

*PICTURE PERFECT: HOW EDITORS OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES DEPICT FITNESS*

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ABSTRACT

My research question was: What messages do editors send through cover images and sell lines? The goal of my research was to explore three women's fitness magazines, *Fitness*, *Shape* and *Women's Health*, and highlight the messages women receive from the cover sell lines and images. I wanted to pinpoint whether the promoted content depicts the promises made in the publication's media kits and mission statements.

I completed my professional component with an editorial internship at Rodale.com and conducted my individual research among three publications. My qualitative content analysis revealed that women's fitness magazines provide readers with plentiful content that focuses on slimming their bodies and striving for perfection instead of encouraging them to achieve more athletic endeavors and self-confidence. All three magazines find similarity in subject matter, editorial voice and how they frame their content, which explains why they are close competitors. Additionally, each publication repeatedly encourages women to lose weight, drop jean sizes and shrink their waistlines; thus, I believe the editors of these magazines place greater focus on image and looking flawless in order to be considered fit and healthy. Rather than highlighting physical strength, ability and athleticism, magazine editors send a message that stresses the importance of attractiveness and appearance, and readers are constantly instructed to be self-conscious about their weight and fixate on correcting their body imperfections.