

# Relations between food, obesity, weight loss and consumption in women's magazines

## Relações entre alimentação, obesidade, perda de peso e consumo em revistas femininas

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### Abstract

*Objective:* To understand sense and meanings that are present in the intricate tangle of messages about eating, obesity and weight loss in magazines targeted at lower class women who have risen to the status of consumers in Brazilian society. *Methodology:* Data were collected from the magazines *VIVA! Mais* (“Live longer”) and “Sou Mais Eu!” (“I like myself better”), published on a weekly basis in the year 2014. Emphasis was placed on the sections that deal with dieting for weight loss purposes. *Results and Discussion:* nutritional rationality has been found to underlie processes of medicalization of eating and pharmacologization of food through experiments that, based on scientific legitimacy, disseminate products which are similar to pharmaceutical drugs in articles and advertisements. Self-control for the sake of having a lean body is encouraged by values and moral judgments that lead individuals to blame themselves. Oriented towards building happiness that can be purchased in the market, the media continues to invest in the construction of new consumer codes. In their daily lives, individuals surrounded by big pharmaceutical corporations, food manufacturers and editorials have to face relationships of power and judgments in a kind of moral obligation to be happy. *Conclusions:* Driven to rely solely on their own forces, individuals continue along a civilizing process in currently modern times. In the relationships between eating, obesity, weight loss and consumption, materialized in this lucrative edited world of magazines that seek to reach the poorest women, “I like myself better” is perfectly possible, easier and simpler than “Live

longer!”. Once trapped in this web of meanings, individuals consume more and for much longer.

**Keywords:** Obesity. Beauty Culture. Magazine. Women. Consumption. Diet, Food, and Nutrition.

## Resumo

*Objetivo:* Compreender sentidos e significados presentes no intrincado emaranhado de mensagens sobre alimentação, obesidade e perda de peso presentes em revistas que se dirigem a mulheres de camadas pobres que emergem ao consumo na sociedade brasileira. *Metodologia:* Os dados foram coletados nas revistas *VIVA! Mais* e *Sou mais eu!*, publicadas, semanalmente, durante o ano de 2014. Destaca-se as seções que tratam de dieta com vistas à perda de peso. *Resultados e Discussão:* Identifica-se a *racionalidade nutricional* orientada por processos de medicalização da alimentação e farmacologização da comida por meio de *expertises* que, apoiados na legitimidade científica, operam na divulgação de produtos similares a fármacos em matérias e publicidade. O autocontrole visando a alcançar o corpo magro é estimulado a partir de valores e julgamentos morais por caminhos que desembocam na culpabilização do indivíduo. Voltadas para a construção de uma felicidade que se adquire no mercado, a mídia segue investindo na construção de novos códigos de consumo. O indivíduo inserido no mundo das grandes corporações de medicamentos, alimentos e editoriais vive seu cotidiano em face de relações de poder e de julgamentos numa espécie de obrigação moral de ser feliz. *Conclusões:* Movido a confiar unicamente em suas próprias forças, segue o indivíduo em seu processo civilizatório nessa hipermodernidade. Nas relações entre alimentação, obesidade, perda de peso e consumo, materializadas nesse lucrativo mundo editado das revistas, que buscam atingir as mulheres mais pobres. Se “*Sou mais eu!*”, então, é perfeitamente possível, fácil e simples que eu “*Viva mais!*”. Uma vez presa dessa teia de significados, consome-se *Mais!* e por muito *Mais!* tempo.

**Palavras-chave:** Obesidade. Cultura. Magazines. Mulher. Consumo. Nutrição. Alimentos, Dieta e Nutrição.

## Introduction

For the reflections developed in this article, we have considered the context of changes in the Brazilian economy that in recent decades has been increasingly leading to the inclusion of impoverished portions of society to the world of consumption.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these changes, the strong increase in *obesity* and comorbidities in Brazil,<sup>2</sup> in particular among groups of society that have started to consume products that were less accessible until very recently,<sup>3</sup> characterizing some signs of new eating and social habitus,<sup>4-7</sup> the dissemination of scientific knowledge in society through magazines in which market rules prevail<sup>8</sup> and the significant role of the media in building symbols, desires and needs, leveraging increasingly diversified consumption and promoting new values and practices in relation to food and health.<sup>9,10</sup>

Some phenomena have been problematized in studies that take products produced by the media, among them magazines, as empirical material to examine social relations mediated by food, including those involving dissemination of diets and products for weight loss. At the same time, in spite of this widespread dissemination of methods to lose weight, it follows obesity in a growing pattern, characterizing an epidemicity of great proportions that seems to affect especially the poorest layers of society.

Searching the specialized literature for discussions on consumption associated with magazines for food products, food, medical products and others associated with health, disease and care, we have identified a number of papers examining women's magazines, turning them into empirical material of analyses, such as Brazilian magazines *Capricho*,<sup>11,12</sup> *Gloss*,<sup>13</sup> *Boa Forma*,<sup>14</sup> *Estilo e Saúde*,<sup>15</sup> *Nova* and *Marie Claire*,<sup>16</sup> among others. In general, they are magazines in which the editor's point of view is given by the proposal of providing information, advice and "tips" to a certain female audience. According to data available on "Publiabril"<sup>17</sup> website, magazines of this nature have their predominant public in A and B social classes, that is, of greater purchasing power in Brazilian society. They are marketed in unit values ranging from BRL 8.00 to BRL 10.00. The articles published there are characterized by the insertion of celebrities, intellectuals, scientists or reference names in society as the central point of issuing truth discourses through which different information circulates and as a place of authority to deal with topics in focus involving the consumption of goods and services aimed at care for the body and health.

Differentiating, in a way, from this profile, there are some magazines aimed at the female audience that seek to spread among the women in economically poorer layers. *VIVA! Mais* ("Live longer") and *Sou Mais Eu* ("I like myself better") are examples and are among the best sellers in Brazil. They are published by (major Brazilian publisher and printing company) Editora Abril Cultural and traded at much lower prices, between BRL 1.50 and BRL 1.99. Also according to data made available on the "Publiabril" website, 94% of the audience that purchase these magazines correspond to women, half of them aged between 15 and 34 years, 63% living in southeastern

Brazil and mostly from C and D social classes and these correspond to lower financial possibilities of consumption when compared to A and B classes. Magazines *VIVA! Mais* and *Sou mais eu!* meet another characteristic that differentiates them from those targeting A and B social classes: they are based on editorial emphasis on readers' testimony on the topics conveyed. Of course, it is necessary to consider the existence of editions of the articles by these media production teams, which can be considered a strategy for meaning production with this group, resulting in material presented as equivalent to reality, as it is lived, present in the narratives of readers who, in turn, are presented as central subjects in issuing messages and publicity in the magazine. It is also necessary to consider the readers' participation in the articles creation process, which involves the payment of testimonies through headlines made viable in the material published itself, as shall be seen later. Finally, it seems that magazines such as *VIVA! Mais* and *Sou mais eu!* have characteristics that would not be present in the studies already carried out, in particular by giving "voice to the readers," making them legitimate authorities<sup>18</sup> in the process of building articles and advertisements for various products.

From these studies, we have taken three axes to delineate hypotheses related to the articles published in these magazines aimed at the economically poorer female audience that emerges to consumption: (a) Food, treated in a fragmented way, sometimes reduced to the condition of diet and nutrients, sometimes as an equivalent to industrialized products targeting spectacular weight loss; (b) Obesity, presented as the magazine main attraction, an issue for which there is an easy and fast solution; and (c) Weight loss as a way to achieve success, happiness and individual fulfillment, in short. All this fitting a non-explicit web of meanings<sup>19</sup> in a movement that seeks to trap people more and more in the construction of meanings of an individualized and individualizing life, alienated from their complex structural and contingent contexts and in which merchandise consumption would solve all problems.

From authors who discuss the health categories, such as Foucault,<sup>20</sup> consumption in hyper-modernity, according to Lipovetsky,<sup>21</sup> and considering the use of science in the current sense of its popularization, according to Vergara,<sup>22</sup> for the affirmation of consumption of body slimming products, it is our objective to understand the senses and the meanings present in the intricate entanglement of messages on eating, obesity and weight loss present in these magazines directed to women of poor strata of the population that emerge to consumption in contemporary Brazilian society.

### Characteristics of magazines aimed at the female audience emerging to consumption

For data collection, we consider magazines *VIVA! Mais*<sup>23</sup> and "*Sou mais eu!*"<sup>24</sup> published on a weekly basis during 2014. During this period, they would be organized into sections presented in the tables below.

**Table 1.** Sections in magazine *Sou mais eu!*

Beauty	One of the sections our readers like best, to always be beautiful and impeccably groomed with tips from experts who understand the subject matter!
Hair	Tips to make the reader have her hair always fashionable.
Cover	A story of overcoming from a woman who has lost weight and got the body she had always dreamed of.
Cooking	Delicious recipes tested and approved by the magazine staff.
Having fun	Crossword to relax.
Drama	Stories that touch the readers' heart.
Education	Special projects that make a difference in education in our country.
Jokes	Jokes found in books or on the Internet to amuse the audience.
Sex	News that our sexiest readers discover and recommend.
Sustainability	People who show how it is possible to help the planet to live better.
Work	Some way of encouraging the reader to search some cool profession with tips from readers who have specialized in the field.
Betrayal	Betrayed, our readers often take their revenge in a funny way. And they bounce back.

**Table 2.** Sections of magazine *VIVA! Mais*

Self-help	How to overcome the limits that are imposed on you and succeed in life with a lot of self-esteem and confidence. Articles showing paths for readers to overcome boundaries and increase their self-esteem.
Beauty	One of the sections that our readers most like, to always be beautiful and well groomed. One of the most popular sections among the readers, since it brings all the tips to make them look prettier: the latest hair treatments (creams, shampoos, blow-dry, haircuts, hair dye...), fashionable nail polishes, the best makeup, products for body and face skin.

continue

Well-being	Tips to improve your mood, feel better about yourself, improve health, nutrition and more. Here, we mainly address health issues. The idea is to show different ways for her to take care of her body and mind, as well as to unravel great topics such as diabetes, sodium consumption, etc.
Career/Education	Career help, how to achieve success, among others, are always welcome, especially for our readers who are just starting out. Career and education are increasingly important issues for our reader. She wants to succeed in life and earn more! The section idea is to show the paths for her to do it. For this, we publish the service of several university courses (mainly technological and distance learning) and we provide a selection of vacancies.
Courses	Each course has at least four classes – precisely to be able to “train” the reader on a specific topic. We have already had courses in makeup, dance, confectionery, holistic therapy...
Tips of the Week	Important facts that have occurred during the week. Tips and curiosities that have rocked the week, especially within topics about Beauty, Money, Fun and Love.
Between us	Fiction stories that are divided into chapters to arouse suspense for the reader.
Celebrities	Summary of the week of celebrities. The hottest events in celebrity lives, with exclusive notes and interviews.
Do things and make money	Tips to increase income with simple and inexpensive things to do at home. Each week, we show a new product that the reader can make at home to sell.
Horoscope	Weekly forecast of each zodiac sign.
Cover story	A special report on the main cover headline. We usually publish stories about new trends, products and methods to lose weight and lead a healthier life.
My money	Tips on how to save money at home, with food, kids’ expenses and more. All the strategies to make money pay off more, whether at home, at the grocery store, while spending with credit cards...
My home	Decorating tips and easy and inexpensive renovations.

continue

My rights	Reports about the rights that readers have at different times: when having a faulty product replacement, when they are fired, when asking for government social security benefits...
Fashion	Tips on fashion, different styles, how to dress well on all occasions for all body types. Readers love all the tips in the section, which is always highly commented! Another beloved section by the readers due to providing fashion tips every week (what looks good for each body type), with examples of beautiful and affordable clothing pieces.
Soap operas	A weekly summary of TV soap operas.
Dear Reader	Sweet messages straight from the magazine staff to the readers.
Hot VIVA	How to spice up the relationship, stories of women who have met Prince Charming and more. All the tricks to make the relationship spicier. And also for the single reader to meet Prince Charming.
Zíbia and You	A message from (Brazilian spiritualist writer) Zíbia Gasparetto.
Mouthwatering	The most delicious recipes.

We have highlighted for discussion in this article the section dealing with the cover diet, which for the magazine *Sou mais eu!* brings “Stories of overcoming from a woman who has lost weight and was left with the body she had always dreamed of,” which in *VIVA! Mais* presents “Articles on new trends, products and methods to lose weight and lead a healthier life”. Here, eating, obesity and weight loss are a constant presence. Such a procedure does not mean that the whole of the magazine was not considered, which operates as a specific context for the object of this study. Several other sections also deal with the topic of interest for our study. We consider, as in Foucault, that “Discourse production is always controlled, selected, organized and redistributed,” as is explicit in the editorial treatment given to the readers’ original reports. Proceeding with the author, we understand that, well beyond the mere revision of the wording, such procedures “Aim to conjure their powers and dangers, dodging their heavy and fearsome materiality.” In this sense, we seek to understand some order underlying these discourses that seem to be worth more than money or power.

A significant, expressive and characteristic feature of this magazine modality is that the readers' stories or accounts are paid for. There are several headlines throughout the magazines about values ranging from one or two hundred (more frequent) to one thousand Brazilian reais for each "Story of overcoming, diet, love, sex, betrayal, beauty, fashion, work, decoration, health and funny stories." The final text published is prepared by the magazine's editorial staff, as seen in the first testimony that follows. On the same page and very close to the box that brings this information, there is an edited report from a reader proving these procedures, expressed in the second testimony.

See how easy it is to participate. There is no need to make a special effort with the text. Leave that to us! Write it your own way, without worrying about mistakes. If your story is approved by our team, a magazine reporter shall contact you to interview you! (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 372).

"A dream!" This is the definition from (...name...), our cover for the 370<sup>th</sup> edition, to describe her achievement. "I've never imagined that I could be published by *Sou mais eu!* being an example of having overcome and giving a testimony about my life. I've found fulfillment because I can share my story," says the eyebrow designer. As for the BRL 1,000 that she is going to receive for her participation, she says: "This money is going straight to my savings to buy a very nice apartment!," she says (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 372).

Within this scope, several products and services are advertised, either in full page, sometimes in small spaces within each page, or as part of the texts that make up the stories. Strong colors, images (of products, figures alluding to the topics covered, many photos of the readers) and flashy titles with large letters in background of contrasting color for short texts give the tone of the whole.

## Food, diet and weight loss

In a single page, two blocks, among others (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 372).

Highlighted by the position on the page and by its size, a headline states that it is possible to learn how "to make 100 desserts without carbohydrate!" Including sweets in the diet is the central axis of the article, which presents a cookbook developed by a nutritionist who has created the diet that takes his name. Recipes adapted [such as (Brazilian desserts) *brigadeiro* and *bem-casado*, besides pudding and cheesecake] are announced for a "leaner" day to day. The image of the carrot cake slice (colored with a thick covering of chocolate sauce – made with corn starch – that pours, accumulating in the bottom of the plate) is very close to the book image, with an emphasis on its cover. The whole strengthens the idea of using wheat bran and oats, some sweetener, skim milk



and soy protein. The other block, slightly smaller, announces a cell phone application in which some weight goal is recorded and the time at which one desires to reach it. From then on, the cell phone beeps at the times of each meal, indicating the amount of calories to be consumed and daily recording the weight.

This is just one of many whole pages (or even three in a row, not counting other parts dealing specifically with weight loss or insertions in articles about other topics that somehow mention food, all in one magazine issue) devoted to diet, present in all the issues considered in this study.

## The experts' opinion

Nutritionists, nutrition experts, endocrinologists, dermatologists, among other specialists (variously clearly linked to companies that market the products mentioned in the articles or to scientific societies or clinics) are always present to say what must be done to achieve success through weight loss or “overcoming” fat.

“The mixture of oils makes the process of digestion slower. With this, you feel satiated for longer and avoid overeating,” explains nutrition expert (...name...) from *Associação Brasileira de Nutrologia* (Brazilian Association of Nutrition Expertise) (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 700).

“Spirulina acts by coating the stomach walls, creating a sensation of satiety,” explains nutritionist (...name...) from the clinic (...name...). (...name...), a nutritionist from the Network (...name...) adds: “It improves the production of serotonin, decreasing binge eating.” “This makes it easier (...).” (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 756).

Calories, carbohydrates, vitamins, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, among other nutritional components, circulate with agility, just as biochemical and pathophysiological processes are present in the simple, direct and naturalized verbiage of the magazines under examination.

(...) Goji berry is damn good to health! It is rich in antioxidants and has high levels of vitamin C, protein, zinc and iron. Check its benefits: 1. It prevents premature aging; 2. It reduces the risk of diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer’s disease (Ad) and Parkinson’s disease (PD); 3. It lowers cholesterol; 4. It is rich in vitamin C, helping keep the immune system properly functioning; and 5. It boots energy. This is great! (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 755).

Citrus + green tea = accelerated fat loss! (...) “This is because this compound contains synephrine, a substance that increases body temperature, breaking down fat.” (...) With green tea it is perfect: “Together, they lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL, sometimes referred to as bad cholesterol), boosts energy and promote fat loss.” (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 375).

In a veritable profusion of new products (including diets, books, foods, teas, shakes, capsules, powders ...), health and weight loss go hand in hand through a verbiage strongly marked by the biomedical discourse that follows, thus introducing itself in society as truth in scientific tones. In texts reminiscent of drug inserts, a specific association between scientific discourse and marketing advertising is consolidated, in which food and medicine are transmuted into one another, in a process of mutual, permanent and insistent support.

By the paths that Lipovetsky<sup>21,25</sup> indicate in his analyses of what he calls hyper-modernity, we continue to identify in these magazines the weekly launch of several new products in new and different forms, in a continuous and uninterrupted movement.<sup>26</sup> If the diet does not work, switch to another one and continue to consume indefinitely, in search of success and happiness. It is easy! It is fast! It is simple!

“NOW YOU LOSE WEIGHT! THE FORMULA TO LOSE 12 KG QUICKLY WITHOUT FEELING BORED ABOUT THE MENU!” She has gone from sizes 22 to 8 (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 743).

With “before” and “after” photos (with the girl taking a selfie in that second moment), the cover headline mentions the article that has at the top of the page three images, each one formed by different angles of slender belly, hip and thighs with slightly toned muscles. The title of the article is: “The plan for you to lose 12 kg.” These are three “powerful” and combined diets... “Losing weight fast.” They are: “Detox,” “Antioxidant” and “No gluten or lactose.” The saleswoman who appears in the photo informs that she has lost 40 kg by following the three diets in turns and says: “As the diet always changes, it is easy to follow.” She was weighing 127 kg, now she weighs 87 kg... “And she wants even more: to weigh 75 kg. Come on, woman!” As expected, all supported by a nutritionist.

## The science

Every week, a woman can conquer her dream: to be a magazine cover and earn up to a thousand reais for this achievement: consume and lose weight! The “before and after” photos are permanently there as an indisputable evidence of the truth provided by knowledge scientifically presented! Hyper-consumption and hyper-scientism in a society guided by mass production and consumption under the aegis of seduction, diversity and obsolescence. Human beings as mere consumers in view of science advances (and/or their simulacra) articulated to the market competitive logic and the investment of advertising in a culture of desires for the new product, service... According to the author, a world of abundance of goods and services worshiped through a hedonistic morality configuring a hyper-individual human profile.

As far as science is concerned, its truth value continues to be used in similar approaches to what is found among authors who discuss *medicalization*<sup>27</sup> and the *social pharmacologization*<sup>28</sup> of present-day life. With health and beauty in focus, the search for information about diet, the dissemination of scientific knowledge to the lay public and the increase in the supply of medical technologies (be they medicines, equipment, services, products ...) participate in the conformation of phenomena such as the capture by biomedicine of non-medical issues and the expansion of the use of such technologies for purposes that go beyond prevention or treatment of diseases. In a movement guided by a specific *nutritional rationality*,<sup>29</sup> the medicalization in the scope of nutrition and the pharmacologization of food are expressed in the intensification of the consumption of diets and products associated with the lean body ideals disclosed in the magazines reviewed here. Such processes are consolidated as truths through the constant presence of biomedically trained specialists to prescribe nutrients systematically accompanied by products that keep all the characteristics of some medication – even if, legally, they are treated as food. Thus, alongside information about diseases (warts, cancer, sexually transmitted diseases...), the presence of full-page advertising by drug industries is identified (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 392). Lists of pharmacies accompany articles titled “Hot news to boost your diet (...)” (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 375), often supported by internationally inserted research.

The benefits that spirulina brings to the body are being studied by doctors worldwide (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 756).

Images of various packages of “natural capsules” appear paired with menus that include tips from a nutritionist recommending “(...) Take one capsule [of one of these products] after meals” (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 375).

Getting even thinner! There are no miracles, right? If you really want to lose weight, you need to combine the consumption of the capsules with a balanced diet. In order to help, the nutritionist (...) has created a 1,200-calorie menu to make one lose at least 2 kg per month (*VIVA mais!*, 2014, 756).

In addition to the strong and ongoing stimulus to consumption of products presented as effective for weight loss, low energy diets are advertised as full-day menus in all issues in the magazines under review. Our observations compare with results from another empirical study,<sup>30</sup> which has analyzed 86 diets, most of which were published on magazine covers published by two different publishers. From the perspective of weight loss, there would be a predominance of menus with great energy restriction, among other nutritional inadequacies when considering the women in the age corresponding to the target audience of these vehicles. In their conclusions, the authors highlight the relevance and the need for a permanent individualized clinical follow-up in the weight loss

process. It is, of course, a study that has an initial and exploratory character, brought to this text with a view to emphasizing the need to deepen knowledge production through comprehensive and solid methodologies related to diets for mass consumption. Still in this line of argument, a review study on a single nutrient (protein) already studied for long in weight loss diets, concludes that

there is evidence that a diet with the highest proportion of protein increases weight loss and body fat and decreases the loss of lean body mass during weight loss. However, more studies are needed to define the best proportion, amount and source of protein to be used in diets for weight reduction, as well as the optimal treatment time and degree of energy restriction that optimize the effect of the highest proportion or amount of this macronutrient in diets. In addition, issues such as associated side effects and mechanisms involved with diets with a higher proportion of protein need further clarification.<sup>31</sup>

If for a nutrient such as protein, which is already widely and deeply studied, there are so many open questions when the scope of research is restricted to weight loss, how to process claims of a scientific nature about the properties of products that are just beginning to be brought to human consumption? Or, discussing again the “carbohydrate-free desserts,” what to say when they contain wheat bran, oat bran or cornstarch as it appears in the recipes from the above mentioned confectionery book? Specialists of predominantly biomedical training, academic institutions and scientific studies are there to prove the “truth” of the facts conveyed. Something as a popularization of science or rather some pseudoscience to support the products and services made available in this market of easy and fast weight loss.

Such marketing strategies (which use references to science and experts as elements of the phenomena of medicalization and social pharmacologization) have been carried out in recent years by the pharmaceutical industries.<sup>8,32</sup> Similarly, the food industry has been investing in the growth of a market for therapeutic consumption of functional foods and nutritional supplements<sup>33</sup> conforming a process that simultaneously creates and attends to the increasing demand on the part of society for products and diets endowed with characteristics that satisfy the new needs for lean bodies, essential not only to avoid risks and diseases but mainly to success in sexual and professional lives.

It is important to emphasize that, from the point of view of social practices, there is a growing concern to relate the dissemination of scientific knowledge to the need for information so that subjects can better act in the modern polis: a democracy consisting of conscious citizens responsible for their decisions, as stated by Vergara,<sup>22</sup> from an admittedly utopian perspective. It happens that hyper-modernity brings strong market interests before one of the most unequal societies of the planet that has very limited levels of schooling. It is necessary to consider the vulnerability of the most impoverished strata in view of aggressive advertising, especially when linked to powers

such as those of drug, food and publishing industries in a peripheral capitalist country such as Brazil. Even when the economy is favorable, consumerism seems to flourish much more than citizenship, directly reaching, in this case specifically addressed here, poor women reduced to consumer status. In addition, so that editorial or clearly advertising articles can be considered as “scientific divulgation,” in the sense lent to it by Vergara, as one tries to present them in the magazines being discussed, it would be necessary that at least independent committees would evaluate the origin of the information conveyed in epistemic, methodological and ethical terms.

## The control

It is from food reduction to the idea of a contemporary biomedical diet, since there is no mention of the historical context in which obesity occurs as a social phenomenon nor does it problematize the social relations mediated by food present in this media discourse built around weight loss for these women. Viewed through the lens of biomedicine, obesity is situated as a biological phenomenon and its inscription in life is perceived by means of a clinical or epidemiological linear determination that places it as a consequence of nutrient intake excess and lack of physical activity. Life here is mere body in biochemical, physiological or pathological activity, placed in the order of the natural of things. We consider the necessary denaturation of biomedical conceptions of eating that prevail in the field of Food and Nutrition. Likewise, we understand as indispensable the contextualization of food in modern or hyper-modern society and the analysis of the interests that circulate in it, whether they are of material or symbolic nature. Thus, life is extended beyond the biological aspect, having it forged in the complex social and cultural world marked by consensus, contradictions, conflicts and paradoxes that belong to social relations and power plays. More than animal life, human life in society.

In a scenario where aesthetic standards have in body thinness their central reference, there is a strong disintegration of the traditional modes of eating, simultaneously conforming lipophobic and obesogenic times. They are potent elements of food modernity that, in addition, operate in the sense of emptying old possibilities of overcoming the difficulties inherent in biological life and in society. If in the past it was possible to count on support and resources from family and the community in view of the adversities of human existence, there also diluted, now and increasingly is presented to the isolated and fragile individual the burden of responsibility for the destiny of their body fragmented in infinites of products to be acquired in the market dominated by international corporations in the pharmaceutical, food and publishing branches.<sup>34-36</sup>

Social relations of power (established through food – understood as symbolized food) anchored in specialists, scientific societies, research institutions, clinics and in the value of truth that their scientific knowledge carries. A constant discourse as an expression of the individuals’ disciplining,

who continue to permanently occupy their time with goals of weight loss and increasingly distanced from reflections on their insertion in the world. It is not some control whose origin is above the individual, oppressing them, restricting their freedom, suffocating them against their will, but a much more subtle and sophisticated investment that operates within the individual's own desire, leading them to self-control and thus to the feeling of victory, as one who "overcomes fat," reaches success printed on a magazine cover and is paid for it, obtains happiness and fulfillment by achieving that goal that, in appearance, was stipulated by themselves.

In addition to attention to meals in the smallest details (portions, calories, schedules, capsules, for each gram of food) and for each inch of distinct and more and more numerous and specific parts of the body, electronic devices are no longer lacking to accompany the people's performance. This is the case of mobile applications that record the weight loss goal established by the individual and that emit a sound signal at scheduled meal times, inform the food amounts to be ingested and update daily body weight data, creating "a graph illustrating their advances" (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 372). Some kind of Fordism applied to control of the body treated as a factory. Or an internalized prison, holding the individual responsible, presented as the one who freely makes their choices in view of what the market offers, by the consequences of their decisions and actions. Praised by one of the magazines is the girl who has prepared a spreadsheet in which she records everything she eats daily and accompanies her progress.

As in Foucault,<sup>37</sup> not only the readers' original accounts are reordered by the magazines editorials: their own text, images, colors and everything else in this media discourse brings an order that obfuscates the powers and dangers present there, dodging its frightening concreteness: the power of control over each one's lives. Thus, these magazines are constituted as instances producing discursive practices, as strategies that bring in themselves maneuvers, techniques, modes of operation that are articulated in the life in society, in the daily life of the social relations constituting the subjects, generating subjectivities that feed the current network of power.

## The moral values

The desire for a thin body is associated with deep suffering from the existential condition made inferior and lived in the fat body, in the social stigma present in the daily relations.

"I've lost 45 kg to not be humiliated anymore" is the headline of the three-page story that also brings three photos of the 1.59-meter-tall reader, who "used to weigh 122 kg at age 17, and two "after" photos, at 77 kg. "With *ginger water and lemon*, I've put my metabolism to work in my favor and have turned from sizes 24 to 10 (...)! I've never been disrespected again!" (*Sou mais eu!*, 2014, 411. Emphasis in the original).

The story begins with a sentence from the reader's father: "Stop eating or else you're going to explode." It follows with her sister's (comments), who in fights would spit out: "Fat! Whale!" Nephews and nieces would laugh at her when she would not run in the children's games. "I'd feel like trash..." I wouldn't go out with my friends because they would flirt at the clubs and I would be left behind. It was too embarrassing! I'd feel inferior to everybody."

And as in many other similar narratives, the controlled script is followed and it is the same ordered discourse that leads to the moment of decision making. The reader-narrator has realized that, besides "the embarrassments that I'd feel because of obesity, my health would not be good either (...). It took time, but the day came: that was not a life! I decided to go after my happiness!" Relatives, friends, coworkers, at some point, play the role of saying the very hard words that lead to a turning point for fight, battle, war that lie ahead. Forces arise from within the subject that, in addition to supplements, teas, capsules, diets, shakes, oils and a whole paraphernalia of products that experts, clinics and store chains present in these dramatic pieces of marketing materials.

With a diet prepared by a nutritionist, at least one liter of water with ginger and lemon, and going to the gym (sometimes, lots, lots, lots of gym workouts...)

*My life is different, everything has changed. Today I am self-confident and make friends easily (...). I'm always going out and having fun! I've never felt humiliated again. On the contrary: I feel more confident and happier than ever! Going to stores and buying clothes that I like and they fitting me is one of the best sensations in the world!*

It is worth noting the readers who have published books and/or who maintain Web pages with numerous followers: sites of reports of their experiences and sale of several products.

Finally, after the story of the drama marked by heavy situations of embarrassment and humiliation illustrated through "before" photos and the decision making, comes a great demonstration of willpower and finally the honors to those people who favorably participated in the process: mothers, siblings, grandparents, coworkers, who are certainly proud to have this grandiose victory dedicated to them. To those who did not believe, disdained or abandoned the fat woman of the past: contempt! "I've resurfaced lean and beautiful on the beauty pageant day and got the muse queen of the city sash: I've shut everyone's mouth!" After winning other beauty contests, "I have almost 30,000 subscribers on my channel. (...) I am an inspiring muse for women who, like me, want to change the course of their stories and shine!"

The idea that individual willpower is the mainspring of action leading to weight loss is clearly present. Moral values, judgments and condemnatory sentences associated with the individual's accountability movement come from all sides, specially from the subjects themselves. This narrative, constant in almost all the magazine issues analyzed, reiterates that success and happiness are

within the reach of all. The more values of self-assertion are placed upon the individual, the more obvious the need for them to make their lives by themselves. And if every week a woman does it, no matter how fugacious, fragile or fleeting it may be, this fact indeed is used as a clear and indisputable proof of the path to be followed, that of the values to be assimilated, the judgments to be carried out, the sentences to be delivered.

In searching a thin and beautiful body, success in professional and sexual lives and happiness, finally the individual exercises control over themselves in submission to the experts' guidelines and the power of their scientific truths. In this way, they carry on being encouraged to acquire a wide range of products and services at the disposal of their "choices" in the market. If they can not lose weight it is because that moment has not yet come, in which forces within them shall awaken and they shall leave their weaknesses behind. They shall continue trying, turning to such goal of weight loss, searching new diets, new products, new experts, new scientific truths, new magazines, new Web pages and an endless yearning for novelties that shall save them from this tragic fat stigma. All of their time shall be occupied with this and also with other surrounding market values they desire.

After a period of significant restrictions in the economic field, a favorable phase has been installed in economic times favorable to purchases. The range of products offered to the population of lower income classes was expanded, which then emerged to consumption. Buy what you want and achieve the body you want. If we are what we buy, we also buy what we are. In the cultural universe of women emerging to consumption, this same universe is reiterated. The habitus leads to reiteration of the world lived but on a new level in which the subject not only can but has a moral duty to be thin, achieve success and be happy. If they do not, their judgment and condemnation are lurking, very close, right there in the relationship with family, friends, coworkers, who have the punishment of humiliation ready to be applied at all times.

## Final thoughts

This brief period of good times of the economy is gone, leaving the trail of financial insecurity and consumption reduction, especially among the poorest. Nevertheless, the context of a strong increase in the prevalence of obesity among Brazilians remains a tendency to be observed in the future. The magazines brought to this discussion, as well as several others, are no longer in the stands. They now occupy Web pages, where these investments remain in habitus of food consumption associated with products that most resemble medications.

In a very recent article, entitled "What does it mean for Brazilians to live life to the fullest?," the (*Editora Abril Cultural*) Area of Market Research and Intelligence publishes research results commissioned by the (American worldwide health care company) Abbott Laboratories about the



fullness of life: just over half of Brazilians (52%) consider that they are happy. Among the 48% dissatisfied, what most disturbs them is body aesthetics (66%), which appears ahead of social and professional life, both with 57% of responses.<sup>38</sup>

Aimed at building happiness that is acquired in the market and anchored in discourses that refer to science, the media continues to invest in the construction of new social codes. The individual inserted in the world – imperceptible indeed – of the big corporations of medicines, foodstuffs and publishing houses, lives their daily life in view of these relations of power, both small and overwhelming, of the judgments that devour them. Everything is more intense, since there is some kind of moral obligation to be happy.

And moved to rely solely on their own forces, the individual follows in their civilizing process in this hyper-modernity. After all, in the relationships between diet, obesity, weight loss and consumption materialized in this lucrative edited world of magazines that seek to reach the poorest women, if “*Sou mais eu!*” (“I like myself better”), then it is perfectly possible, easy and simple that I “*Viva mais!*” (“Live longer”). Once captured and trapped in this web of meanings, this woman shall consume *More!* for much *Longer!*.

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