Health and Wellness in Women's Magazines: A Case Study of *Reductress*

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ABSTRACT

Women's magazines have been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and oversimplifying complex health issues. In recent years, the satirical digital magazine *Reductress* has challenged the conventions and ideologies of traditional women's magazines through parody. This study examines how *Reductress* utilizes parody to critique the topics and conventions of women's magazines, particularly in the realm of health and wellness advice. By conducting content and textual analyses of *Reductress* articles, the research explores the publication's strategies for using intertextuality and recontextualization to expose and subvert the underlying assumptions and stereotypes promoted by women's media. The findings suggest that *Reductress'* parodic approach aligns with feminist efforts to deconstruct patriarchal representations, while also serving as a tool for enhancing critical media literacy. The discussion situates *Reductress'* critique within techniques of satire and parody and their role in composition studies and women's media, contributing to the scholarly understanding of how satirical media can challenge dominant discourses in women's magazines.

INTRODUCTION

Women's magazines have been a prominent fixture in popular media, serving as a source of advice, entertainment, and cultural commentary. However, these publications have also been the subject of extensive critique, with scholars highlighting their tendency to perpetuate stereotypes, promote unrealistic beauty standards, and oversimplify complex health and wellness issues (Forster 39; Gill 156; Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia 191).

Since 2013, the satirical women's digital magazine *Reductress* has emerged as a prominent voice challenging the conventions and ideologies of traditional women's magazines ("About Reductress"). Through its use of parody, *Reductress* mimics the thematic focus, including outdated perspectives, condescending tone, and source usage patterns found in women's magazines, but it does so in an exaggerated and subversive manner to expose and critique the underlying assumptions and stereotypes promoted by these publications (Dentith 32; Seitz 379).

This study aims to examine how *Reductress* utilizes parody to critique the topics and conventions of women's magazines, particularly within health and wellness advice. By conducting a content analysis and textual analysis of selected *Reductress* articles, this research seeks to understand the publication's strategies for using parody as a tool for media critique and to explore the implications of such an approach for media literacy, feminist media studies, and the broader cultural impact of satirical media targeting women's magazines.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women's Magazines

Women's magazines have adapted over the years to reflect various contexts and have shifted focus from external challenges to women's internal struggles (Forster 39). However, the burden remains on women, specifically, to improve themselves (Gill 156). This gendered perspective is a defining characteristic of writing in women's magazines, impacting the publications' voice and tone (Duffy 36). The tone is typically conversational, as if one friend (the author) is conversing with another (the reader) and the content focuses on what are deemed to be "feminine" topics.

Women's magazines often depict their audience as young, white, heterosexual women, treating them as a homogeneous group with shared experiences solely based on their gender (Roy 25). Traditionally, women have been portrayed in these magazines as wives, mothers, professionals juggling domestic and work responsibilities, and as objects. This focus on stereotypical femininity excludes women who do not conform to this image and lifestyle, such as women of different ages, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds, career paths, and life

paths. Although contemporary magazines may mask these stereotypes more subtly, remnants of sexism persist (Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia 190).

Experts currently debate how to analyze women's magazines. Some see them as a positive escape from daily life, while others view them as promoting stereotypes (Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia 191). One study points out the significance of considering the historical, social, and cultural context in which women read magazines, as these factors influence their interpretation of the content. Additionally, the researchers themselves must acknowledge their own situational context, recognizing it as just one perspective among many in understanding the messages conveyed in women's magazines (Roy 22).

Health and Wellness in Women's Magazines

Of the scholarship I reviewed, a focus on health and wellness in women's magazines appeared frequently in content and discourse analyses. Because of the range of scholarly work in this sector of women's magazines, I chose to focus on health and wellness in my case study, adapting some of the methods used with an additional layer of parody and satire to unravel.

One study highlights the inconsistency in defining health within women's magazines, reflecting the broader challenge of defining this multidimensional concept (Roy 94-95). Articles within these magazines even redefine health within themselves, adding to the confusion (Roy 95). These magazines portray readers as possessing inherent health "common sense" while simultaneously positioning themselves as expert guides through extensive health coverage (Roy 111). This presents a contradiction: the magazines acknowledge the readers' existing knowledge while also presenting themselves as the primary source of expertise—one that corrects the readers' misconceptions.

Magazines often prioritize novelty over accurate health coverage, leading to buried or contradictory information, contributing further to reader confusion (Roy 46; Beijbom et al. 611). These publications position themselves as health authorities, assuming readers lack knowledge, and often offer advice without clear sources, which some view as women sharing information with each other ("letting them in on the secret") but others see it as undermining critical evaluation (Roy 93; Hinnant 326). Another analysis of women's magazines' information accuracy and role of experts suggests that, despite most of the health claims being backed by science, the overall quality and consistency of information in the magazines is low. Even though including experts does not necessarily improve the quality, the mere presence of an "expert" can influence readers (McLaren et al. 122). Notably, when sources are included in the articles, both women's and women's health magazines predominantly rely on clinical and professional experts (Reynolds and LoRusso 11). This could suggest that the criticism women's magazines may receive regarding the sources of information they publish is not a common problem, though the implications can be serious for readers who take the advice when information is not thoroughly researched before publication.

One discourse analysis of magazine content that I reviewed found weight-loss as the primary focus, mainly in nutrition and fitness articles. Contrary to the study's expectations, these articles rarely used vanity as a motivating factor, instead emphasizing self-love for body transformation (Hinnant 324). Medical health concerns were common in these articles, challenging a common pattern of traditional beauty standards in framing weight-loss narratives.

A content analysis of popular women's health and health/beauty hybrid magazines found that health frames, in which the article instructs "readers to do something… in order to get healthier in general," were most often found in the women's health magazine articles (Aubrey and Hahn 498). It should be noted that the study created a separate category to code for weight loss frames, and this weight loss frame was most commonly found in articles with a food/nutrition topic (Aubrey and Hahn 499). Appearance frames, in which the article instructs "readers to do something in order to look better," were the second most common frame in women's health magazines (Aubrey and Hahn 498). However, this appearance frame was most commonly used in the health/beauty hybrid magazines. Body competence frames, which "instructed readers to do something… in order to improve a body's instrumental traits, such as fitness, strength, or flexibility," were found to be underrepresented in the magazines observed (Aubrey and Hahn 498).

Women's magazines present topics as common experiences among women, though their solutions are often made out to be problems that the individual must work on (Roy 26). A theme extracted from one study suggests that women are responsible for pursuing good health. Articles included words like "need," "should," and "must" that suggest urgency and importance regarding health information (Roy 113). Another theme identified is that of self-assessment, urging readers to be constantly attuned to their bodies (Roy 131). Finally, health protocols are a recurring feature, presented through "instructional articles" and "platitudes and reminders" (Roy 136-137, 139). However, these protocols often lack crucial details on "how to" implement the advice, leaving women with a burden of responsibility to find solutions (Roy 139).

A critical discourse analysis of women's health magazines suggests that magazines imply good health is attainable for all women through simple lifestyle changes, such as finding time to exercise and substituting current

foods with healthier, albeit pricier, options. However, this messaging may exclude readers who lack the resources to adhere to these standards of "good health," highlighting issues of accessibility and affordability (Beijbom et al. 615-616).

Health magazines often employ metaphors and symbolism to depict the pursuit of good health. For instance, they frequently utilize combat metaphors similar to those associated with battling cancer, such as "fight" or "battle," which may serve to inspire some readers. However, when readers are unable to meet the standards set by these magazines, such language may lead them to self-blame (Beijbom et al. 613-614). In the health sections of general women's magazines, writers may embellish concepts of science, medicine, or technology, describing them as "magical" or "revolutionary" to create newsworthy articles (Roy 46).

Another study reveals that magazines often use health as a metaphor for women's control over their lives. Magazines frequently equate good health with a good mood, experiencing minimal stress, and maintaining high energy levels. This narrative suggests that maintaining health entails a continual effort to ward off "a bad mood, high stress, and low energy" (Hinnant 324). By highlighting these easily recognizable challenges, magazines transform the concept of health into a metaphor for a life in control.

The tropes found in health and wellness articles in women's magazines that I explored in this section provided me data with which to compare my analysis of *Reductress* articles.

Parody and Satire

Studies on parody in popular media have mainly focused on its use in satirical news and politics (Colletta; LaMarre et al.; Leclerc; Zhou). Studies like these have looked into how the genre being parodied conveys its message and how audiences perceive these messages, among other areas beyond composition studies. To pull together a comprehensive definition of parody, I reviewed literature on parody and satire as tools for critical writing. Views on the nature of parody and satire differ across sources, but it is widely agreed that satire and parody are distinct entities, despite being used interchangeably at times. Therefore, first, it is important to isolate the characteristics of satire and parody.

Satire has been defined "as the ridicule of a subject to illustrate its faults" (Pfaff and Gibbs 46). It is usually implicit, and typically used to critique cultural or societal issues, although other scholars note that effective satire "must poke fun at a person or position of authority," as well as be relevant and humorous (Stark 305). Writers use satire to exaggerate a contrary viewpoint (Fife 323), and irony is commonly used to accomplish this (Simpson 52). Other satiric tools include "incongruity of discourses and actions," "mimicry or parody of familiar genres," and "minimization" (Fife 326). Understanding a satirical narrative may rely on readers recognizing the author's intent. Readers interpret satirical stories based on shared knowledge with the author, but authors often misjudge this common ground (Pfaff and Gibbs 46).

Parody, defined as an imitation aimed at ridicule or critique, relies heavily on the audience's ability to recognize its resemblance to the original work (Kreuz and Roberts 102-103). Other scholars such as Hutcheon and Rose argue that a parody can also be an imitation of a work simply out of the parodist's admiration of the original. Additionally, parodies can take on multiple stances: it does not have to be developed purely out of ridicule or purely admiration (Gurney 96-97). Successful parody strikes a balance between originality and cultural familiarity, emphasizing its social nature and reliance on "shared cultural understanding" (Gurney 96). Parody can function as a form of criticism, employing exaggerated stylistic elements to challenge and subvert dominant discourse without replicating it (Dentith 32; Seitz 379). A parody's effectiveness often relies on the audience's recognition of the original work, highlighting the importance of familiarity with the source material (Chatman 35). Parody frequently extends its critique beyond surface-level imitation, targeting the underlying ideologies embedded within the original text (Chatman 36).

Parody imitates cultural works, often critiquing them (Dentith 9). It achieves this by both imitating and transforming the original author's words, with each word becoming part of a chain, evolving with unique meaning and tone as it is used (Dentith 3). When employing language, individuals inevitably personalize it to some extent. Every use of language involves imitation, but the inflection of that imitation reflects how language has been adapted to fit the situation and altered the value of expression (Dentith 4). Parody thus serves as a tool for achieving these objectives. All texts position themselves relative to preceding works and are subsequently referenced or rejected by those that follow (Dentith 5). Parody, as a cultural practice, intentionally references earlier texts evaluatively. Similar to how speakers naturally adopt stances in conversations, language-users must also position themselves evaluatively in relation to the language they use (Dentith 6). Paradoxically, parody can preserve the text it aims to dismantle, even if the original text is effectively negated (Dentith 36).

With these definitions and characteristics of satire and parody in mind, I intend to address the gap in literature that exists between parody, feminine discourse, and media genres outside of news outlets in composition studies. The following research question and sub-questions will drive my study:

- How does *Reductress* critique the topics and conventions of women's magazines through parody?
    - What are the common topics covered in *Reductress'* health and wellness articles compared to those typically found in women's magazines?
    - How does *Reductress* utilize sources (editorial team, experts, etc.) in their health and wellness articles compared to the sources typically used in women's magazines?
    - How does *Reductress* employ parody and satire to critique the content and conventions of women's magazines, particularly in the health and wellness section?

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to analyze how *Reductress* critiques the topics and conventions of women's magazines through parody. By conducting a content and textual analysis of *Reductress* articles, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of parody and satire as tools for social commentary and critique, especially in underrepresented satirical media, such as sources that do not focus primarily on politics and news.

Content Analysis

In addition to the previous studies on women's magazines, I relied on Krippendorff's and Huckin's definitions of content analysis to begin my content analysis of my selection of *Reductress* articles. Krippendorff defines content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 18). He points out several components of texts that relate to his definition (Krippendorff 22-25):

- Texts have no inherent meaning. Readers give a text meaning by engaging with it.
- Texts can be interpreted in many different ways.
- Achieving consensus on the meaning of a text is not necessary and it undermines the diversity of perspectives.
- A text's meaning transcends literal content, influencing readers' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
- A text's meaning depends on its context.
- Content analysis involves understanding a text's context by inferring its purpose and impact on audiences, linking its literal meaning with its broader significance.

I kept these principles in mind as I conducted my own analysis and reviewed previous literature involving content analyses. I replicated these previous content analyses of women's magazines to make a fair and measurable comparison between *Reductress* and women's magazines. The women's magazines analyzed in past studies have uncovered underlying themes in the texts, and this is what I aim to do as I adapt those methods to identify topics in *Reductress* (Huckin 14).

Coding and Analysis

Reductress' articles were filtered by the "health" and "wellness" tags on its website, since these two keywords were featured prominently across research on women's magazines and health advice in women's magazines, specifically. *Reductress* parodies the convention of tagging, resulting in some less relevant articles appearing in my corpus, but I chose to include them because they imply some absurdity in the concepts "health" and "wellness" as women's magazines use them. The results were narrowed down to articles I categorized as "advice" and "how-to." This gave me twenty articles to work with. I coded for topics in women's magazines that previous studies coded for to account for the parody and mimicking that *Reductress* employs in its articles. These will be coded as if *Reductress* is a traditional, non-satirical women's magazine.

Aubrey and Hahn's content analysis of health and wellness advice in women's magazines was adapted in order to conduct my own content analysis. They coded for frames, or the justification for the advice being given—for example, an article coded with an "appearance frame" would instruct "readers to do something in order to look better" (Aubrey and Hahn 498). However, I only coded for the topic of the article (i.e., the "something" in the previous example) in my analysis so that I can compare the patterns apparent in *Reductress* articles to the patterns that Aubrey and Hahn found in their analysis.

Each article was coded for the topic primarily addressed in each article. Aubrey's (2010) and Aubrey and Hahn's (2016) coding schemes were used as a foundation for my data collection and I added additional categories as they appeared in the articles. These categories include Aubrey's (2010) and Aubrey and Hahn's (2016) coding

schemes (1) beauty/fashion/skincare, (2) fitness/exercise, (3) food/nutrition, (4) general health, (5) mental health, (6) physical health, (7) relationships, as well as my own based on inductive coding, including (8) emotional health and (9) spirituality.

Using Beijbom et al.'s characteristics of women's and women's health magazines and Reynolds and LoRusso's content analysis of motivational frames, sources used, and the sources' credibility in nutrition and fitness articles, I transitioned from a content analysis into a textual analysis. Reynolds and LoRusso's coding scheme was adapted to compare any patterns that the articles use for sources. Since Reynolds and LoRusso's study coded nutrition and fitness articles, I expect my results to differ from theirs slightly, given that I am only looking at advice and how-to articles in the broader health and wellness category. Each article was coded for sources used to back up information presented in the piece. Unlike my coding for topics, each source that appeared in the article was coded, therefore some articles have more than one source assigned to them. The results of the sources coded and topics coded were then compared to look for patterns, then I conducted a textual analysis of a sample of articles.

Textual Analysis

To address the parody aspect of this project, I used the intersections of genre, intertextuality, and parody to conduct a textual analysis of a selection of *Reductress* articles.

Parody is constructed from prior texts, like a chain of utterances that connects texts across contexts. Intertextuality goes along with parody as it was discussed in my literature review. Translation across contexts, or recontextualization, occurs when words or phrases from one context are used in a new context, giving them new meanings. This can happen subtly or significantly. Recontextualization can also involve a shift in tone or criticism. In recontextualizations, the current author takes a stance or comments on the original words (Bazerman 90). Along with the characteristics and conventions that my literature review outlined regarding parody, intertextuality will inform my analysis of *Reductress* articles. For the purposes of this study, intertextual analysis can demonstrate how *Reductress* positions itself in relation to women's magazines, satire, and the context in which it was written. My analysis examined the topics and sources used in articles as coded in the content analysis, now under the lens of satire. I selected an article to represent each source of information that I coded for in my content analysis. From each source, I selected articles focusing on different topics.

Through textual analysis, I analyzed how *Reductress* uses content and conventions from the intersections of women's magazines, advice articles, and health and wellness articles to parody the genre. The articles were analyzed in their entirety to understand the message of each piece, along with what the message might suggest about the genre and content of women's magazines. The sample of articles was analyzed through the lenses of parody and satire, given the definitions developed in my literature review.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Coding for Topic

Food/nutrition and emotional health topics were the most common among the articles that were coded, both appearing in four articles each. Beauty/fashion/skincare and general health appeared in three articles each. Mental health and physical health were the topics of two articles each. Relationships and spirituality appeared as topics in one article each. None of the articles' topics focused primarily on fitness/exercise.

Coding for Source

Fourteen of the twenty articles primarily relied on the author as the source, therefore they were coded as "editorial team implied" to differentiate from those that explicitly used pronouns (other than to address the audience). Of these fourteen, two advised against seeking clinical or professional experts. Also of these fourteen, two different articles made brief references to research or studies. One of these two claimed that a subject was taught "on day one of Harvard medical school" and the other reported on emotions that "100% of women" feel (Heller; Bouton).

Four of twenty total articles specifically used "we" to refer to the source of information. It should be noted that two of the fourteen that relied on the author as the source also used "we," though they were coded as referring to the audience as a collective "we." It is possible that three out of the four using "we" could have also meant it in that sense–two of those articles offered concrete sources, using phrases like, "We recommend" and "we have some tips" (Lux; Quirk).

One of the twenty articles relied primarily on clinical and professional experts, backed up by research and studies, with a brief "real person" testimonial (Haynie). Lastly, one of the twenty articles was explicitly sourced

from the author, as it uses a first-person narrative. Research is mentioned in that the source explicitly admits that it does not rely on credible research to inform the article (England).

Results

While Reynolds and LoRusso found the editorial team to be the least used source among their selection of articles, my data indicates that the editorial team is the most common source used to provide health advice. Despite the limited range of topic variability between the most and least common topics (only ranging from zero to four in each category), emotional health and food/nutrition were the most common, and seven of the eight emotional health and food/nutrition articles relied on the implied editorial team and the pronoun "we" as sources of information.

All but two of the total articles examined relied primarily on the implied editorial team as the source of information–one of the three general health articles explicitly mentioned the editorial team and one of the four emotional health articles cited clinical/professional experts. These results suggest that *Reductress* aims to criticize the lack of expert knowledge especially in emotional health and food/nutrition articles.

These results are insightful, but they do not tell the whole story. I will not limit the study to these patterns found in women's magazines and how they compare to *Reductress* because I do not think that the frequency of topics and sources used necessarily means that it should be critiqued more or less often. As the inconsistencies in patterns between *Reductress* and traditional women's magazines' use of sources suggest, women's magazines may be, more often than not, citing reliable sources in their articles. *Reductress* may not be representing the majority of women's magazines faults accurately. However, *Reductress* exaggerates the infrequent instance of unreliable sources for both comedic effect and to criticize irresponsible reporting of health advice. Infrequent as some of the faults of women's magazines may be, *Reductress'* take on these faults is worth analyzing.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Editorial Team, Explicit: General Health

The first satirical article from *Reductress* that I will analyze for parody and satire was coded as general health, with the editorial team as the primary source of information, mentioned explicitly. The article, "Lifestyle Changes I, a Freelance Writer, Think Might Prevent Cancer," provides advice on how individuals can change their lifestyles to prevent cancer. It presents health/wellness as a "one size fits all" concept. The information is introduced as "tips and tricks that Big Pharma *doesn't* want [readers] to know," making the article seem innovative, and, as previous research suggests, possibly inaccurate or outlandish because it promises some deeper understanding on disease for which there is no definite cure. An idea presented is that "more aliveness" is equivalent to "less cancer," so anything (reading poetry, in the author's case) that makes the reader feel "alive" will ensure that they have less cancer. The author mentions that they know "that green juice is healthy because it's $8," which perpetuates the notion that health is something one can purchase, and that the more expensive the item is, the healthier it is. Health advice commonly offers expensive solutions, like spending more money "better," possibly organic foods, for example. The advice also places a burden on the individual, warning them to look out "for foreshadowing of ill health to come" and to avoid stressful tasks, both of which could be interpreted widely by readers.

The article refers explicitly to the author, a freelance writer, who makes it clear throughout the article that they have "no credible medical knowledge" and the extent of their cancer research is a once-reviewed Wikipedia entry. The author even suggests that cancer research should be avoided to prevent cancer. The author is presented as an authority on the subject. From a satirical lens, using this source of advice criticizes the idea that all health advice is unbiased and factual, especially when it references scientific or medical terms. This article liberally uses terms like "cholesterol," "carcinogens," "omegas," "chemotherapy," "good blood," and "kaleido-nutrients" to convince the reader that the author is making accurate claims, but they are used as buzzwords in this context. The article is less likely to be challenged by readers because of this seeming neutral "science-backed" advice.

The advice offers abstract approaches to preventing cancer. The preventative care that the author provides is based on what they know–English literature and writing, and the advice is only backed up by the author's personal experience and knowledge, so it is not a comprehensive list, especially with very little research conducted. One piece of advice suggests that if the concept it is offering "is too confusing, try diet and exercise," leaving that common suggestion broad and without any clear direction–it tells the reader what to do and not how to do it. Referring to diet and exercise also fails to define how this might contribute to one's health, if at all, and is used again as buzzwords that are often associated with health.

The author's intentions are revealed throughout the piece–something that may be overlooked in traditional women's magazines and instead taken as genuine, accurate information. The author acknowledges that they are meeting a word-count minimum and simply trying to get published. For the author, the article serves as a way of

earning their income and contributing to their professional experience, not necessarily to give people genuine and accurate health and wellness advice.

This article exaggerates the role of an author who lacks credentials and research on the topic presented. Although previous studies on women's magazines show that clinical/professional experts are commonly used as sources of advice in articles, this satirical article emphasizes the increasingly rare phenomenon of unqualified writers on health and wellness topics. Even though sources are commonly used in traditional women's magazines, the implications of inaccurate health information are important to criticize, especially when these may be readers' primary sources of information.

The effectiveness of the parody and satire of the article relies on the audience's shared knowledge or shared cultural understanding of the subject. First readers should understand common tropes and conventions of women's magazines, specifically in health and wellness advice. The article relies on the audience's understanding that a freelance writer with very little knowledge of the subject they are writing about is not a reliable source. This parodies similar, genuine articles that persuade readers to trust them, offering new, secret information using personal anecdotes and a conversational tone, although those articles are not common, according to recent research.

Readers should also understand that health and wellness culture often references some "superfood," or a food claimed to provide various health benefits. This article suggests incorporating avocado and green juice into diets, using scientific words, even when they may not make sense in the context, to develop the advice's credibility. Additionally, the author shares advice specific to English studies, like foreshadowing, magical realism, and post-structuralism. The author offers some elaboration on the topics, but the article emphasizes that the author's educational background has no relevance to medical or cancer studies. The only source that the author uses to understand cancer is a Wikipedia entry–a source that is often not recommended for citation in formal writing because its content can be edited by anyone with access to the internet. The article relies on the audience's familiarity with reincarnation, suggesting that readers who develop cancer can simply wait for a "redo" at life, get it right, and prevent cancer their next time around (or the time after that, and so on). The author mentions that it is simply their belief, and not an objective truth, calling into question the entire article, as it is based on the author's personal experiences.

Editorial Team, Implied: Food/Nutrition

The *Reductress* article "How To Start Drinking More Water By Staking Your Whole Self-Worth On It" was coded as food/nutrition, with the editorial team as the implied primary source of information. It is tagged in *Reductress* under "health." This article satirizes the pressure that women's magazines put on women as individuals to achieve and maintain healthy practices as well as the placement of the word "health" in articles without any specificity. The article "scares" women into staying healthy. This is done using by satirizing the mundane task of drinking water–women are advised to spend excessive money on water gear so that they will feel guilty when they do not use it, publicize their goals to drink more water to instill a fear of public failure, and to journal, suggesting that women reflect on their self-worth, which they suggest is directly correlated with whether women achieve their water goals. Finally, the article shames women, calling out their underutilized "privilege of clean running water" and referring to them as lazy. Instead of providing positive reinforcement to encourage water consumption, the article guilts and scares readers into drinking more water.

This article satirizes advice that involves sharing goals with friends, and while this might work for some people by holding them accountable, the article points out a less-often discussed, more negative side of this plan–that it is really the fear of public shame that motivates people to follow through. The article plays on a trope that is often hidden in health and wellness articles: sacrificing one aspect of health for another. In this case, the author is promoting physical and nutritional health: drinking water to maintain a healthy body (not necessarily appearance, but body function in general). However, this is promoted at the risk of sacrificing mental and emotional health, as the article suggests that the reader manipulates themself by instilling the fear of failure and guilt-tripping themself in order to reach their water goals. The readers' water intake is equated with their self-worth, causing undue stress and pressure on them to maintain health and wellness, despite both concepts' varying definitions throughout and sometimes within women's magazine articles.

"We": Mental Health

The article "How to Never Try Your Best So You Can Live in the Illusion of Unfulfilled Potential" was coded as mental health, with the editorial team as the primary source of information, using the pronoun "we." It is tagged in *Reductress* under "wellness." This article encourages readers to not try their best as they go through life in order to prevent disappointment when they come up short. It employs a philosophy of "what you don't know can't hurt you." The article describes its solution as "safer and healthier," calling into question what is truly meant when these

articles discuss health. The article promotes procrastination, drug use ("but not the helpful kind"), and living "badly," all of which satirize typical advice that would promote the opposite.

For this article to be effective, the audience should understand the significance of the array of suggestions under the "live badly" subheading in the article. The author advises readers to get insufficient amounts of sleep, "wear shoes with poor arch support," and to refuse to eat fruit, all of which may be used as excuses that other people may use for their deficiencies or as quick solutions to health problems magazines may offer readers. The article also compares the reader's potential "an unopened box of Schrödinger's ability." Readers should understand that Schrödinger refers to a scientist and the box refers to his thought experiment in which a cat inside a sealed box is both alive and dead simultaneously until observed. The article uses this experiment as a metaphor for the women and their unfulfilled potential.

The article satirizes real pressure that women face by opposing a stance that would typically be seen in women's magazines. Although women's magazines might encourage readers to try their best, based on common themes in magazines, women may be shamed for not achieving their goals. One article in a magazine may take the perspective of encouraging readers to try their best, while another article in the magazine may include a success story that makes the reader feel as if they are falling behind in achieving their goals. This article adopts a skeptical attitude towards women's potential, especially when women may be criticized for failing–it is essentially saying that it is better for women to preserve their emotional wellbeing, saving them from disappointment, rather than maximizing their potential. Leading a lifestyle like this can give women excuses for when they come up short.

Clinical/Professional Experts: Emotional Health

The final satirical article from *Reductress* that I will analyze for parody and satire is titled "Doctors Recommend at Least 6-8 Hours of Not Crying Per Day." It was coded as emotional health, with clinical/professional experts as the primary source of information and is tagged in *Reductress* under "health." The article's information comes from researchers at Yale-New Haven Hospital, making this scientific-backed information less likely to be refuted by the audience. It also features a testimonial from a "real person," who claims that "applying a strict no-crying routine to her day" has improved her life.

The article exaggerates both women's emotional responses as well as health problems and benefits. It takes a gendered view, suggesting that women, specifically, function better when they spend less time crying. The suggested amount of crying time adds to the absurdity, as it assumes that the average woman is crying for more than eighteen hours a day and needs to cut back. The article also sensationalizes health problems caused by excessive crying, which appear to have no strong connection to the cause. This article can make the audience, who likely does not cry for over eighteen hours a day, feel like they are doing something right in terms of health. However, it could also make them feel inadequate if they do not feel the alleged health benefits of reduced crying–energy, productivity, or healthier skin–despite adhering to the article's advice.

This article raises the question of why women cry in the first place. It explores the exaggeration of topics in women's magazines and highlights the absurdity found in some health advice. However, it also emphasizes the justification behind women's tears. While it initially presents the control of emotions as an individualistic issue, it ultimately prompts discussion about broader societal concerns when Dr. Reed mentions that "'[a]s a woman, it's normal to want to cry.'" These concerns include whether women are constantly assumed to be crying due to stereotypes or if there are legitimate reasons behind their tears–*should* women be crying and is it stranger that women are *not* crying constantly?

For this article to be effective, the audience should understand that the testimonial and experts cited are fictional characters and that the average woman does not regularly cry for over two-thirds of her day, even if pressures placed on her for merely being a woman justify this emotional response.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore how *Reductress* critiques the content and conventions of women's magazines, particularly in the context of health and wellness, through the lens of parody and satire. By conducting a content and textual analysis, this research uncovered several key insights into the ways *Reductress* employs satire to comment on the norms and practices prevalent in traditional women's magazines.

My method for gathering texts to analyze was to search *Reductress* for all articles tagged with "health" or "wellness." *Reductress* parodies this convention of tagging articles that digital magazines often use. The tags on *Reductress* are often used in an ironic way, so my results did not always populate directly relevant topics, but the ironic use of its "health" or "wellness" tag emphasizes the absurdity of such words. Like traditional women's magazines, *Reductress* leaves the terms broad and takes on a position of authority on the topics while also assuming

that the reader knows what these complex terms mean. In reality, they account for a variety of lifestyles and habits. In women's magazines, health and wellness often represent the dominant discourse associated with the words—typically weight and body image. *Reductress* subverts this dominant discourse by offering ludicrous advice, emphasizing how absurd the hold is that women's magazines and their advice on health and wellness has on some women, not to mention media beyond magazines.

The content analysis revealed that *Reductress'* health and wellness articles focus heavily on topics like food/nutrition and emotional health, in contrast to the broader range of topics typically covered in women's magazines. Notably, *Reductress* articles rarely addressed fitness/exercise, weight loss frames and a focus on body image, which are common focus areas in traditional women's magazines. This suggests a deliberate choice by *Reductress* to target specific topics for parody within the health and wellness genre.

Furthermore, the study revealed a notable difference in the use of sources between *Reductress* and traditional women's magazines. While women's magazines often rely on clinical or professional experts to lend credibility to their advice, *Reductress* predominantly employs its editorial team as a source, often implied rather than explicit. This deliberate choice serves to underscore the lack of expert knowledge in many mainstream health and wellness articles, inviting readers to question the reliability of information presented in traditional media.

Textual analysis of select *Reductress* articles provided deeper insights into the satirical strategies employed by the publication. Through parody, *Reductress* critiques the pressure placed on women to conform to unrealistic standards of health and wellness. The articles analyzed often used exaggerated language and absurd recommendations to highlight the absurdity of health advice found in traditional publications. Moreover, *Reductress* subverts typical advice structures by offering unconventional, often negative, solutions to health and wellness concerns. This challenges the "one-size-fits-all" approach often found in women's magazines. By presenting seemingly nonsensical advice, *Reductress* prompts readers to question the underlying assumptions and justifications behind health advice in women's magazines.

Overall, this study contributes to a collective understanding of parody and satire as effective tools for social commentary and critique, particularly within the realm of women's media. By dissecting the ways in which *Reductress* subverts and critiques the conventions of women's magazines, this research sheds light on the power of humor to challenge prevailing narratives and promote critical thinking. Moving forward, further exploration of satire in media can provide valuable insights into how alternative voices engage with and interrogate dominant cultural norms.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study focused on a limited selection of *Reductress* articles, which were tagged under "health" and "wellness." The corpus I used was condensed from all "health" and wellness" tagged articles on *Reductress'* website as of around March 2024. This meant I had to use my best judgement when deciding whether the article was primarily offering advice to readers. Although I began this study with the intention of collecting articles pulled from several health and wellness related keywords, the volume of articles tagged or containing the keywords was beyond the scope of this project. A search of "health" and "wellness" turned up several pages of results, which was also outside the scope of this study. This left out any article that mentioned "health" or "wellness" in the text. Additionally, the texts I analyzed could be interpreted in many different ways, therefore it is important to continue gathering different perspectives and interpretations on these topics to create a more nuanced view of women's media and how it is parodied—whether themes are perpetuated criticized by new publications.

Beyond the topic of health and wellness, expanding the analysis to encompass the publication's full range of content may yield additional insights into its parodic strategies and critiques. Future research could include a separate analysis of women's magazines or other women's media compared to *Reductress* to determine more ways that *Reductress* parodies women's media.

CONCLUSION

This study's analysis of how *Reductress* uses techniques of satire and parody to critique the topics and conventions of women's magazines contributes to scholarly understanding of satirical writing as a tool for challenging established conventions and stereotypes of women in media. By systematically transforming the familiar elements of discourse in women's magazines, *Reductress* encourages readers to question the underlying ideologies and representations perpetuated by these publications. The findings suggest that such parodic critiques have the potential to foster more nuanced and critical engagement with media.

Based on my analysis of *Reductress*, I have found that it contributes to feminist frameworks by applying humor to the serious issue of gender discrimination and other social problems. The satire employed in *Reductress* exposes

sexism, not only by criticizing conventions in health and wellness but also by addressing various topics across the website's articles, such as style, lifestyle, or relationships. While perpetuating some stereotypes in a mocking manner, *Reductress* counteracts this by including stories that challenge the assumption of white readership. *Reductress* also includes stories for and about gay, lesbian, and queer readers to counteract the stereotypical heterosexual audience of traditional women's magazines. Again, these aspects of *Reductress* were beyond the scope of my study, so I can only speculate, but it would be worth looking into these areas in future research.

Satirical platforms created by and for women, like *Reductress*, are not as common as the more male-dominated satirical news and political satire media that is more widely known. This phenomenon appears to be a problem of gender discrimination in itself. First, it is common to hear that women are not funny or that men are funnier than women. This likely discourages women from engaging in similar projects to *Reductress*, resulting in a scarcity of satirical content created by and for women. Additionally, the audience may believe that *Reductress* is aggravating gender discrimination, simply by writing about it and sustaining the very stereotypes they are attempting to challenge. This presents a possible ramification of satire—the audience may not recognize the irony, causing readers to "laugh at" the harmful stereotype rather than the absurdity of the stereotype. The controversy of satirizing certain topics may be a reason for a lack of women-oriented platforms similar to *Reductress*. *Reductress* might also be unique because other people with similar views to *Reductress* might fear being labeled "angry feminists" for expressing their own satirical takes on feminism. This label exacerbates stereotypes of what a woman should be, according to gender norms often perpetuated by traditional women's magazines—gentle, caring, and compliant. On the other hand, women who conform to these traits may be criticized for perpetuating stereotypes—for not being "feminist" enough. Ultimately, based on my data collection and analysis of *Reductress* articles, I found that the site offers articles from various voices and perspectives. Persistent through the variations is a common theme that women's media and the way women are portrayed in media, as a direct result of how they are treated in society, is absurd. There is no "one-size-fits-all" for women, whether it is advice in a magazine or stereotypes that society assigns them.

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