/reproduce norms and expectations. General

statements that occur with regularity within *Women's Health* will be noted and in a later stage of the discourse analysis, examined.

*Discursive rules.*

Statements within dominant discourses around aging women prescribe a set of rules which include and exclude ways of talking about aging, health, and gender. These rules guide how we understand discourse and how we make sense of that discourse as true. Hall (2001) discusses how

[j]ust as discourse 'rules in' certain ways of talking about a topic, defining as acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write, or conduct oneself, so also, by definition, it 'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic of constructing knowledge about it. (p. 72)

My next step within the discursive analysis was to examine what is ruled in as acceptable and what is ruled out as unintelligible to discuss within *Women's Health* in relation to aging. Possible rules around women and aging within media representations may reinforce that aging can be avoided through cosmetics, anti-aging products, wrinkle cream, hair dye, plastic surgery, and fitness routines. I analyzed how aging women are excluded or included from dominant discourses of aging, health and fitness.

*Discursive subjects.*

In having examined *Women's Health* magazine and through identifying statements that appear with regularity and the rules which frame the knowledge of aging, gender and health, I analyzed what subject positions are produced within the discourses. I then examined what subject positions are normative or deviant within *Women's Health*. If a subject position is ruled out through discourse it is excluded from the norm and has certain social and political implications (Hall, 1997b). I am interested in whether popular portrayals of the discursive subject position of the aging woman, within *Women's Health*

magazine, reinforce/reproduce or resist the dominant discourses which were identified by the existing academic literature.

*Discursive authority.*

Subject positions are accepted due to the knowledge, power and authority of those who can speak to the discourse and be seen as a professional within the field of study.

The next step within my analysis will be to identify which subject positions have been set up as normal, which are deviant/other, and whose voices have been given authority within discursive statements and rules. Is discursive authority given to medical professionals, researchers, or women themselves? I will critically convey whether the knowledge in the articles and advertisements are coming from medical professionals, specialists within the field of health and aging, or whether the knowledge is coming from women themselves and their individual experiences. Within *Women's Health* I will pay specific attention to who is seen as an expert in the field and what is the gender of that expert. This is significant because I am interested in how gender is implicated within the authoritative knowledge of aging and health.

*Social institutions.*

Social institutions play a significant role in reinforcing dominant discourses and discursive subjects. Powerful social institutions include: school, religion, family, friends, sport, medicine, and media. I am aware that there are many social institutions that influence discourse as well as many different types of media, but I will specifically look at print media, in the form of *Women's Health* magazine, as a significant site for the reproduction of dominant discourses. I am specifically looking at the impact and importance of media as a social institution and how *Women's Health* influences and

portrays aging women. The social institution of popular media influences how aging women are dealt with everyday and how they interpret themselves as subjects within dominant discourses. Social institutions can influence each other through the reproduction and reinforcement of social norms and expectations. What is socially acceptable within social institutions of media influences what is socially anticipated through friends and peers. Media is a very important social institution because it reflects specific representations of subject positions. I am also interested in examining what social institutions aging women are encouraged to use within *Women's Health*. Are the articles and advertisements using family, educational institutes, and/or medical treatments as appropriate sites of change for normalized subject positions?

*Shifting discursive knowledge.*

Discourses are constantly changing and shifting within society and new discourses will arise in different periods of time. Changing discourse over time is due to shifting discursive knowledge and truth. My analysis will therefore examine what specific discourses of aging women are coming up with regularity within *Women's Health* magazine at this specific moment in time. Contradictory and/or conflicting discourses help shift discursive knowledge. I hope that my analysis will highlight such contradictions and help shift discursive constructions of aging. For example, if aging women are viewed as failures, patients, and/or other to normative femininity, yet aging women are in fact successful, independent, and healthy women than there is a contradiction between discursive subject positions. This would bring to light that discourse is constructed and therefore is questionable, subjective, and can change. This

contradiction in discourse would force a discursive change over time and a change in how subject positions would be understood.

### Reflexivity

In hopes of being reflexive I am aware of my subjective views of popular media representations due to my background in health, fitness, gender, and media studies within Kinesiology. Due to my academic background I may be a more critical reader and consumer. Media messages within health and wellness literature, including women's health magazines, may be read by the general public with a more neutral political stance, thus not questioning the politics within media representations. I will read the articles and advertisements thoroughly to examine the language, messages, and discursive unsaid assumptions within the magazines issues. But I also acknowledge that most people read health magazines as a hobby or enjoyable/relaxing activity and are therefore not reading them with the same detail I will be. I will engage with as much material in the magazine as possible, including magazine articles, advertisements, and pictures, while critically examining and analyzing each. I feel that it is crucial to read media messages through a critical lens due to my background in health, wellness, gender, and media.

## Chapter Three

### **Aging Women as Aesthetic and Reproductive Failures and/or Diseased within**

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

Within chapter one, I drew upon existing academic literature to highlight how dominant discourses of aging women are based on gendered myths and negative stereotypes (Vertinsky, 1994). These dominant discourses are reproduced through social institutions such as popular media. Markula (2001) states that media representations portray beauty and health as unrealistic for most women, especially aging women. This chapter therefore aims to investigate discourses of aging females and femininity within a specific set of mediated representations. Throughout this chapter I undertake a discourse analysis to examine representations of aging within the women's health and fitness magazine, *Women's Health*. I expose how dominant discourses of aging are portrayed and reproduced within this magazine through discursive statements, images and absences.

I must start this chapter by briefly highlighting how normative femininity is presented within the magazine because through my discourse analysis on aging it became apparent that how normative femininity is set up within *Women's Health* is crucial for how aging is set up. It is therefore important to begin with a discussion of how the magazine represents normative femininity with respect to age, race and/or ethnicity, class, sexuality and womanhood. I then link this normative femininity as it is represented within the magazine to representations of aging within the magazine. Finally, I discuss the place of scare tactics, personal blame and self-surveillance in relation to aging and normative femininity.

## Normative Femininity and Successful Womanhood within Women's Health Magazine

Before speaking specifically to representations of aging it is necessary to highlight discourses of femininity that are present within the *Women's Health* magazines under investigation. As described previously in chapter one, Winterich (2007) states that normative femininity is reproduced as attractive, young, heterosexual, white, and middle-upper class. This normative femininity, that is identified by the academic literature, is apparent within the magazine texts and pictures. Normative femininity is apparent through both dominant discursive presences (what is said with regularity within the magazine) and discursive silences (assumptions and things that are not said). Through these presences and silences the magazine produces and reproduces a particular femininity that is portrayed as natural and attainable. Women who do not fit within this narrow classification of femininity are not normative and are therefore not seen as feminine and/or ideal women. I will now provide specific examples of how normative femininity is reproduced within the magazine. I then briefly highlight successful womanhood, in order to position my discussion of aging and femininity.

### *Normative Femininity in Women's Health*

The magazine does not overtly define an ideal "woman" through a checklist or a set of guidelines specifically, but normative femininity is apparent within the texts, pictures, advertisements and articles of the magazine. *Women's Health* uses a combination of text and image that often function together to reproduce normative femininity. Normative femininity, as it is illustrated within the magazine, is portrayed as imperative and achievable for all women and is legitimized through products that are sold within the magazine. One such example is a Ryka footwear advertisement, where Ryka

portrays ideal femininity through both pictures and texts. Ryka (2009) states that their footwear is “lightweight, flexible, and shaped for a woman” (p. 45). The picture that accompanies this advertisement is of celebrity Kelly Ripa who is a co-host on the morning talk show “Live: With Regis and Kelly”. In the picture Kelly Ripa is jumping and in mid-air striking a pose. She is graciously smiling while her long blonde hair is flowing through the air. Her slight, fit, petite body is emphasized in her sports bra and workout shorts. The picture of Kelly Ripa that is paired with the text emphasizes that this product (footwear) is “shaped for a woman” and that Kelly Ripa is the ideal of normative femininity that women should strive to reproduce. This image of Ripa legitimizes the embodiment of normative femininity as described by Winterich (2007). Another example is within the “Breakthrough beauty” section where an anonymous staff writer (2009a) describes how having designer genes can keep you beautiful for years to come. This article is paired with a picture of a feminine youthful model.

The magazine also reproduces normative femininity through feature articles. Feature articles that I include in my discourse analysis are lengthy articles (four to eight pages), which take up a significant amount of the magazine. For example, the January/February 2010 fashion section features an article titled “‘I will wear things that hug the body I’ve worked hard for’ (And six other style resolutions to make this year)” (anonymous staff writer, 2010a, p. 126). Pictures within this article portray a young, blonde, curvy, thin woman who reproduces normative femininity. This model is wearing revealing clothing while in bed, eating breakfast, at a professional workplace, and out on errands. This feature article provides six pages of fashion statements described by an anonymous staff writer (2010a) as “I’ll look pulled together and polished for work” (p.

130) and “I’ll look hot at the gym” (p. 133). The advertisement, article, and feature article examples reinforce normative femininity through the pairing of both magazine pictures and texts. These examples illustrate that within *Women’s Health*, women are depicted as normative through a narrow classification of femininity leaving little room for resistance and variation. My overall analysis illustrates that representations of femininity within the magazine do not differ from the trend identified in the scholarly literature (such as Winterich, 2007). This is evident in the sections to follow where I provide specific examples of how *Women’s Health* reproduces femininity as narrowly defined through being Caucasian, middle-upper class, heterosexual and young.

*Normative femininity and racial/ethnic variation.*

Within the twelve magazine issues under analysis there are few visibly racial and/or ethnic variations of women within images in both advertisements and articles. For instance on the cover of *Women’s Health* magazines a big picture of a model, actress and/or celebrity is featured each month. This featured woman is interviewed in detail within the magazine issue. This celebrity is meant to illustrate an inspiringly successful woman who conforms to the normative femininity that is reinforced within the magazine. There are very few visible raced and/or ethnic women featured in this role. Within the twelve month period under investigation there are only two magazine covers that present visibly raced and/or ethnically coded celebrities. These include African American/Dominican actress Zoe Saldana (cover of May 2009), who starred in the movie “Guess Who” with Ashton Kutcher and Bernie Mac, and actress Mila Kunis (cover of September 2009) who is originally from the Ukraine and played Jackie in “That 70’s Show”. Zoe Saldana is portrayed as a visible minority both on the cover of the magazine

and within the feature article, whereas Mila Kunis' Ukrainian (othered) ethnicity is emphasized within the feature article. Both women are smiling with flawless hair and make-up while posing in a passive feminine manor. For example, in her cover picture Zoe Saldana is smiling with her left arm resting on the back of her head. She is wearing an orange sweater-top that has the bottom three buttons undone and is thus exposing her bellybutton. Zoe Saldana's outfit is finished off with small black "booty" shorts. These two celebrities are presented in the same poses and body positioning as Caucasian celebrities on magazine covers, but the articles feature very different information as a main focus. In both the Zoe Saldana and Mila Kunis articles race and/or ethnicity is discussed in great detail, whereas in the articles featuring Caucasian women race/ethnicity is not mentioned. When a celebrity's race or ethnicity is unquestionably Caucasian it becomes invisible because it functions as normative, therefore *Women's Health* does not need to discuss or make note of it to the readers.

Beyond these two cover features, the only discussion of ethnicity within the twelve month period is within an article on cross-cultural beauty tips and anti-aging techniques titled "Passport to Pretty". On the first two pages of this article, women from around the globe are wrapped in their country's flag. These women are visibly naked underneath their flowing nationalistic banners. Within "Passport to Pretty", Almasi (2009) describes how "beauty shouldn't have borders" (p. 121). The article boasts that it "celebrates the secrets of women around the world" (Almasi, 2009, p. 122). For example, "[m]any women in China use rice water to cleanse their faces because rice has antioxidants that help prevent premature skin aging" says esthetician Christine Chin" (Almasi, 2009, p. 123). Within the "Passport to Pretty" article, the magazine culturally

stereotypes women from specific cultures. These women are represented as physically enhancing their normative femininity to North American standards of beauty through performing culturally unique beauty techniques to stay looking young and beautiful.

Both of these examples of visibly raced and/or ethnic variation (the “Passport to Pretty” article and the magazine cover models) reinforce that whiteness is the norm. There are only a small number of examples of visibly raced and/or ethnic variations within both articles and magazine covers. By providing only two such women on magazine covers within the twelve month subscription analyzed, and by describing beauty techniques from around the globe as reinforcing North American beauty standards, North American, Caucasian women are reinforced as normative while other races/ethnicities become exceptions to the norm.

*Normative femininity and class.*

As evidence here, I return again to the magazine covers. All the feature models are high-class famous celebrities including actresses Mila Kunis, Christina Applegate, Kristen Bell, Evangeline Lilly, Malin Akerman, Elisha Cuthbert, and Zoe Saldana, and actresses/singers Mandy Moore, Ashlee Simpson-Wentz, and Pink. Portraying only ultra wealthy women on the cover of these magazines and within feature stories reproduces upper-class as desirable. These women are portrayed as role models due to their financial and social success and their ability to live idealized lifestyles.

Furthermore, illustrations and pictures of women within articles and advertisements are depicted as upper-class through the clothing and products they wear and endorse. For example, within the September issue, pictures portray young beautiful women wearing trendy clothes that include the prices of each piece of their wardrobes.

Moodie (2009) describes how you can accomplish the models look by buying “Alice Ritter pants, \$285, at Barneys New York [as well as]...Michael Kors booties, \$775” (p. 154). By portraying ultra-rich celebrities and expensive designer clothing as the norm, lower-middle class women are reproduced as lacking due to their socioeconomic status. Expensive designer fashion products are reinforced as necessary consumption for lower-middle class women to become normative. This is not only apparent within magazine fashion and beauty products, but also within prescriptions for diet and “healthy” food consumption. For example, there is an assumption that magazine readers possess the economic requirements for the vegan all-natural diet that is promoted by celebrities such as Alicia Silverstone (anonymous staff writer, 2009b). *Women’s Health* neglects to discuss how this all-natural lifestyle and choice in food is very costly and will thus necessarily exclude those from particular socioeconomic statuses. Ignoring and excluding such women from this expensive “good for you” diet can reproduce a healthy lifestyle as solely an individual choice, rather than an economic privilege and consequence.

This is reinforced through discussions of some of the celebrity cover models coming from working or middle-class backgrounds. Interestingly, this is most apparent when the magazine discusses feature models that are visibly raced and/or ethnic, such as Kunis and Saldana. It is imperative then to discuss the link between race and class within *Women’s Health*. Within the feature stories of Kunis and Saldana, their class and race/ethnicity are discursively intertwined. The articles describe how these two women came from a predominantly middle-class standard of living and how they became successful through hard work and determination. For example, Spines (2009) describes how “Mila knows what it’s like to be an outsider. Born in Ukraine, she came with her

family to Los Angeles when she was 7. At first everything was a struggle” (p. 43).

Another example is when Corcoran (2009) discusses how,

Zoe spent most of her early childhood in Queens, New York, but her mother sent her to live with relatives in the Dominican Republic when she was 10, following the sudden death of her father. ‘My mom was scared of losing us to the streets’ she says. (p. 128)

Both of these *Women’s Health* examples reinforce the importance of hard work and personal struggle that these actresses, who are visibly raced and/or ethnic, endured and that, like them, you too can become better and more successful with hard work. By highlighting successful racial minorities as surpassing seemingly inevitable economic struggles, the magazine reproduces racial minorities as working or middle-class individuals. Furthermore, it reproduces ideal femininity as normatively upper class.

*Normative femininity and sexuality.*

Gender (masculinity and femininity) is not natural or biologically inherent; it is learned and reinforced through a lifetime of socialization based on cultural assumptions around biology (Butler, 1997). Traditionally masculinity is thought to belong exclusively to male bodies and femininity to female bodies with little to no variation or discrepancy (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Gender differences as a dichotomy influence the order of sexuality “where adherence to gender norms helps to produce a myth of heterosexuality” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 7). If one’s gender does not fit into these narrow binary classifications one’s heterosexuality is called into question. Using that same logic, when normative femininity is presented on female bodies there is an assumption of heterosexuality. Given that *Women’s Health* features normatively feminine bodies, not surprisingly the magazine also assumes heterosexuality in its readers and reinforces that assumption through its texts and pictures.

Normative femininity and heterosexuality are reproduced as the norm within the magazine and the “Sex + Love” section is the prime illustration of that as only heterosexual relationships are described and discussed. In the table of contents there is a section called “In Every Issue” that includes themes such as “Beauty and Style”, “Health”, “Weight-Loss”, “Fitness”, “Sex & Love”, and “Eat Smart/Nutrition”. The “Sex + Love” section is one of these themes and is thus included as a main segment within each magazine. Within this section advice is given on how to “Make Love Last” (Women’s Health, 2009a, p. 6) and “Find Your Soul Mate” (Women’s Health, 2009b, p. 6) as just a couple examples.

Assumptions around the reader’s love/sex interest as male are reproduced by using descriptors such as “him” rather than a more neutral term such as “partner”. For example, this section discusses how to “Uncover His True Feelings” (Women’s Health, 2009b, p. 6), “Cheat-Proof His Love” (Women’s Health, 2009c, cover), “Make Him Want You” (Women’s Health, 2009d, p. 8), “Discover What Makes Him Tick” (Women’s Health, 2009e, p. 10) and “Lock Down His Love” (Women’s Health, 2009f, p. 12). By describing only heterosexuality and by assuming that all readers’ relationships are heterosexual all other sexual orientations such as gay, lesbian and/or bisexual are reinforced as other. The magazine altogether excludes homosexuality from the magazine’s insider advice and secret telling by only providing advice on heterosexual relationships. Homosexual relationships are discursive silences and do not appear at all within the magazine, thus stigmatizing those relationships while setting up heterosexuality as exclusively normal.

Again, it is interesting to note that both models on the cover of *Women's Health* who are visible racial and/or ethnic minorities (Mila Kunis and Zoe Saldana) are explicitly described within their feature articles as heterosexual. For example, Spines (2009) states that, Mila Kunis has “been dating the same guy for seven years” (p. 40) and Corcoran (2009), describes how “Zoe embraced the big 3-0 by throwing herself a massive dinner party at her home, which she shares with her longtime boyfriend, actor Keith Britton” (p. 128). Within my analysis, I found that if one social aspect, such as race/ethnicity, deviates from normative femininity than other social norms such as class and sexuality are explicitly highlighted as conforming to normative standards of femininity. Normative femininity is reproduced within racial/ethnic minorities by verifying and overemphasizing that their class and sexuality is normative in order to compensate for their difference in race/ethnicity. Describing and highlighting both celebrities as heterosexual reinforces their femininity as normative and culturally acceptable.

*Normative femininity and youthfulness.*

Normative femininity is reproduced within *Women's Health* as youthful. The presence of youth as normative is reproduced through depicting only young women in its article and advertisement images. Maintaining youth is positioned as an important priority that it is necessary to uphold in order to maintain feminine beauty. For example, an anonymous staff writer (2009c) describes how you should “[f]ollow these 5 food laws to stay looking beautiful and young” (p. 82). Lennon (2010) also describes how if you “follow this advice ... you can look 10 years younger than your chronological age” (p. 100, original in capitals). These are just a few examples of how *Women's Health*

reinforces the link between femininity and youthfulness. By embodying youthfulness any woman at any age can conform to normative standards of femininity. For example, the picture that corresponds with Lennon's (2010) statement portrays a young woman with little to no outward signs of aging, such as wrinkles or skin sagging. There are no pictures of "aged" or even middle-aged women within magazine articles and advertisements. Their invisibility within the magazine creates an unsaid assumption that successfully feminine women do not show signs of aging.

*Women's Health* also reinforces the notion that health is measured through youthful appearances. For example, the article "The Age Erasing Diet", describes how "the right eats can help you look great, feel fantastic, and stay sexy for decades to come. Eat to stay young by following these five commandments of long-lasting health and beauty" (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 82). This article reinforces that health is deciphered based on youthful and beautiful appearances. Another example of how health is measured by youth within the magazine is when Wenner (2009) describes how "[b]eing frazzled can do nasty things to your bod[y]. But in small doses, angst-provoking situations can improve your health, slow down the signs of aging, and even help you live longer" (p. 62). These statements reinforce that youth and health are equivalent. Within the magazine, there is an assumption that if you are young you are also healthy and furthermore that a woman's health can be read through her outward appearance and signs of youthfulness.

The magazine describes how lifestyle and diet techniques are necessary to become and stay normative. Particular lifestyle and diet techniques are seen as enhancing youthfulness. For example within the article "Your Stay-Young Meal Plan", an

anonymous staff writer (2009c) claims that the provided menu will slow-down your chronological clock and stave off the aging process. This article also describes how “[r]educing the amount you eat may help you live longer” (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 86). Another example is within the article “Speed Up Your Metabolism: Race against time”, where Ator (2009) describes how to “[b]eat the downshift in metabolism that comes with aging” (p. 95). The focus of this article is on ways to prevent being unhealthy, which in this case is assumed to come with aging. Within these magazine examples, diet techniques that are presented to maintain youthfulness are linked to overall health and wellness. The link between youthfulness and health is reinforced through the promotion of techniques that decrease women’s weight and deter the aging process and help you live longer and healthier. Aging women may be perceived as unhealthy due to assumptions around outward signs of aging. These assumptions reinforce that women are responsible for their normative femininity through everyday decisions. Normative femininity is equated to normative health and wellness. Therefore women who resist normative femininity (show outward signs of aging) are seen as unhealthy, due to their own lifestyle choices.

### *Successful Womanhood*

Within the magazine, successful womanhood is evaluated through femininity and motherhood. As outlined in chapter one, women are often assumed to have a natural role in childbearing and motherhood given that normative femininity is strongly correlated with reproduction. Women are often defined as nurturing mothers and caregivers (Dillaway, 2006) therefore creating the discursive norm of successful womanhood as naturally linked to reproduction. Women who choose not to have children are plagued

with social judgement and stigmatization because they are not conforming to normative femininity and therefore successful womanhood. Within *Women's Health* this emphasis on having a baby and mothering is apparent. For instance, within the article, "Want a Baby... Someday?" Cohen (2009) describes how "even if you're not ready to get pregnant. You need to take certain steps right now to help keep your body in peak baby-making shape" (p. 147, original in capitals). Another example is within the article, "Want to have a Baby... Now?". In this article Paul (2009) discusses how "if you're ready to get pregnant, here are the steps to take to give yourself the best possible shot" (p. 121, original in capitals). The picture that corresponds with the article is a young professional woman who is walking away from her work desk while on her cell phone. She is looking at her reflection in the window, but in the reflection she is pregnant. Both of these examples reinforce the importance of mothering to successful womanhood. The magazine reinforces that if you are not planning on having children right now, than you must be planning to have a baby in the future. As discussed in chapter one, Gee & Kimball (1987) describe how women are defined as successful through biology and reproduction, not through mental knowledge or career success. Mothering as the norm for successful womanhood disadvantages women because mothering is seen as a necessary and selfless role, where the mother, herself, is the last priority (Dillaway, 2006). This is because priorities are not based on the woman's own self or wellbeing but the wellbeing of children. If women are not selfless mothers that nurture and rear children as a main priority, they are seen as deviating from the norm.

## Aging Women as Other to Normative Femininity

In the previous section I illustrated how the magazine reproduces normative femininity. I did so in order to expose in this section how the magazine draws upon those normative constructions of femininity to “other” aging women. Dominant discourses of aging women are influenced by and set up in relation to normative femininity and successful womanhood. In the next section I highlight how aesthetic beauty is seen as a direct contradiction to aging. As described in chapter one, aging women are represented as “other” to normative femininity within popular media representations, such as women’s health and wellness magazines. These representations are noteworthy because representations of hyper-feminine young women reinforce aging as an aesthetic beauty failure and thus exclude aging women from the norm, consequently, alienating them. Youthfulness as normative can stigmatize aging women who can be seen as not living up to society’s expectations of being feminine. According to Winterich (2007), ideal femininity does not correspond to the majority of the population, including aging women. I proceed by highlighting how apparent the perceptions of aging women as reproductive failures and/or diseased are within *Women’s Health*. As described in chapter one, various authors have highlighted that menopause is positioned as a loss or crisis (Vertinsky, 1994), failure and physiological regression (Singer & Hunter, 1999) and a medical disease (Gannon, 1999). As described in chapter one, Gannon (1999) argues that menopause is viewed as a negative disorder and a process that can be managed through treatment and medicalization. I conclude the section by discussing the ways in which the magazine uses scare tactics and strategies of blame to reinforce personal responsibility for self-improvement.

### *Aging Women as Aesthetic Beauty Failures*

Discursive assumptions of aging women reinforce that youthfulness is equivalent to beauty and that one is not possible without the other. Both texts and pictures within the magazine reproduce normative femininity through aesthetic beauty standards and thus reinforce aging women as failures due to their outward signs of aging. Pictures within the magazine present youthful faces and flawless/smooth bodies, with little to no signs of aging despite the magazines target audience as encompassing all ages. There are no pictures of women with outward physical signs of aging, even when anti-aging is discussed. The pictures within advertisements of anti-aging products reflect the woman you could be and should be, through consuming their merchandise.

*Women's Health* often describes how to maintain your youthfulness and therefore aesthetic beauty, through consumption. As described in chapter one, Hvas & Gannik (2008b) describe how the “forever young” discourse reproduces women and normative femininity as youthful at any age and that if this is not achieved through consumption and lifestyle choices, you have failed as a woman. Normative femininity, is reinforced as youthful through catch phrases such as “Fountain of youth” (anonymous staff writer, 2009a, p. 24), “fresh-faced” (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 84), and “key to looking younger” (anonymous staff writer, 2009b, 84). In numerous magazine issues, beauty and youth are often described in the same sentence. For instance, an anonymous staff writer (2009c) describes how to “[f]ollow these 5 food laws to stay looking beautiful and young” (p. 82). Within the article “The Beauty Tipping Point”, Lennon (2010) states that in order “[t]o keep you looking gorgeous throughout your thirties and way beyond, we asked dermatologists to identify the major skin and hair issues” (p.102). These statements

reinforce that aging starts young and that anti-aging advice is equivalent to beauty tips. When women depict signs of aging they are seen as unattractive and unfeminine. Another example is an Aveeno (2009a) advertisement where it states that “Natural Beauty is ageless” (p. 11). Lennon (2010) continues by describing how “ [i]f you’ve already detected some beauty erosion, don’t fret. There’s still time to undo the damage” (p. 102). By describing youth and beauty in the same sentence women are encouraged to maintain their beauty through looking young and using anti-aging products. For women of all ages, these examples reinforce that youth is equivalent to normative femininity and that maintaining youthfulness is necessary in order to stay feminine.

On the first page of the article “Beauty Tipping Point” (Lennon, 2010, p. 100) a picture of a woman’s face is revealed. The picture is taken as a close-up and the young model’s face is glistening in the light. The female model reinforces youth, beauty and femininity through her long brown hair, bronzed skin, wrinkle-free and flawless youthful skin. This example is significant because the model is reinforced as normative, therefore aging women who do not look like this model are stigmatized as invisible based on their physical appearances. Another magazine example is within the article “The Age Erasing Diet” (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 82) where a close-up shot of a woman is shown. She is standing in the nude (waist down) presenting almost the entirety of her buttocks. This female model is blemish free and does not reveal any wrinkles or cellulite on the skin shown on her hand, buttocks or legs, and does appear to be youthful and feminine. When both pictures and texts within magazine articles reflect normative youthful femininity, even in articles and images related to aging, it is reinforced as the only option for women of all ages.

Statements within *Women's Health* articles often describe how, through magazine advice and knowledge, women can avoid growing older. When aging is described through discursive statements, the pictures that correspond are often of young women, or the "ideal". An example of this is within the five page spread article "The Age Erasing Diet" where there is a section called the "Age Eraser Awards". In this section there are pictures of celebrity women aged thirty to sixty, including Christie Brinkley, Sandra Bullock and Heidi Klum. These celebrities are portrayed as successfully aged due to their youthful appearance. They are described in terms such as "virtually wrinkle free" and "jaw-dropping bod[ies]" (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 84). This magazine article does not show pictures of women within Hollywood who have any outward signs of aging or are viewed as "old" such as long-time actress and comedian Betty White. Another example is within the article "Look younger longer" (Mahoney, 2009, p. 30), where a quiz is provided for readers to take that determines what your skin's "real" age is. After you have taken this quiz, you can add up your total "age" points within the results section. According to Mahoney (2009), "If your skin is... [y]ounger than you [then] clearly you've been doing all the right things" and if your skin is "[o]lder than you it's not too late to turn back the clock" (p. 30). Within the real-age quiz, discursive statements of normative femininity are reinforced due to the expectation for women to have younger looking skin. These assumptions around appearance of your skin's age draw on dominant discourses of aging women as other to normative femininity. There is a contradiction or disconnect between the statements within articles about aging, and the pictures that they are paired with. Magazine articles that are based on preventing and treating wrinkles and cellulite use pictures that reflect women in their twenties. These

articles that describe how to preserve the health and beauty of your skin through anti-aging techniques and products would appeal to women who are aging or worrying about aging in the future. Yet the female model is flawless and young, thus reproducing the fear of aging in women of all ages. Winterich (2007) describes how media over-represent young “normal” women and can produce aging women as deviant from the norm. As described previously in chapter one, women’s worth is heavily measured on their physical appearance, beauty and youth (Sontag, 2004). All women that are portrayed within the magazine reinforce normative femininity as youthful and flawless. This reproduces youthfulness as normative and pressures women through cultural and social stigmatization.

Aging women are also viewed as deviant from the norm through questions that are asked within magazine articles. The majority of questions that are asked to the hypothetical reader are based on aesthetic physical appearances and the portrayal of beauty. As just a few examples, *Women’s Health* poses questions such as “want to look and feel younger?” (anonymous staff writer, 2010b, p. 30), “Why is a woman’s age so frickin’ important?” (Paul, 2009, p. 123) and “want amazing skin like Elisha Cuthbert’s?” (*Women’s Health*, 2009g, cover, original in capitals). When the magazine asks questions of the reader there is an assumption that the answer will always be “yes”, because questions asked are based on dominant discourses and cultural norms. If you were to answer “no” to these questions, you would be perceived as deviating from normative femininity. Questions asked of the reader are used to prop-up the dominant discourse that is to follow within the article, thus representing dominant discourses as natural and important. Answers to questions posed to the reader are easy to follow with little to no

other option of an answer. These questions are used to guide the reader toward a desire to look young and beautiful through magazine tips and secrets.

Within *Women's Health*, aging is portrayed as an avoidable process through medical prevention and treatment techniques that are both cosmetic and surgical. For instance, within the article titled "Secrets of the Skin Doctors", aging is described as an avoidable process through skincare. Edgar (2009) describes how anti-aging products, which magazine dermatologists recommend through their expertise and personal use, can help reduce and eliminate any outward signs of aging. Within this article, Edgar (2009) discusses how dermatologist Amber Kyle "is a big believer in vitamin C's role in helping promote the formation of collagen (fibres that keep the skin's layers tight) and warding off wrinkles and uneven pigment" (p. 145). Within this example (and many others), wrinkles are portrayed as an observable sign of aging that must be eradicated in order to be viewed as young, beautiful and healthy. There is an assumption that individuals who physically appear young are also physiologically young. For example, the magazine article described previously in this chapter "The Age Eraser Awards", states that age-defying female celebrities are wrinkle-free, youthful and fresh faced. This article further discusses these "beautiful women whose healthy lifestyles and youthful attitudes have pushed back the effects of time" (anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 84). This example is significant because these female celebrities are imposed as idealized femininity through their youthful appearances. These discursive statements infer through physical appearance and youthfulness that these female celebrities have not aged and therefore reproduce normative femininity as physically and physiologically young.

### *Aging Women as Reproductive Failures*

As described in chapter one, dominant discourses of successful womanhood as having the ability to reproduce positions menopause as deviant from the norm (Gannon, 1999). Women who are menopausal, or appear to be menopausal through physical signs of aging, can be viewed as inadequate and deviant from normative womanhood based on discursive norms and ageist expectations. As a result aging women, who have less reproductive capacity, are reinforced as useless and physiological failures (Gee & Kimball, 1987). Brooks (2010) states that there is a quest for agelessness that “reflects the postmodern fantasy of constructing and reconstructing the self and body outside of time” (p. 240). Discourses of femininity and successful womanhood, as naturally youthful and reproductive, do not allow for discursive contradictions such as menopause to be understood as normative or natural.

Aging is often portrayed as a process that can be (and should be) avoided. Aging is depicted as avoidable through the sharing of magazine secret insider tips. As discussed in the previous section the necessity of warding off aging effects and outward signs of aging is reinforced through statements such as “Turn Back The Clock” (Farah, 2009, p. 44), “Race Against Time” (Ator, 2009, p. 95), “Age erasing beauty tricks” (Women’s Health, 2009h, cover), and “slow down the signs of aging” (Wenner, 2009, p. 62). Within statements such as “turn back the clock” and “trick the chronological clock” there is an assumption that there is a clock that is ticking, that you must somehow stop this clock, and that if this is not possible you have failed as a woman. Magazine insider tips and secrets give advice on how to stop the aging process of time, therefore conforming to normative standards of femininity.

When the “secret” of aging is discussed it is only through narratives of avoidance and prevention. Menopause is dominantly depicted as a secretive process that is not discussed within the magazine. Discussions of menopause do not appear with regularity within *Women’s Health*, despite dominant discourses of aging appearing regularly. By not overtly mentioning menopause within the magazine, in spite of all women going through this process at some point, menopause can be set up as deviant from normative femininity and thus positions aging women as other. Discussions of the physical consequences of menopause and how to prevent menopausal effects do appear with regularity but they are not linked to menopause explicitly. When menopause is described it is often in terms of what women are lacking. Only two magazine articles, within the twelve month discursive analysis, overtly discuss menopause and female hormone changes relating to menopause. The magazine article titled “Pop Culture” describes hormone changes and menopause. In the article, Beil (2009) states that the female version of Viagra may be available soon and “[w]hile these drugs are intended for women who have lost their libido after menopause and have ‘hypoactive sexual desire’, experts predict they’ll find their way...into the hands of people looking for a pleasure pick-me-up” (p. 129). Within this example, there are discursive assumptions that reinforce menopausal women as having lost their sexual desire and libido consequently positioning them as failures and/or other to reproductive femininity. As described in chapter one, ageist stereotypes of women often depict asexual lifestyles that are far from truthful or realistic (Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Another example is within an article titled “want a baby...now?”, where Paul (2009) describes how “[a]s women get older, their number of healthy eggs dwindle” (p. 123). The use of the word “dwindle” when describing women’s

reproductive eggs reinforces aging women as lacking. Discursive assumptions within this quote suggest that a woman's age is socially important and the "scientific proof" for that is based within reproduction and hard science. Both these article texts reproduce women as reproductive failures by describing hormonal changes and physiological failure.

Menopause as non-existent or lacking within *Women's Health*, leads to the assumption that normative women are reproductive and therefore positions aging women as other to normative femininity.

### *Aging Women as Diseased*

As described in chapter one, aging women are often portrayed as diseased through medical discourses and the medicalization of their aging bodies. Aging women are portrayed as diseased and deficient through biomedical illness terminology, which produces women as patients (Gannon, 1999; Hvas & Gannik, 2008b). While there are particular diseases that increase in prevalence with age, such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and heart disease, within magazine articles, wrinkles are often thrown into this list of diseases associated with aging. For instance, within the January/February magazine issue, the power of eating almonds is discussed and how almonds can fight against "[o]besity, heart disease, muscle loss, wrinkles, cancer, [and] high blood pressure" (anonymous staff writer, 2010c, p. 74). This inclusion may characterise wrinkles as a chronic disease and/or symptom of disease. Another example of a discursive association between wrinkles and disease is within the article, "The Age Erasing Diet". Within this article, an anonymous staff writer (2009c) describes how "cell-damaging free radicals,... have been linked to everything from wrinkles and age spots to cancer and heart disease"(p. 84). These discursive statements describe how the same

agents that cause wrinkles can also cause cancer and heart disease, thus wrinkles can be interpreted as a warning sign for chronic diseases. In these examples wrinkles thus come to be associated with disease. Within the magazine, outward signs of aging such as wrinkles, which is something that can be read on the body, can come to signify potential diseases' such as cancer, which is something that cannot be read outwardly on the body. If there are no outward signs of aging there is an assumption that you are a healthy woman, but if there are signs of aging, such as wrinkles, you are perceived as unhealthy and even diseased. These discursive assumptions influence social stigmatizations of aging women as diseased and deviant from the norm, unless they are able to stave off these outward signs of aging.

#### *Scare Tactics within Women's Health*

Scare tactics within media representations reinforce fears of aging as a disease. As described in chapter one, the negative age-related gendered discourse within Western culture primarily reproduces fears around loss of social and cultural power (Singer & Hunter, 1999). Various authors have highlighted that media representations reflect the aging process as evoking fears about aging (Singer and Hunter, 1999) and bombard readers with advertisements to consume anti-aging products in order to stay normative (Winterich, 2007). According to Dworkin & Wachs (2009), "multinational fitness campaigns have successfully sold anxieties about 'bodily lack' to women through the commodification of ideologies" (p. 109). These anxieties lead to the reproduction of scare tactics within health and fitness magazines and reinforce the importance of becoming and staying normative.

This is the case within *Women's Health*. As my previous examples have illustrated, the magazine continually draws upon the message that if you neglect your body, face, and appearance through your lifestyle choices you are deviant from the norm and therefore other, failed, or diseased. One example of a scare tactic within the magazine is the statement “your behind can start to widen and get dimpled as you age” (Lennon, 2010, p. 102) which infers that aging women are overweight. A second example is the statement “Monounsaturated fats found in olive oil, fish, nuts, and seeds have been shown to lower the risk of a host of age-related diseases: arthritis, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, and even Alzheimer’s” (anonymous, 2009c, p. 84) which infers that aging women are diseased. The magazine also describes how grape seed extract is scientifically proven through a study at University of Alabama at Birmingham to potentially “reverse wrinkles, skin cancer, and other damage from UV rays” (anonymous staff writer, 2009e, p. 69). As stated previously, in examples such as this *Women's Health* infers a link between wrinkles and chronic diseases such as cancer. If women resist advice given in an anti-aging article there is an assumption that they open themselves up to chronic disease due to the superficial link between physical signs of aging (dimples, wrinkles) and chronic diseases such as cancer. Such scare tactics pressure women to change their everyday lifestyle choices. Within the July/August magazine issue, supplements such as “power pills” are discussed in relation to anti-aging (anonymous staff writer, 2009d). Specifically the magazine argues that grape seed extract can defend against cancer and wrinkles. This article provides important health advice in regards to using daily supplements and if the advice is not followed there will be serious consequences, such as cancer. Diseases associated with aging are portrayed as a personal responsibility and due

to the lifestyle choices of the individual. These articles thus link and suggest that wrinkles (a natural progression of aging) are an indicator of irresponsibility (not doing all you can to avoid disease) rather than just an aesthetic result.

Organic and natural foods are recommended within the article “A Kinder, Gentler Diet” where celebrity Alicia Silverstone, who appears youthful, healthy and happy, describes her natural vegan diet and the lifestyle consequences of eating naturally. According to an anonymous staff writer (2009b), Alicia Silverstone is “an avid environment and animal activist...[s]he also makes some pretty bold claims - specifically, that eating a plant-based diet rich in whole grains is a key to looking younger, losing weight, and feeling healthier”(p 84). This statement, which explicitly links health with youthfulness and body weight, reinforces dominant discourses that women who look “aged” do not eat well and are unhealthy and/or diseased. Aging women are stigmatized further due to the unsaid assumption of personal blame that women who are showing signs of aging do not have a healthy lifestyle.

#### *Blame and Self-improvement due to Aging*

Popular media representations and magazine articles/advertisements reproduce a neoliberal philosophy that it is your sole responsibility, as a female, to maintain your looks as you age and if your youth is not preserved you are viewed as a failure. Dworkin & Wachs (2009) describe how “the text and imagery of health and fitness magazines reproduces discourses of healthism and operates to promote neoliberal ideologies that obscure the impact of government and structural contributions to health disparities” (p. 11). Through this discourse of personal blame the magazine also reproduces the possibility of self-improvement. Brooks (2010) discusses how individuals are portrayed

as responsible for their own aging because it is a private problem, hence placing blame and shame on the individual if they are not normative. Many articles and advertisements reinforce normative femininity and images of what you could be with possible self-improvement through magazine tips, secrets and advice. The neoliberal assumptions of *Women's Health* are obvious within the article "what's your skin's real age?", where Mahoney (2009) describes "how you treat yourself can keep your complexion baby-soft or leave it looking older than its years" (p. 30). Another example of self improvement is reinforced through advertisements such as that for Olay Total Effects' "seven powerful anti-aging tools" (Olay, 2010, backcover). The Olay Total Effects' advertisement consists of a tool box "all in one elegant little package" (Olay, 2010, backcover) that includes tools for smoothing, reducing fine lines, evening tone, hydrating and refining pores. This advertisement implies that women need a "tool box" for regular maintenance similar to a house or vehicle, yet this maintenance tool box must still be stereotyped as feminine and elegant. If someone did not use a tool box to regularly maintain and "fix" their home, they would be viewed as lacking and to blame if their house fell apart. Therefore it is viewed as a necessary step for all responsible homeowners. There is a similar message being implied within Olay's skin care advertisement which reproduces the narrative that women are to blame if they do not take the appropriate steps for the regular maintenance and the prevention of aging. Self improvement and maintenance through Olay is seen as a necessary product for staying young and healthy and if you do not take these necessary steps you become abnormal and other to normative femininity. Advertisements that reinforce normative femininity and youth through products for self improvement reproduce what you could and should be. The message is that if a woman does not fit

within normative femininity she is to blame because there are preventative measures she could have and should have taken.

The magazine also portrays aging women as to blame for overt physical signs of aging because of their unhealthy lifestyle choices. Physical signs of aging as reflected solely by how women treat themselves and their skin implies that older looking women have not taken care of themselves, inside and/or out and therefore reinforce that aging women are neglectful. For instance within the article “The Beauty Tipping Point” discussed previously in this chapter, Lennon (2010) describes how to rebound from self-neglect:

if you spent your twenties on a beach chair with a glass of chardonnay in one hand and a cigarette in the other, those vices will begin to show, quite literally, on your face. ‘You start to see the cumulative effects of hard living on your skin in your thirties’ says dermatologist Rebecca Giles, M.D., owner of FIX skin clinic in Malibu, California. (p. 102)

Lennon (2010) continues by stating “[e]xperts explain what to do to retain your hotness- and how to quickly recalibrate if you’ve neglected your looks for too long” (p. 101).

These statements describe how if you have not retained your ‘hotness’ through preserving your skin, then you are neglecting your looks and your lifestyle. Another example of neoliberal blame is within the article “The Age Eraser Awards”, where an anonymous staff writer (2009c) states that “[within] the age eraser awards...[there are] 10 winners [who are] beautiful women whose healthy lifestyles and youthful attitudes have pushed back the effects of time” (p. 84). This example implies that women who have healthy lifestyles are not only outwardly youthful looking, but also have youthful attitudes, thus producing “aged” attitudes among aging women. Through magazine statements such as the above, personal blame for aging is placed on women thus reproducing aging women

as deviating from the norm. These magazine examples reinforce assumptions of self neglect and personal failure based on outward signs of aging, thus reinforcing stigmatization of aging women. Within the magazine, successful aging is portrayed as something women of all ages can achieve through conforming to the magazine's beauty advice, anti-aging tricks and secrets. Aging women are portrayed as neglectful and to blame if they do not have youthful appearances, but through reading the magazine they will soon find a way to redeem themselves through what the magazine describes as subtle lifestyle shifts.

### *Self-Surveillance*

Women begin to self police their femininity in comparison to media representations within popular magazines that reinforce scare tactics, personal blame and self-improvement. As discussed within chapter one, aging women are subject to their own objectification as well as objectification from others, based on their physical appearances (Powell et. al, 2006). When readers of the magazine are faced with personal blame and scare tactics through both pictures and statements of aging, self-surveillance is reinforced in order to maintain normative femininity through youthfulness. For example, the magazine reinforces self-surveillance through the age quiz discussed earlier in this chapter. In that article, Mahoney (2009) describes how you can find out what your skin's real age is based on lifestyle choices and genetics, rather than just your chronological age. This article allows readers to answer questions through a multiple choice scoring system. Once the quiz is complete the reader can compare her score with the normative score for which she should strive. Normative age for women's skin is always younger than their chronological age. If your score is too high for the "younger than your age" category you

are categorized as deviating from the norm. Reproducing the reader as other, within magazine articles such as “What’s Your Skin’s Real Age?” can stigmatize aging women further. As described previously in this chapter, aging women’s appearances as other are listed within the magazine as an individual’s responsibility and personal lifestyle choices, which can and should be changed. The magazine therefore reinforces personal responsibility and blame through self-surveillance. Magazine readers of all ages are faced with wrinkle and blemish free pictures that are reinforced as the norm. For instance, “The Age Eraser Awards” article described previously in this chapter provides pictures of female celebrities in their thirties, forties, and fifty plus. Within this article, pictures of all “aged” female celebrities (according to *Women’s Health*) reinforce normative femininity and reproduce self-surveillance and personal judgement of the readers based on the celebrities flawless features and wrinkleless skin. The magazine portrays how all women can look like these “ageless” celebrities with appropriate lifestyle choices and healthy attitudes. Aging women that cannot live up to these unrealistic expectations are consequently judged for not conforming to normative standards of femininity. Women are encouraged to become objects of their own judgemental gaze in ways that reproduce normative bodies and the quest for normative femininity. Women of all ages (not just middle-aged women) are led to compare themselves to normative femininity within media representations and magazine articles. Through self-surveillance and policing many readers reproduce dominant discourses by attempting to conform to the femininity that magazine representations reinforce as normal.

This chapter highlighted how normative femininity and discourses of successful aging are prevalent within the magazine. The magazine reinforces scare tactics associated

with aging and encourages women not to deviate from the norm. One can avoid personal blame by subscribing to the daily life changes and self improvements that *Women's Health* endorses. Aging is thus positioned as a problem to be managed due to the consistent message of normative femininity within the magazine. This notion of aging as problem to be managed will be the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.

## Chapter Four

### **Aging Women as a Problem to be Managed through *Women's Health* Magazine**

In chapter three I emphasized how dominant discourses of normative femininity and aging are propped-up by *Women's Health* through scare tactics, the placing of blame, and the encouragement of self-improvement and self-surveillance. As illustrated in chapter three, youthfulness and normative femininity are reproduced through *Women's Health* in ways which can reinforce aging as a problem to be managed. In this chapter I highlight how managing aging, often through consumption, was a focus of the magazine throughout the year. I also draw attention to how discursive authority within *Women's Health* functions through perceived 'experts' (celebrities and doctors) and 'expert' knowledge (science and nature/natural). The chapter concludes by positioning the reader and consumption in relation to these experts and expert knowledge.

#### The Focus of *Women's Health*

In each magazine issue there is a shift of focus depending on the section of the magazine, season and time of year. Within the magazine's section "in every issue" the features include "Beauty", "Health", "Weight-Loss", "Fitness", "Sex & Love", and "Nutrition". There is a variety of advice within these feature sections throughout the year. Summer issues primarily include summer weight loss, toning bodies, getting fit for the summer, and how to achieve a beach/swimsuit body. Some of these magazine covers describe "Hot Body Secrets [: How to] Sculpt a Tight Butt and Flat Abs in Minutes a Day", how to "Improve Your Nude Attitude" (*Women's Health*, 2009i, cover), and "Two Weeks To A Bikini Ready Body[:]Reshape Your Abs, Butt & Thighs-Fast" or "Flat Belly

Foods” (Women’s Health, 2009j, cover). These titles provide an insight on possible strategies for achieving and maintaining a bikini body, tight muscles and body toning. An example of summer weight-loss and the toning of bodies as a focus within magazine articles is in the July/August summer issue, “25 Amazing Summer Meals”. Within this article culinary expert Bittman (2009) lists healthy, fresh, fast and creative meals to keep your summer body in the best shape. Yet another weight loss story that is celebrated within the magazine summer issues is the article “You lose, You win: How one clean-plate club member mastered portion control” (anonymous staff writer, 2009e, p. 8). This article describes how a magazine reader successfully lost weight. An example of the magazines summer fitness focus is *Women’s Health* Fit Coach (2010). This advertisement describes how “[y]our hot new body is just a click away” (p. 88). All of these articles and advertisements reinforce the importance of weight-loss and maintaining a particular summer body in order to conform to the normative femininity that the magazine supports. Summer weight loss and body toning in order to maintain the normative reinforce women’s bodies as a problem to be managed.

While summer issues tend to focus on bikini bodies, during holiday seasons such as Thanksgiving and Christmas the focus is mainly on weight loss and how to resist holiday food temptations. As illustrated in chapter three, catchy titles are used to draw attention to the magazine and give a quick glimpse of what will be within the magazine issue. On the cover of the December magazine issue, titles are used to reproduce the main focus of weight-loss and body maintenance. For instance, titles such as “Burn More Fat!...Eat, Drink & Still Shrink!...Flat Abs Now! 4 Super-Easy Moves” (Women’s Health, 2009k, cover) are placed down the side of the December magazine cover issue.

While the main focus of an issue of *Women's Health* may shift depending on seasons and holidays, aging is consistently a focus within the magazine during all seasons and holidays. For instance, *Women's Health* (2009c) describes "Age Erasing Beauty Tricks" (cover), "Surprising Anti-Aging Secrets" (*Women's Health*, 2009h, cover), and how to "Age-Proof Your Skin [through] 8 Easy Tricks" (*Women's Health*, 2010a, cover). Aging as a focus of the magazine (and its advertisements) throughout the year reinforces the importance of youthfulness as normative and reproduces anti-aging as a main focus of concern. The magazine suggests that anti-aging is an issue that we all must face at some point in our lives and is an issue that is important no matter what time of the year or what season is around the corner. Anti-aging strategies provided by the magazine illustrate ways to stay youthful all year long.

### Successful Aging

As discussed in chapter three, the magazine uses scare tactics and personal blame in association with physical signs of aging, and therefore women are encouraged to self-police their behaviour and perform self-improvements primarily through consumption. As stated within the previous section it is apparent that no matter what season or holiday is near the magazine's focus is consistently on women's bodies as a problem to be managed and anti-aging as a priority of that management. Successful aging is therefore defying aging through avoiding the physical/physiological process altogether. According to Kinnunen (2010), "positive ageing promotes the idea that one can defy ageing by purchasing products or services that will help one look young, healthy, and happy" (p. 258).

In *Women's Health*, successful aging is described through statements such as “[f]ollow this advice and you can look 10 years younger than your chronological age” (Lennon, 2010, p. 100), “[l]ook younger longer” (Mahoney, 2009, p. 28), “[s]tay looking beautiful and young” (Anonymous staff writer, 2009c, p. 82) and “[i]f your skin is... [y]ounger than you [then] [c]learly you’ve been doing all the right things” (Mahoney, 2009, p. 30). These statements reinforce that youthfulness must be maintained in order to uphold normative femininity within magazine representations. Anti-aging articles provide prevention strategies, skin and body maintenance tips, surgical procedures, and anti-aging products to purchase. For example, within the anti-aging article “SECRETS of the Skin Doctors” described in chapter three, a zoomed in picture of a female model is portrayed. She is staring off in the distance, while her youthful skin is glowing in the light. She does not appear to have any outward-signs of aging, such as wrinkles or fine lines. Under the picture a caption reads “[p]eople with oily skin have fewer fine lines and wrinkles because oil protects skin from free-radical damage”-Leslie Baumann, M.D.” (Edgar, 2009, p. 142). Edgar (2009) follows this quote by describing how within this article dermatologists “reveal their best lifestyle advice and products they swear by” (p. 143) such as “Burt’s Bees Naturally Ageless Intensive Repairing Serum” (p.145) that keeps skin moistened through ingredients such as fatty acids and natural oils, which essentially create oilier skin. Within this example successful aging is portrayed as a normative maintenance process through the consumption of youthful (oily) skin in order to prevent skin damage. Brooks (2010) describes how “successful aging mirrors our contemporary era of late consumer capitalism in which individuals are free to shape, mould, design, and choose their bodies” (p. 239). I will proceed in the following sections by illustrating how

*Women's Health* encourages successful aging through providing access to experts and expert knowledge, telling secrets and sharing tricks within magazine issues.

#### Discursive Authority of Anti-Aging “Experts” and “Expert Knowledge”

As discussed in chapter one, knowledge and truth are produced through discursive practices and cultural norms within society (Hall, 1997a,b,c). It is important to note who has the legitimacy to speak and be understood as knowledgeable and truthful and who is excluded from speaking truth based on discursive authority. Certain subjects come to have more legitimacy in producing knowledge based on their perceived professional expertise (Hvas and Gannik, 2008a). Those with perceived knowledge and authority within dominant discourse are seen as speaking the truth. Hall (1997c) argues that this discursive knowledge/truth regulates the social conduct of subjects.

Knowledge is reproduced through dominant discourses and reinforces subject positions. Discursive authority is reproduced through a hierarchy of knowledge within dominant discourses. Little is revealed about why certain subjects are positioned differently within the hierarchy of knowledge (Hall, 1996). Shogan (1999) describes how this discursive hierarchy of knowledge functions between many subjects including athletes and coaches. Within dominant sport discourses, “[w]hat athletes do may be more important than what coaches do but what coaches and sport scientists say is much more important than what athletes say” (p. 41). This is due to the authoritative knowledge that coaches possess as professionals/experts. According to Shogan (1999), “Coaches and sport scientists control the subject matter and hence the discourse of what counts as legitimate talk” (p. 41). This is also true within the magazine, where particular subjects

including celebrities, doctors, and scientists come to have more legitimacy in producing knowledge about health, fitness, femininity and aging than others such as the readers.

There is a particular discursive authority within anti-aging articles and advertisements that prop-up dominant discourses of aging. There is both a truth and power within magazine titles as well as who is seen as knowledgeable within it. The magazine often uses the word “Expert”. For example, within the “2009 Beauty Awards” article, magazine experts and editors select a particular anti-aging skincare product that they recommend to the reader (anonymous staff writer, 2009f). This information is presented as expert advice given by figures of authority that possess a particular truthful knowledge. This skincare advice is given to magazine readers who are positioned as skincare knowledge seekers. Circumstances of such discursive authority reinforce dominant discourses as natural and do not encourage the reader to question the knowledge being provided. The reader is automatically positioned as inferior to the “professional” and/or “expert”. Dominant discourses can become difficult to question if the reader is seen as inferior because those discourses are often reinforced by powerful authoritative individuals and themes, such as celebrities, doctors, science, and nature.

#### *Celebrities as Discursive Authority*

Celebrities’ voices are not heard as expert knowledge due to their extensive education or credentials, but rather due to their experience and personal success. They gain discursive authority through media attention and being seen as role models for idealized lifestyles, including beauty, ultra-rich social economic status, and personal fame. Celebrities are portrayed through media spotlights and can become ideal candidates to promote particular products, norms, and lifestyles. Discursive authority can be given to

highly publicized subjects due to their public lifestyle as well as the ability for big companies/corporations to buy the celebrity's support. According to Andrews & Jackson (2001), celebrities can be "reduced to individual qualities such as innate talent, dedication, and good fortune, thus positioning the ...star as a deserved benefactor of his/her devotion to succeed..." (p. 8). Their voices are heard over others due to their successful status and consequently through others idealizing them. As such, they are used to sell not just products but more importantly to validate idealized lifestyles and subjectivities. For example, sports celebrities such as Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan reinforce a particular racial masculinity through both their athletic performances, product endorsements and everyday lifestyles (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Public figures such as celebrities endorse a way of life by portraying a particular lifestyle through products and consumption.

Celebrities within the magazine are primarily actresses, singers, and models, who gain authority by becoming ideal discursive subjects within a globalized and highly media driven society. The magazine often uses celebrity actresses and singers as cover models for their issues as well as important exclusive features within each magazine issue. Within these feature articles *Women's Health* asks these female celebrities about everyday beauty care, fashion, and lifestyle secrets so that readers (who want to gain knowledge through reading magazine articles) can obtain the illusion of the same lifestyle. For example, the magazine highlights how actress/singer Eve gets in shape for her role in the movie "Whip It" with her "spin on getting buff and beautiful" (Sayers, 2009, p. 71). This example reinforces that celebrities, such as Eve, are produced as discursive authorities through the significance of their personal beauty/fitness secrets.

Another example is when *Women's Health* (2009k) describes how to “[h]ave the baby, keep the body! [b]ounce-[b]ack [s]ecrets of Melrose Place’s Ashlee Simpson-Wentz and 6 other fit Celeb Moms” (cover). The magazine also states that Elisha Cuthbert’s interview reveals the key to staying balanced and happy (*Women's Health*, 2009g). Through providing Simpson-Wentz’s after baby weight-loss secrets and Cuthbert’s keys to happiness, these women are reinforced as authoritative social figures who have legitimate knowledge to share. These statements reinforce a particular discursive authority that these celebrities (and others) hold due to their fame. These articles are written in a way that assumes that the reader is yearning to become like the feature celebrity consequently reproducing celebrities as holding expert knowledge.

Celebrities as discursive authorities provide an authoritative knowledge based on how well known they are. Readers are encouraged to consume products in order to become more like the celebrated individuals in the magazine. Knowledge produced by celebrities remains unquestioned and is perceived as relevant to the reader even though the lived experiences of the two (celebrity vs. reader) are drastically different. Readers do not have the lives of celebrities and the exclusive resources to which they have access, yet discursive knowledge is provided as something the readers can access through consuming *Women's Health* and the products it endorses.

#### *Doctors as Discursive Authority*

Doctors are perceived as holding a significant amount of power due to their discursive knowledge. Doctors’ voices are heard as true due to their education and perceived professional status and credentials. The magazine utilizes doctors as “experts and “professionals” within many articles and advertisements. A significant amount of the

doctors and “experts” within the magazine are women. This is significant because it illustrates that authoritative knowledge of aging can be held by females, as long as they are medical professionals. The knowledgeable voices of doctors are used to reinforce cultural norms on day-to-day medical issues. For example, “Secrets of the Skin Doctors” (first described in chapter three) is one of the main articles within the September magazine issue (Edgar, 2009). This article title enforces that the skin doctors, who provide dermatological advice, are experts and that their knowledge is important due to their role as experts with secrets to tell. For instance, Edgar (2009) describes how

just as you wouldn’t want to follow workout advice from a pudgy trainer, you don’t want your dermatologist to have bad skin. We talked to four with luminous complexions and got them to reveal the lotions, potions, and skin-care tips they use at home. (p. 143, original in capitals)

Within the “Secrets of the Skin Doctors” article, each section is written by a dermatologist. Within the title of each skin type section the dermatologist is named with her credentials provided. For example, “Jennifer Kinder, M.D.... is a board-certified dermatologist with a private practice in Scottsdale, Arizona” (Edgar, 2009, p. 145), “Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D., [is] a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association” (Edgar, 2009, p. 84), “Jacob is the director of Chicago Cosmetic Surgery and Dermatology [and]... Baumann is director of the Cosmetic Medicine and Research Institute at the University of Miami...” (Edgar, 2009, p. 144-145). Providing expert credentials after their name, for both doctors and nutritionists, provides readers with confirmation that these experts have extensive education in the field and are deemed knowledgeable professionals. Describing these dermatologists as directors of prestigious centers or research institutes also proves that they are successful professionals who have extensive experience, as well as education, in their field. Doctors’ subject positions and

the medical discourses they are positioned within reinforce a power and authority over readers. This positions magazine readers as less knowledgeable and/or lacking credentials and thus as not providing a legitimate voice to be heard. Medical knowledge is not questioned because of the medical subject positions and the extensive credentials of doctors. There are many differing medical opinions, yet the diversity of medical knowledge is not acknowledged within *Women's Health*. Medical knowledge used in the magazine is presented as singular, unbiased, unquestioned, and not affected by promotional materials and/or products, despite the possibility of biased medical opinions and paid endorsements.

#### *Science as Discursive Authority*

Similar to doctors, scientists acquire a particular discursive through their education, experiences and credentials. Furthermore, scientists' voices are heard due to the perceived truth and honoured position of scientific research. Dominant discourses, such as aging women as diseased, are dominantly viewed as truthful and natural because they are positioned within scientific "proof" and the expertise of scientists and the scientific method. Within the magazine, scientists are listed along with their credentials and professional status. For example, *Women's Health* (2010b) describes how "lead researcher Richard Blackburn, Ph.D....[believes that] [s]eaweed may be the next big thing in hair dye" (p. 32). Providing educational credentials after the researchers name and referencing scientific studies can help legitimize the scientists and create an authoritative knowledge, in a similar way as doctors. An anonymous staff writer (2009g) discusses how "[i]nvestigators found that women in rocky relationships were up to 40 percent more likely than happily hitched women to have metabolic syndrome...says study author Tim

Smith, Ph.D., of the University of Utah” (p. 34). Such quotes reinforce the discursive authority of scientists and science. Magazine statements are legitimized because scientists are believed to be providing truthful information because of their professional credentials. Further, knowledge that is shared through scientific research and findings is assumed to be truthful due to the rigor of science. Scientific evidence is provided as “proof” through small articles and statistics, where the scientist is sharing their “expert” advice and cutting-edge findings.

Advertisement’s often state that their product is necessary to consume based on new scientific research and legitimate lab tests. For example within the magazine, ORIGINS (2009a) skincare states that

ORIGINS [is]  
Powered by Nature.  
Proven by Science. (p. 9)

Within this ORIGINS advertisement their product is supposedly “Proven by Science” and therefore should not be questioned. Aveeno (2009a) also describes how to “[l]earn more about the beauty of nature and science at [aveeno.com](http://aveeno.com)” (p. 11). By providing a website for more scientific information that is portrayed as “proof” that this product is effective, this product and the magazine’s knowledge is positioned as superior due to science backing them. Product research is used as a tool to convince the general public that a product is better than a competing, often cheaper, product. What is not described in the advertisements (or the magazine generally) is that often there is a conflict of interest because “scientific” research is done or sponsored by the company selling the product not a neutral scientific investigator. The research lab results can be positioned, obscured, and/or biased in order to sway consumers to buy the “logical” product. Scientific

findings, within advertisements, are often presented in percentages, with little to no background on the methodology, validity, reliability, population demographic and/or total number of participants. For example, within the April magazine issue, Aveeno (2009a) describes how “in a clinical study 94% of women showed improvement in the look of fine lines or wrinkles” (p. 11). This statement is propped up by a zoomed-in before treatment illustration/picture of older looking skin and an after treatment illustration of smooth youthful skin. There is an assumption that the skin sample is from the same participant and not from different people. It is also assumed that the illustration is a picture that has not been tampered with or airbrushed. Within the March issue, an ORIGINS (2009a) advertisement states “75% agreed their skin felt firmer...73% saw younger-looking skin with fewer lines” (p. 9). In both magazine examples, the reader is not presented with the total number of participants within either study, nor is the reader presented with information of placebo effects that can occur within research trials.

Often, scientific research for skincare products is tested on animals not humans.

The magazine describes how

[s]cientists exposed hairless mice to UV radiation for eight weeks. To half of the group they applied a daily cream containing ellagic acid, an antioxidant in raspberries, strawberries, cranberries, and pomegranates. After eight weeks, mice that got the cream developed fewer wrinkles than their unprotected peers. (anonymous staff writer, 2009g, p. 30)

Scientific research based on animal trials in order to sell skincare products is not regularly questioned as evidence for human consumption. There is an assumption within these magazine statements that mice and humans react to UV rays in a similar way. There is also an assumption that wrinkles and outward signs of aging, on both humans and mice, are signs that they are both not healthy. This scientific trial with mice and skin

cream to prevent wrinkles from UV radiation does not provide the reader with any background information on the length of the trial, how many mice were in the trial, etc. Nor does this scientific trial stand alone as evidence of the products efficiency.

I am not suggesting that this scientific research is necessarily flawed or untrue, but that when scientific research is used within the magazine it is presented in such a way as to suggest that it is unbiased and truthful. Not enough information is given to allow a reader to make informed decisions about the validity and reliability of the scientific research. In fact, within the magazine science is used to discourage such questioning of credibility. Within *Women's Health*, science is portrayed as equivalent to truth regardless of biases or motivations. More controlled scientific research and credible policing within advertisements would provide the reader with more sufficient background information. This would allow for the reader to become a critical consumer and make an educated decision on accepting information and/or buying products, rather than a decision based on unquestioned assumptions around the legitimacy of science and scientists.

#### *Nature/Natural as Discursive Authority*

Within the magazine there are many statements and pictures that reinforce dominant discourses as natural. What the magazine endorses and supports is provided in such a way as to represent it as the only viable option. Discourses that the magazine does not support are not provided at all, therefore reproducing dominant discourses as natural. Furthermore, *Women's Health* often alludes to the natural and nature to backup dominant discourses that it supports. Nature can be positioned as a discursive authority and difficult to dispute because it is seen as a force that is beyond human tampering and therefore part

of the natural world. For example, Aveeno's (2009a) advertisement for positively ageless night cream states that

natural beauty is ageless  
Aveeno  
discover nature's secret. (p. 11)

This statement reinforces that young skin is natural and achievable for women of all ages. *Women's Health* reinforces younger skin and youthfulness as occurring naturally despite the purpose of the advertisement, which is to sell products for your skin to "stay" young or "awaken" youth. Another magazine example is an ORIGINS (2009a) advertisement where ORIGINS states

Youthtopia Age-correcting serum with Rhodiola [is] [p]owered by the legendary plants, Rhodiola rosea and Amalaki, and clinically proven by science, this potent complex rapidly and visibly helps restore firmness and elasticity to repair the appearance of lines and wrinkles... Growing old will just have to wait. (p. 9)

This advertisement reproduces dominant discourses of youth as natural and part of nature through pictures of plants and trees, green coloured text and a description of natural ingredients within the product. Statements of youth being linked to nature and natural beauty are not exclusive to advertisements but are also apparent within *Women's Health* articles. For instance, within the November magazine issue, red coloured fruits are described as "Natures Wrinkle Fighter" (anonymous staff writer, 2009g, p. 30). Within the July/August magazine issue, natural vitamins and nutrients are described as nature's power pills. These power pills include grape seed extract which "[p]rotects against wrinkles and skin cancer" (anonymous staff writer, 2009d, p. 69). These statements reinforce that wrinkles are unnatural and against nature and that nature literally fights against outward signs of aging. Positioning natural ingredients and vitamins as protecting or fighting against wrinkles and outward signs of aging reproduces dominant discourses

of aging as other and unnatural. It also suggests that if you resist anti-aging products and procedures you are unnatural or going against nature.

Within the magazine, statements such as “nature’s wrinkles fighter” and descriptions of natural ingredients fighting aging are contradictions within dominant discourses because aging and outward signs of aging such as wrinkles are themselves natural and part of the aging process. Wrinkles and aging are represented as deviant from the norm, and therefore are not seen as natural, yet aging is something that we cannot avoid and is a natural occurrence in all living beings. When anti-aging products are backed up by scientific proof and natural ingredients it becomes difficult to question discourses such as aging women as other. But when contradictions, such as nature fighting wrinkles despite wrinkles being natural, become apparent then possibilities for resisting dominant discourses become a viable option.

#### *Positioning of Reader as Knowledge Seeker*

Magazine readers’ voices are heard as those seeking knowledge rather than those positioned to give knowledge or expertise. For instance, within the September magazine issue, a letter of the month, by a magazine reader, is described:

A bigger fan base [:] I’d never read Women’s Health before, but Evangeline Lilly (June) caught my eye, so I bought a copy and WOW! Its jam-packed with useful tips and great motivators. I’ll be looking out for the next issue. Keep up the good work! – Gillian Hammer, Calgary, Alberta. (Hammer, 2009, p. 23, original in capitals)

The next “Letter of the Month” article reflects how a magazine subscriber feels about an article from a previous issue. According to Cyndi Casinelli, “I loved the sex tips in ‘Little Moves, Big Pleasure’ (June). I’ve always thought of myself as the queen of sex knowledge, but there were a few tips that I didn’t know” (Casinelli, 2009, p. 23). These

comments from magazine readers reinforce that their voices are only heard due to their knowledge seeking, rather than their own expertise and/or ability to provide knowledge. The knowledge of the reader does not count because the reader is positioned as unknowledgeable and in need of discipline in order to become normalized much like the athlete described by Shogan (1999) earlier in the chapter. She suggests that authoritative knowledge is not held by athletes, rather it is held by coaches. Shogan describes how “[t]he disciplinary technologies of high-performance sport are constraints placed on the actions of athletes. This exercise of power by coaches produces skills that athletes require for performance” (p. 36). Similarly, “The Letters of the Month” section only provides readers’ praise for the professional knowledge that they received through previous issues, rather than acknowledging that they too might have information or advice to share with other magazine readers and/or magazine editors. Magazine readers are disciplined in the same way as an athlete because they are not seen as holding authority and knowledge within the magazine issues. Discipline of the reader is achieved by positioning them as knowledge seekers within *Women’s Health*. If magazine readers were positioned as authoritative and knowledgeable within magazine issues there would be no need for women to read the magazine and gain insider knowledge and tips (and to consume products, the focus of my next section).

The magazine often uses the word “law” which reinforces the authority and discipline of discursive rules. For example within the previously referenced article “The Age Erasing Diet” there are five different age-erasing laws that you must follow as a knowledge seeking reader. This article also describes “an easy-to-follow meal plan that combines all the laws of eating to stave off the aging process” (anonymous staff writer,

2009c, p. 86). The discipline that is to follow, if these laws are not obeyed, can be cultural stigmatization. Assumptions based on this statement are that if you do not follow the rules/laws you will appear aged, which is deviant from the norm. This advice, given to the reader by a discursive authority, is seen as legitimate and therefore truthful. Within *Women's Health* this advice generally comes in the form of the telling of secrets and the sharing of tricks.

#### Expert Knowledge: The Telling of Secrets and the Sharing of Tricks

The sharing of expert knowledge is often discussed within *Women's Health* through the telling of secrets. Secret telling advice is significant within social interactions and personal relationships because there are implications and assumptions around the culture of secret telling and secret keeping. When someone tells a secret there is an assumption that it is important and should be respected and understood as truthful. Rodriguez & Ryave (1992) describe how the secret teller can deem the secret as exclusive therefore considering the recipient as an exclusive beneficiary of that valued information. In this case the secret teller is *Women's Health* magazine and the exclusive recipients of secretive information are the magazine readers. Secret telling can also be interpreted as an intimate bonding experience between the secret teller and secret keeper (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). Traditional secret telling produces power shifts from the secret teller to the secret keeper by allowing the recipient to sanction the secret through confidentiality or by breaking the rules of secret keeping through telling the secret to others who are not deemed exclusive (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). Power shifts within the secret telling process differ within the magazine due to the assumption that recipients follow different secret keeping/sharing rules. Magazines may want their secrets discussed

between women of all ages in order to increase magazine consumption and increase future clientele.

Magazine readers are expected to respect the secret told by not questioning that the secret is truthful. If readers question the validity of the secret shared within the health and fitness magazine, readers would no longer have a reason to read the magazine. Secrets told within magazines are portrayed as cutting-edge by *Women's Health* experts and important by magazine readers and therefore reinforce that loyal supporters are exclusively gaining knowledge through secrets that are shared. *Women's Health* secrets include products and procedures that professionals use or recommend, where to get these anti-aging/beauty secrets, and how much these products cost. For example, within the magazine “surprising anti-aging secrets” (*Women's Health*, 2009h, back cover) and “SECRETS of the Skin Doctors” (Edgar, 2009, p. 143) are shared with magazine readers. Within these examples, *Women's Health* utilizes the word secret (in capital letters) which draws attention to the article by offering elite information for the exclusive reader.

Age-erasing tricks are used in a similar way as secrets to reinforce expert knowledge within the magazine. *Women's Health* tricks are portrayed as easy and efficient ways to become and/or stay normative. Age-erasing tricks are presented on the covers of three magazine issues out of the twelve month subscription analyzed. For example, *Women's Health* (2009g) describes “Age Erasing Beauty Tricks” (cover), and how to “Age-Proof Your Skin: 8 Easy Tricks” (*Women's Health*, 2010a, cover). Within the magazine table of contents *Women's Health* describes how to “Age-Proof Your Skin [through] [w]ays to prevent the not-so-pretty skin and hair conditions that pop up in your thirties” (*Women's Health*, 2010c, p. 9). These magazine tricks are reinforced through

expert knowledge and advice within the articles. Anti-aging tricks and advice are often given in an easy-to-follow, short, and simple list provided for knowledge seekers.

Because anti-aging tricks are presented through expert knowledge it becomes difficult for readers to resist because readers are set-up as primarily knowledge seekers with little power to question or expert advice to offer.

Within the previously discussed magazine article “Age Erasing Beauty Tricks” (Women’s Health, 2009g, cover) womens’ smiles are described as reflecting your age and youthfulness. Farah (2009) describes how perceptions of someone’s smile can influence the age that women portray. This *Women’s Health* article only describes womens’ smiles and teeth as cues and clues to ones age, which is also apparent through the picture that is paired with anti-aging statements. Within this article, Farah (2009) describes how “[t]eeth don’t get wrinkles, but they do show signs of aging” (p. 44) through teeth darkening with age. Procedures and tricks that are recommended within this article include teeth whitening, evening out shifted teeth through braces and inserts, brushing teeth regularly with fluoride, and removing/replacing old fillings with less visible dental options (Farah, 2009). These procedures and products can be pricey, time consuming, and painful, yet the only discourse that is considered within this article is the importance of looking youthful and beautiful. What is important in this article is that these beauty tricks are given by experts who are difficult to question due to the power imbalance of the reader and expert. These anti-aging tricks reinforce normative femininity and youthful beauty as desirable at any age and at any price.

## Consumption as the Solution to the “Problem” of Aging

Within a women’s health and fitness magazine one would expect to find a great deal of exercise and fitness information and advice. According to scholarly research, resistance training, aerobic exercise and moderate activity levels can slow the aging process. An overview of that literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, but there is evidence to suggest that regular moderate exercise has positive health benefits as one ages (see for example, Ashmore, 2008; and Orsega-Smith et al., 2008). One example of this from *Women’s Health* is within the article title “Walk It Off”, where an anonymous staff writer (2009h) describes how “[h]oofing it can slow weight gain associated with aging” (p. 26). This article describes physical activity as a quick and easy way to lose weight and maintain youthful appearances. There is little description of how long you must walk to slow weight gain or specific exercise strategies for staying healthy. The magazine portrays it as a very effortless process. This example is one of very few within the twelve month subscription and even then it provides very little information. Exercise and fitness advice with respect to aging does not appear with regularity within the magazine, but rather the emphasis of advice in relation to aging is based on consumption of medical procedures/surgery and/or products.

### *Anti-aging Medical Procedures/Surgery and Products*

Managing or evading the problems of aging to be managed is primarily presented within the magazine as achievable through medical procedures and plastic surgery. Magazine pictures that reproduce normative femininity promote aesthetic plastic surgery and medical procedures such as Botox. This is due to women comparing themselves to unachievable and unrealistic norms through pictures of models that have undergone

surgery as well as magazine airbrushing. Kinnunen (2010) describes how cosmetic surgery can reproduce successful aging as ageless and preventative. According to Kinnunen (2010),

[t]he rise of the rejuvenation surgery stems from the everyday representations of the normative body, which is young, beautiful, healthy, happy, effective, and often white. Cosmetic surgery is perhaps not used to deny the accumulation of years, but to control the visual signs of negative emotions and of the body equated with ageing. (p. 268)

Aesthetic plastic surgery is encouraged through articles and is portrayed as a simple option to combat outward signs of aging. According to Brooks (2010), “[a]geing successfully, in light of the increasing prevalence of aesthetic anti-ageing surgeries and technologies, comes to mean not only maintaining a healthy, active body through diet and exercise, but a young looking body (and face) through surgery and injectables” (p. 251). Consumption of products and medical procedures are reproduced as the only viable option to maintain longevity of women’s youth and youthful appearances. Within popular media representations, including *Women’s Health*, anti-aging procedures are dominantly targeted to women of all ages. Brooks (2010) describes how anti-aging surgeries are appealing for aging women due to the possibility of eliminating age-related characteristics and conserving normative femininity through youthful appearances.

Within *Women’s Health*, anti-aging surgeries and procedures are often described as investments in your health and wellness. Kinnunen (2010) describes how “[c]osmetic surgery is frequently justified as a quality of life investment: ageing people who choose it often wish to feel happier by looking younger” (p. 258). Investing in your health and wellness through consumption is seen as a necessary step to take in order to become/maintain normative femininity. According to Dworkin & Wachs (2009),

“consumers could and still do negotiate self-identity through a ‘reflective project of the self’, something that can be personally empowering” (p. 142). But this empowering project of the self is centered on consumption of procedures, surgeries and products. To facilitate the perception of aging gracefully women must eliminate wrinkles and “problems of aging” before they even appear, which can be seen as an investment into your future health and wellness.

Within *Women’s Health* magazine articles, aesthetic plastic surgery and medical procedures such as Botox are encouraged and endorsed as a normative means to conserve femininity. For example as described previously, Lennon (2010) discusses how

if you’ve been a maximum sun offender, a small dose of Botox—yes, even at 30—may be in order. When used in conservative amounts, it may keep ‘dynamic’ wrinkles (lines that show up only when you frown or smile) from turning into ‘static’ wrinkles (which hang around no matter what your expression). (p. 103)

Within this article, Botox is encouraged not only as a medical strategy to treat wrinkles, but also as a way to prevent wrinkles from occurring in the first place. Within the magazine, prevention of aging is important to portray, rather than just treatment of aging because dominant discourse of normative femininity as youthful are reinforced as natural. Anti-aging strategies are suggested for women in their twenties and thirties in order to prevent outward-signs of aging. For instance, Lennon (2010) describes how “30 is a pivotal age for preserving the health of your skin” (p. 101). The magazine reinforces that if a woman preserves her skin at a young age she is able to avoid aging side-effects, and therefore she ages gracefully. Botox, as a medical procedure, is presented as a low-risk necessary treatment to maintaining youthfulness. Botox and other anti-aging treatments are represented as regular maintenance that is essential for women of all ages. The magazine does not describe details of medical procedures including the pain that these

aesthetic procedures may inflict. Botox (as a wrinkle defeater) is presented as a risk-free medical procedure, which is performed by professionals who have expertise and knowledge in the field of health and aging. For instance Lennon (2010) does not discuss any risks involved with the procedure of Botox or cosmetic surgery. Lennon (2010) also does not describe how this procedure must be performed every few months in order to maintain the physical appearance of a wrinkle free youthful face. Within *Women's Health* there is no knowledge provided for the reader about how Botox is injected, risk-factors, or what the product is derived from. Botox is displayed as a socially accepted prevention and treatment strategy to stave off outward signs of aging for women of all ages. Lennon (2010), drawing on the advice of highly credible 'expert' dermatologists, suggests to the reader that if you perform routine Botox and retinoid treatments at a younger age you can all together avoid skin aging. This example reinforces how the magazine reproduces anti-aging procedures and aesthetic plastic surgeries as normative for women of all ages.

Consuming products to maintain youthfulness or beauty, which is portrayed as desirable within the magazine, is reproduced as important and significant. Women can manage the "problem" of aging through the consumption of products that *Women's Health* endorses. As I stated above, cosmetic surgery is endorsed within *Women's Health*, but there is a resistance to the invasive nature of surgical procedures within some advertisements for anti-aging products such as Olay. Olay (2009) and ORIGINS are the only advertisements that outwardly resists cosmetic plastic surgery and procedures such as Botox. For instance, Olay (2009) describes how to "Open your eyes to a regenerist eye make-up and close the door on cosmetic procedures. It's not surgical results of course, but it is a total eye makeover without a single cosmetic procedure. You won't believe

your eyes” (p. 114). This advertisement provides an alternative to anti-aging surgeries while stating that the results are not equal to surgeries but that Olay’s anti-aging skincare line can provide surprisingly youthful appearances. ORIGINS (2009b) states that their skin tone correcting serum is “nature’s alternative to lasers” (p. 9). Olay (2009) and ORIGINS (2009b) promote their product in a way that caters to readers who do not hold the economic freedom for expensive anti-aging surgical procedures as well as readers who feel that surgery is too invasive for aesthetic results. As previously described in this section, Edgar (2009) discusses skincare products that will create a more youthful appearance such as “Burt’s Bees Naturally Ageless Intensive Repairing Serum” (p. 145) and “Neutrogena Ageless Intensives Deep Wrinkle Anti-Wrinkle Moisture Night... [which will] soften fine lines” (p. 144). Edgar (2009) provides anti-aging skincare products that are affordable for magazine readers to consume. As described in chapter three, GARNIER (2009) provides a skincare line that “stimulates micro-circulation to awaken youthful radiance” (p. 5, original in capitals). All of these skincare products provide an affordable alternative to anti-aging surgeries and procedures. Within *Women’s Health* advertisements and articles one thing that is clear within all anti-aging products, surgeries and procedures is that women are expected and anticipated to consume in order to mask the problems of aging.

#### *Blurring between Advertisements and Articles within Women’s Health*

Consuming anti-aging procedures/surgeries and products is promoted within the magazine and is perceived as a way to maintain normative femininity. One final but very important point with respect to consumption is that, within the magazine, it at times becomes difficult to tell what is content and what is advertising. This can make it difficult

for readers (who are perceived as knowledge seekers) to navigate what is expert knowledge and what is paid endorsements.

Due to the blurring between articles and advertisements, it is often not easy to distinguish the selling of lifestyles, cultural standards, and products. For example, a Cottonelle (2009) advertisement states

Don't Forget Your Cheeks!

Booty Bulletin

Ward off a wrinkled tush with a full-coverage swimsuit and waterproof sunblock [from the] cottonelle institute of sensitive skincare. (p. 61)

Cottonelle is a brand of tissue and toilet paper, yet the advertisement does not provide any information on the product that is being sold. The product name is only placed in small font on the bottom of the advertisement. This Cottonelle advertisement is depicted as scientific information within an article, rather than an advertisement for toilet paper. Advice is given by Cottonelle (2009) that includes creative workout activities to burn fat such as “215 calories burned in a 60 minute rump-shaking session” (p. 60) while dancing, as well as a “Gluteus Maximus Exercise of The Month: Squat Jumps” (p. 60) and advice on how to avoid sun damage and wrinkled skin. This advertisement is organized in such a way that it gives advice on a lifestyle that the toilet paper company promotes as normative, even though this lifestyle has no direct influence on the product that is being sold. This advertisement is set up in such a way that it mimics a magazine article. Virtually all that distinguishes this advertisement from an article is that the word “Advertisement” appears in print on the top of the page.

Overall, there are no clear-cut boundaries and/or specific formatting for articles and advertisements, which can make it difficult to distinguish between magazine articles and advertisements. Not only are products being sold within advertisements as we would

expect, but they are also being sold within articles. Magazine articles provide product information which includes where to find products as well as how much products cost. For instance, within the Nutritional SCOOP section, the magazine discusses how if you “[w]ant to look and feel younger? [you should] [d]rink more tea” (anonymous staff writer, 2010b, p. 30). This example describes how individuals who drink tea are actually younger than their counterparts who do not consume tea daily. This health advice is paired with an endorsement for a product for readers to buy that will provide the reader/consumer with a healthier lifestyle. For instance, an anonymous staff writer (2010b) argues that you should

Go boil some water

Or for the ultimate brew, check out the new Breville variable-temperature teakettle (Williams-sonoma.com, \$150), which features individual settings to maximize the distinct flavours of green, white, oolong, and black tea varieties. (p. 30)

This advertisement is significant because it is difficult to tell if it is an advertisement for the teakettle or if it is a magazine article on the positive health effects of tea drinking. It is possible to drink tea that is made with a cheaper and simpler kettle, but this kettle is promoted as providing readers with a healthier lifestyle and a younger physique.

Another example of blurring between magazine advertisements and articles is within the article “2009 Beauty Awards”. This article describes readers’, experts’ and editors’ favourite product picks for women’s face, hair, body and makeup products. The article provides information on top beauty products including “Best Anti-Aging Product (8) Olay Regenerist Daily Regenerating Serum, \$10, at drugstores” (anonymous staff writer, 2009f, p. 117). This product is advertised through the article that states that this is a good product to buy, which makes it difficult to decipher between magazine advice and

product endorsement. Olay is able to expand their advertising through magazine endorsements within magazine articles. Olay as a “best anti-aging product” chosen by magazine readers may have been influenced by the massive amount of advertisements within the magazine with which the readers are bombarded. Another example is within the “Secrets of the Skin Doctors” article. Within this magazine article, Edgar (2009) provides advice from dermatologists about their favourite skincare products, how much each product is and where to find them. While we expect to find this type of information within product advertisements here we find it within articles as well. These articles provide insider advice to consume particular products that can be bought through companies that advertise within the magazine. Both the “2009 Beauty Awards” and the “Nutrition Scoop” articles illustrate how magazine advice can also be used as an advertisement for companies that support the magazine financially through advertising dollars.

One final example of the ways in which *Women’s Health* blurs content and advertising is by placing advertising strategically within related articles. One example is Aveeno (2009a,b,c) advertisements which are strategically placed between “the perfect skin diet” article pages. The magazine’s “the perfect skin diet” article provides facts and advice from a magazine advisor and doctor on how to keep your skin healthy (Gaynes, 2009). Due to the placement of these advertisements, Aveeno’s skincare line is promoted as part of the article and part of the medical advice given within the article.

As I argued in the previous chapter, *Women’s Health* reproduces dominant discourses of femininity in relation to race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, youthfulness and successful womanhood and draws upon these normative discourses of femininity to

frame aging women as aesthetic and reproductive failures, and/or diseased. In the process the magazine puts the responsibility for self-improvement on individual women (including aging women) and blames them for not conforming to normative standards of femininity. In this chapter I argued that the magazine relies on the discursive authority of experts and expert knowledge to legitimize these dominant discourses while positioning the reader as unknowledgeable and in need of advice. *Women's Health* positions readers as consumers in relation to expert knowledge. I concluded by describing how consumption is reinforced as a solution to the problem of aging through anti-aging surgeries, procedures and products. Within the magazine consumption of anti-aging reproduces aging women's bodies as problems to be managed in order to uphold normative femininity.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

My research investigated discursive productions of aging through media representations of health and fitness within *Women's Health* magazine. The research is significant due to the prevalent nature of the media and the link between biological and social beliefs of aging. The question I began with was "how are aging women socially constructed through a societal institution such as the popular media?" My literature review highlighted that a number of social constructions of aging for both men and women have been perpetuated in popular discourse including aging as physical and mental decline, a problem to be managed, and a drain on society. My research specifically examined if dominant discourses of aging women as other, as diseased, as patients, and/or as a problem to be managed were appropriated and/or resisted within the magazine under investigation.

*Women's Health* was a significant platform for my discursive analysis because it is aimed to women of all ages, lifestyles and abilities. This magazine provides a variety of healthy living advice for the 'average' women. *Women's Health* describes how

Women's Health is for the woman who wants to reach a healthy, attractive weight... [for those that know that] exercising and eating well will make you happier and stronger... And that life can be stressful since there's never enough time, but balance is achievable. (Women's Health, 2008)

This Foucaultian discourse analysis investigated what discourses appear with regularity within a specific moment in time and explored how knowledge, truth, and power influence the functioning of those discourses of aging.

Poststructural conceptions of language, meaning, and the subject were significant to my understanding and analysis of representations. Within our increasingly commercialized culture, representation is important because it shapes how subjects understand themselves and how they conduct their own behaviour. Within my discourse analysis of *Women's Health* I did not engage representation as reflective (the magazine simply reflects reality) or as intentional (the magazine simply imposes meanings upon the readers). Rather I engaged in a constructionist approach to representation which acknowledges that meaning is constructed through the representations. Given this approach what is significant within the discursive analysis of media representations is the power relations that are created by particular discursive practices within the magazine.

My results first focus on how normative femininity and successful womanhood is portrayed within *Women's Health*. Normative femininity is apparent through both dominant discursive presences and discursive silences. Normative femininity, as it is illustrated within the magazine, is portrayed as imperative and achievable for all women and is legitimized through products that are sold within the magazine. *Women's Health* reproduces dominant discourses of normative femininity in relation to race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, youthfulness and successful womanhood.

Race/ethnicity is reproduced as primarily Caucasian, with only two visible minorities as feature models and one multicultural beauty advice article. Class is illustrated as middle-upper class through pictures of women and the clothing and products they wear and endorse. The magazine portrays ultra-rich celebrities and expensive products as the norm, thus reproducing lower-middle class women as lacking due to their socioeconomic status. Costly products are reinforced as necessary to

consume for lower-middle class women to conform to normative femininity. Given that *Women's Health* features normatively feminine bodies, not surprisingly the magazine also assumes heterosexuality in its readers and reinforces that assumption through its texts and pictures. Normative femininity is also, and perhaps most importantly given the topic of this thesis, reproduced as youthful. The presence of youth as normative is reproduced through depicting only young women in its article and advertisement images. There are no pictures of “aged” women and this invisibility within the magazine creates an unsaid assumption that successfully feminine women do not show outward signs of aging. Successful womanhood is also reinforced as reproductive and nurturing. *Women's Health* articles often focus on the importance of planning for a baby and the natural role for women of being a mother.

The magazine draws upon these normative discourses of femininity to frame aging women as failures, and/or diseased and in the process puts the responsibility for self-improvement on individual women and places blame on them for not conforming to normative standards of femininity. Pictures within the magazine present youthful faces and flawless/smooth bodies, with little to no signs of aging. Aging women are portrayed as reproductive failures if they appear to be menopausal through physical outward signs of aging. Menopause is dominantly illustrated as a secretive process that is not discussed within *Women's Health* magazine. When the “secret” of aging is described it is only through narratives of prevention. Within the magazine, aging women are often described through medical terminology as diseased and deficient. Outward signs of aging such as wrinkles, something that can be read on the body, can come to indicate potential diseases’, which is something that cannot be read outwardly on the body. If there are no

outward signs of aging there is an assumption that you are a healthy woman, but if there are signs of aging, you are perceived as unhealthy and possibly diseased. Aging women are often portrayed within the magazine as neglectful and to blame for not conforming to femininely youthful appearances. It is suggested that in reading the magazine women will soon find a way to redeem themselves through what the magazine describes as easy lifestyle changes.

In this sense, the magazine reinforces aging as a problem to be managed through the sharing of youthful secrets, advice, and age-erasing tricks. The magazine draws on the discursive authority of celebrities, doctors, science, and nature/natural to provide 'expert' advice. *Women's Health* legitimizes the discursive authority of experts and expert knowledge by positioning the reader as knowledge and advice seeker. The reader is assumed to be in need of knowledge rather than in a position of giving expertise. The reader is disciplined (in the Foucaultian sense) by reinforcing them as knowledge seekers within *Women's Health*. If magazine readers were positioned as knowledgeable there would be no need for women to read the magazine and gain insider advice.

This problem of aging is depicted as manageable through the consumption of products endorsed within articles and advertisements. Exercise and fitness advice with respect to aging does not appear with regularity within the magazine, but rather the emphasis of advice in relation to aging is based on the consumption of medical procedures/surgery and/or products. Anti-aging procedures and surgeries such as Botox are encouraged through magazine articles targeted to women as young as their twenties. Anti-aging products are endorsed as a 'healthy' less invasive solution to the problem of aging through magazine advertisements such as Aveeno, ORIGINS, and GARNIER.

There are no clear-cut boundaries or differentiation between articles and advertisements. Products are sold within advertisements, but they are also sold within articles. Due to this blurring between magazine advertisements and articles, it is often not easy to distinguish the selling of products versus the selling of cultural standards and/or lifestyles. This reinforces aging women as problems to be managed through the combination of the magazine's expert knowledge and their endorsement of anti-aging procedures and products.

The contribution this thesis makes to academic research is in analyzing through a critical lens which discourses of aging appear with regularity within a specific health magazine. Through this project, contradictions within the dominant discourses of aging are revealed within *Women's Health*. When these contradictions become apparent (as they have in this analysis) discourses are unravelled and can be acknowledged as socially constructed. Contradictions within *Women's Health* are significant because when inconsistencies are apparent the questioning of dominant discourses and the use of resistant discourses become possible.

In a study somewhat related to mine (and discussed in Chapter one), Barnett (2007) describes how within *More* magazine young, youthful pictures of women are reproduced as normative despite the middle-aged target audience and texts describing stereotypes of aging and how to challenge them. A contradiction becomes apparent between texts, statements and pictures within *More* magazine articles. Within *Women's Health* there appear to be few resistant discourses or challenges to ageist stereotypes, but there are similar contradictions within discourses of aging women through the pictures that are shown. Many pictures of women within aging articles and anti-aging

advertisements are young and completely flawless; these female models do not show outward physical signs of aging on their face or body. Young female models within an aging article or an anti-aging advertisement are a contradiction because young women in their twenties should not have to use age treating/correcting products. These pictures of young women reflect what women should aspire to be when they are starting to see possible signs of aging, even though this is impossible and unattainable. Within *Women's Health*, contradictions within dominant discourses of aging women as diseased and other are obvious. For example (and as I argue earlier in this thesis), within *Women's Health* outward signs of aging, such as wrinkles, are represented as deviant from the norm, and therefore are not seen as natural, yet aging (including wrinkles) is something that we cannot avoid and is a natural occurrence in all living beings.

Additionally, readers may not see themselves in the dominant discourse because their lived experiences may contradict the knowledge shared within the magazine. For example, if a woman's experience of menopause was a positive experience that does not conform to the discourses of disease, treatment and medicalization that are portrayed within *Women's Health* the discourse can be acknowledged as socially constructed, unnatural and untrue. Once the discourse is revealed as socially constructed resistance is possible for the reader who would no longer look to the magazine for advice, secrets and/or tricks. When readers acknowledge that dominant discourses that are portrayed within the magazine as unquestionable are in fact socially constructed, then new resistant discourses become viable options.

When anti-aging surgeries, procedures, and products are backed up by scientific proof and natural ingredients it can become difficult to question discourses that position

aging women as deviant from the norm. When science is used within the magazine it is often presented as truthful and unbiased and therefore discourages questioning of credibility. However, when contradictions become apparent, such as nature fighting the aging process despite aging being natural, or women's lived experiences not conforming to the discourses represented, resisting those dominant discourses becomes a viable option. Thus, this project is meaningful because when contradictions are found within dominant discourses, resistance can be seen as possible and dominant discourses can change and shift as a result.

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