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Is there ‘an alternative roadmap to growing older; one that includes chiselled abs’? A multimodal critical discourse analysis of two women's health magazines

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Introduction

Magazines occupy a significant percentage of space in supermarkets and convenience stores worldwide, from shelves to checkout lines; magazines support a huge sector which has become a fundamental ingredient of our every-day-life: the 'kiosk culture' (Held, 2005: 173). Thus, individuals are easily exposed to a plethora of ideologies concerning myriad topics. Ideologies consist of 'social representations that define the social identity of a [particular] group' (Van Dijk, 2006: 116). This dissertation will specifically focus on *Women's Health Magazine* (WHM) which launched as a sister publication of *Men's Health* magazine in 2005. WHM has since established its brand across the globe, with thirteen international editions that have a global readership of 'over 8 million readers' (Wiki). The publication is recognised for disseminating the knowledge 'on the latest health, fitness, weight loss, nutrition, and beauty news and trends' (WHM.com). Celebrities with net worths of up to \$200 million have graced the cover of the magazine, capturing the attention of millions of readers and subsequently generating \$15 million in revenue for the company thus far (Zoominfo). Previous sociolinguistic studies have identified issues surrounding the representation of women, health and nutrition within women's magazines. However, a trivial amount of academic research has been conducted based on ideologies surrounding age, despite magazine covers leading with problematic titles such as 'Cameron Diaz, 43 like fine wine' and 'Heidi Klum 40 is the new 20' (Readly).

To address such power disparities and close research gaps, I have chosen to perform a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) of two issues from *Women's Health* magazine. I will predominantly focus on the representation of ageing, with a secondary emphasis on the representation of women, given that past research has focused extensively on the latter. CDA is concerned with 'the practices and conventions in and behind texts that reveal political and ideological investment' (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 2). However, this study will analyse data which combines visual and linguistic features, rendering it multimodal. Therefore, I have employed MCDA given that it is a framework which offers 'a more precise set of tools' to 'encourage [a] more systematic analysis of (media) texts' (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 4).

The two magazines in question both feature Davina McCall (a well-known British TV presenter) on the cover and were released in October 2020 and January 2022, respectively. To conduct an accurate assessment of discourses, I have selected a celebrity who has appeared twice, on two distinct covers. My analysis comprises two sections or themes; firstly, 'Performing 'successful' ageing', followed by 'Ageing in relation to gender and postfeminism'. Here, I will compare both covers simultaneously.

Within this dissertation, I aim to critically analyse the discursive strategies employed to represent ageing, and to determine whether each of the covers indicate the notion that there is a correct way to age.

1. Literature review

1.1 Ageism

Ageism can be summed up as the discrimination against older people on grounds of age (Bytheway, 2005: 361). Past studies have shown that an increase in age has consequently caused individuals to become judged as being 'inferior', by 'having lived a specified number of years' (Comfort, 1977: 35). To understand why older individuals may be deemed as

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'inferior', it is vital to examine how they are represented in the media. This is because the media, specifically advertisements, 'can set the agenda for the public's attention' towards ageist discourses, 'around which[,] public opinion forms' (McCombs,2002: 2).

Makita et al. (2021) argue that older adults 'and particularly older women, are under-represented in advertising media' (250). However, a more recent study by Kenalemang (2022) has shown that 'there has been a significant increase in representations of older people in advertising' (2123). Kenalemang (2022) concludes that, in spite of increased representation, advertisements fundamentally reproduce 'ageist attitudes' by encouraging older women to use items which promote 'conformity to a youthful and sexualized ideal of beauty' (2135). Thus, advertisements may portray ageing in a negative light, through the implication that the effects of ageing on the body must be reversed or prevented. Kenalemang (2022) adds that 'older people who do not appear to age as 'successfully' as their peers become defined as people in need of fixing' (2123). This implies that ageing must be 'fixed' through the consumption of beauty products to meet the criteria of a conventionally 'young and attractive woman'. Consequently, older women who do not meet these requirements are marginalised. Lewis et al. (2011) discovered that celebrities were 'placed within an external narrative that spoke of agelessness or, in a more negative view, of anti-ageing' within fashion advertisements (108). Coupland (2007) also found that 'individuals are pressured into attempting to retain the appearance of youth, into staving off visible signs of their ageing' (38). Ageist discourses may even endanger those 'as young as in their 20s', 'who are targeted with invocations to take responsibility for "delaying outward signs of ageing" through regimes involving marketi[s]ed solutions' (56). Consequently, younger individuals could develop an unwarranted fear of ageing healthily without being judged.

Consumerism has influenced the reproduction of ageist discourses, conveyed by 'the growth of products and services designed to modify the body' to keep it 'from looking old'. As a result, 'ageing' has become socially impermissible to an extent which the media assumes 'that older women will conform' to the notion of 'agelessness' (Lewis et al.,2011: 101). Bodner (2009) brings forth the question of how realistic it is for individuals to conform to anti-ageing mechanisms since the 'ideal [generally] depends upon class and racial privileges'(156). Alternatively, for those who 'enjoy the privilege of choice, if we avoid these consumer options, we risk striking others as neglectful, having "let ourselves go"' (156). By combining both of these assertions, it could be said that ageing individuals are advised to employ anti-ageing mechanisms to age 'correctly'; which is inherently unnatural.

Little research has been conducted on how ageist discourses have appeared in magazines, despite scholars' keen interest in how ageism permeates advertising and has an impact on consumerism. As a result, I intend to use linguistic and visual analysis to show the implications that magazines promote on the premise of ageism.

1.2 Women's Magazines

Aforementioned, ageist discourses may exist within several forms of advertisement, however, this study will narrow its focus to magazines. Magazines are a form of print advertising, and as such, they are a type of mass media that pervades our day-to-day life. Magazines are broadly defined as 'a periodical publication containing [...] stories, articles on general subjects, etc., and [are] illustrated with pictures' (OED). While this may be true on

the surface, Cook (1992) explores the intricacies of magazines and advertisements as a whole, making it imperative that 'their 'deep' meanings or structures' should be critically analysed. Because 'the choice of substance [impacts] the nature' of an advertisement, '[creating] new kinds of relationship[s] between participants' (Cook, 1992: 19, XIV).

Given that the *Women's Health* magazine is generally aimed at a female audience, which accounts for 59.94% of the publication's readership, women's magazines should be discussed. Roy (2008) expresses that women's magazines can 'act as guidebooks for women's lives' (463). Women's magazines could thereby propagate gendered ideologies which may 'manipulate' women who are 'allegedly less enlightened than feminist researchers' (464). However, not all female readers will inevitably be misled.

Moreover, the role of celebrities in magazines must be considered given that 'the traditional discursive technique of women's personal accounts as both cautionary tales and inspirational stories' is used to entice individuals to read and learn from the exhibited discourses (Ballaster, 1991: 463). According to Martín-Santana et al. (2013), the 'use of celebrities is prevalent in women's magazines', whereby using celebrity endorsers is more effective than using a regular user due to their 'credibility'. Celebrity endorsement 'provides greater appeal', 'stronger recall of the message, and attracts more attention to the advertisement' (141). Consequently, celebrity endorsement may boost the incentive for readers to internalise and believe the discourses found in magazines. Young audiences are particularly vulnerable in this regard because the media can 'nurture in young people' the ideologies which underpin discourses and therefore cultivate their perceptions on issues such as age or gender (Wee, 2017: 138). Given that both magazine covers in this study foreground celebrity Davina McCall as a participant, ageist discourses must be diligently deconstructed. This is because readers may be led to believe that each text contains reliable and reputable information.

1.3 Health magazines and the representation of women

Women's Health magazine is 'centered on health' (wiki), therefore, it is vital to consider the context in which my analysis will take place, since 'discourse is text and context together, interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful' (Cook, 1992: 2).

Bazzini et al. (2015) found that the female participants on the covers of *Women's Health* 'were more likely to be portrayed partially clothed than cover models on *Men's Health*'. Additionally, objectifying captions in *Women's Health* were related to the feminine thin body ideal' (206). Malkin et al. (1999) have observed that Women's magazines seem 'to focus on improving one's life by changing one's appearance, especially by losing weight' (654). Thus, as argued by Roy (2008) health is ultimately 'worn on the body' whereby 'the physical manifestation of one's healthy inner or true self' can only be identified through 'bodywork like exercise targeted to produce a lean firm physique, dieting, and ascetic measures'. Consequently, the use of 'women's personal accounts' (463) may further entice consumers and thus establish the 'lean firm' physique as a normative signpost of health. Normativity is that which is regarded as the 'standard' or 'typical' (Morris, 2016: 952). Furthermore, such discourses fail to adopt consideration of intersecting barriers which consumers may face in adhering to societal standards of health. Intersectionality can be defined as 'categories of race, class, gender', 'ethnicity, and age' 'as interrelated and

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mutually shaping one another' (Collins et al., 2020: 14). Yet, intersectionality is a prominent factor that the mass media often fails to consider.

From these studies, it is plausible that within health magazines, a 'healthy woman' is merely defined and represented through her physical attributes, thereby eliminating the significance of mental and social well-being. An incessant focus on the female body as an indicator of health may be an influence of postfeminism.

1.4 Postfeminism

To fill research gaps, this dissertation seeks to marry postfeminism, health, age and advertisement to form a coherent understanding of how the participant in the following data set has been represented. Given that magazines in question have publication dates of 2020 and 2022 and that 'we are far from becoming post-postfeminism', postfeminism must be taken into account in this study.

To understand postfeminism, feminism 'has to be understood as having already passed away' as 'feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s' have been made 'redundant' (McRobbie, 2004: 255). Postfeminism is interested in the following ideas: 'individualism, choice and empowerment' (Gill, 2007: 153), in the mass media culture. Propagation of 'girl power' and female autonomy permeates various areas of society such as the media, fitness, workspace and domestic spaces (Gill: 2017). Gill (2017) contends that the idea of 'girl power' where women can have it all is promoted by postfeminist media culture, but that this message is frequently restricted to a select group of privileged women who are skinny, white, and conventionally pretty. Gill (2007) further discusses the concept of self-surveillance whereby the 'performance of successful femininity' (155) is encouraged through the maintenance of one's physique, appearance, and successful career. However, such glamorised concepts are merely a guise of 'constant monitoring and labour' (155).

Women have begun to pursue 'personal empowerment' through strength training exercise and fitness as a whole which challenges previous notions of 'women as weak, passive, or docile' (Dworkin et al., 2001: 334). Dworkin et al. (2009) concluded that *Women's Health* magazine transmitted the notion that 'women's engagement with sports is solely a matter of individual achievement' (717). It is evident that women are encouraged to live up to a 'glossed' ideal of what it is to be a 'successful' or socially acceptable woman, which is difficult to sustain naturally; leaving women feeling suffocated by a realm of toxic positivity. Furthermore, 'one of the most striking aspects of postfeminist media cultures is its obsessive preoccupation with the body' (Gill, 2007: 149). Notwithstanding the idea of autonomy and female endowment that postfeminism espouses, it is clear that there is still a focus on the female body, which is supposedly the only way for a woman to exhibit her ability and power.

In broad terms, Gill (2007) summarises postfeminism as distinguished by an opposed blend of feminism and anti-feminism, in which women are celebrated for their power and independence while still being objectified and sexualized.

2. Data and Methodology

2.1 Women's Health

Women's Health magazine has acquired a global presence since its first publication in 2005, operating in thirteen countries from the 'United States' to 'Turkey' (Wiki); with an overall average circulation of '73,227' (ABC) per issue. The publication has seemingly grown in recognition because of the information provided about 'overall wellness; not just fitness, but [...] generally looking after your physical and mental health' (Wnip et al.: 2018). In addition, readers say 'they learn things first' from and 'trust magazines' (Shymansky,2009: 4). Despite the existence of numerous women's lifestyle magazines, I have chosen to analyse *Women's Health* in light of their prominent position within the realm of fitness magazines and the impact that discourse may have on readers. The first issue under analysis was published in October 2020 followed by the second which dates back to January 2022. Given that both issues are relatively recent, they are pertinent to the present audience and will therefore strengthen the significance of this study (see section 2.2 for further justification).

Due to the constraints of my study, only two *Women's Health* magazines will be examined. As a result, my findings will be extrapolated and cannot be applied to the broader discourses found in the remaining publications.

2.2 Data

Although *Women's Health* has now established an online platform where readers can readily access articles and advice, I have chosen to concentrate on its printed issues. This is because individuals may be more likely to encounter magazines in stores and supermarkets around the world than they are to intentionally visit a website. Furthermore, shoppers may glance at magazine covers while perusing supermarket shelves, which allows discourses to be subliminally assimilated—even if only for a brief period of time. In addition, 'fifty percent of magazine readers engage in no other activity while reading them, while only 7% of television viewers do not' (Magazine Publishers of America [MPA]: 2007; Shymansky, 2004: 4). Moreover, '93% of adults (18+) read magazines' and 'the average reader spends an average of 42 minutes on each issue' (Magazine Media Fact Book 2011/2012). Consumers are therefore more likely to be receptive to discourses in magazines than in other types of media.

Numerous celebrities have graced the front covers of *Women's Health* UK, but only one, British television personality Davina McCall, has done so twice. As a result, I will be able to produce an unbiased perspective on the prevalent discourses which emerge across both covers and reach a solid judgement about how *Women's Health* magazine represents the same participant in two distinct circumstances. Here, Davina is classed as a representative participant which is a term coined by Kress & Leeuwen (2006) (KvL henceforth). Representative participants are those 'who constitute the subject matter of the communication', such as 'people' represented 'in and by the speech or writing or image' (48). Thus, the ways in which Davina is represented across both of the covers, will be a key part of decoding ageist discourses.

To compile my data, I have utilised Readly, 'a Swedish digital newspaper and magazine subscription service' (Wiki), which provides every issue of *Women's Health* UK. I have gathered two screenshots of each issue followed by a segment from each of McCall's articles.

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2.3 Methodology

A multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) methodology will be used to conduct this investigation. I will expand on MCDA below, while outlining the methodology's justifications and constraints.

2.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

To fully grasp the principles of MCDA, we must first comprehend Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

KvL (2001) define discourses as 'socially constructed knowledge of (some aspect of) reality'. Socially constructed means that discourses 'have been developed in specific social contexts (5); in this case, the media. CDA views 'language as a means of social construction' where 'language both shapes and is shaped by society' (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 4). Hence, CDA claims to be less interested in language usage itself, but in the 'relations between discourse, power, dominance and social inequality' (Van Dijk, 1993: 249). Although CDA has become a significant area of interest within sociolinguistic practice, a narrowed focus on linguistic discourse negates other modes of discourse, such as visual communication or visual semiotics; which is pertinent to this study.

2.3.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Machin & Mayr (2012) explain that a broader set of tools are required to analyse discourses that are not restricted to language, with a focus on elements 'such as colour, lighting' and the 'articulation of detail' (8). This is because, 'texts will use linguistics and visual strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface, but which may in fact be ideological and seek to shape the representation of events and persons for particular ends' (9). In this case, the consumers of magazines.

KvL (2006) state that, linguistic and visual discourses can both be used to realise the 'same fundamental systems of meaning that constitute our cultures, but that each does so' through its own 'specific forms' and 'independently' (19). Hence, visual resources are 'used to communicate things that may be more difficult to express through language, since images do not tend to have such fixed meaning' (Machin, 2012: 9). Hence, visual semiotics may be deemed as subjective to each individual. Therefore, my analysis does not provide a fixed meaning of the covers' discourses.

Magazines contain participants, images and texts. Therefore, a multimodal approach allows for a comprehensive investigation of how each magazine cover utilises discursive strategies to transmit nuanced meanings in ways that CDA may not. For this reason, I position my study here.

My analysis will comprise two main themes which I have identified:

1. Performing 'successful' ageing
2. Ageing in relation to gender and postfeminism

I intend to develop a rigorous understanding of how *Women's Health* represents ageing by looking at the discursive strategies utilised across both themes.

The analysis will begin with the October 2020 issue of *Women's Health* featuring Davina McCall. Thereupon, I will draw comparisons to the January/February 2022 issue; continuing this pattern throughout.

3. Analysis

3.1 Performing 'successful' ageing

Women's Health publications promote 'not just fitness,' but also 'overall wellness'. Hence, the magazine covers often include details regarding a range of topics. These texts, however, may be perceived as serving a supportive role in helping to confirm the notion that 'successful' ageing must be performed.



Figure 1: October 2020 issue of *Women's Health* Magazine

In the Figure 1, the phrase states 'Davina on fitness at 52 and wanting to be naughty'. On the surface, being 'naughty' brings forth the idea of child-like behaviours such as mischief and rebellion, thus implying she must perform a certain 'naughtiness' to be deemed youthful. The transitive verb 'wanting' suggests a material process whereby Davina is the actor and being 'naughty' is the goal. This evokes a sense of desire which proposes the need for action or doing to be 'naughty'; suggesting that sexuality is out of her reach or abnormal. Such deviation is perhaps due to her age which is highlighted through colour. The number 52 is in baby pink text. This distinguishes it from the remainder of the sentence, which is black; hence, the participants' age is foregrounded. In two ways, the colour 'baby pink' bears associative value (KvL, 2002: 355). The first is due to its delicacy in hue, as well as the adjective 'baby' which has connotations of

young children or innocence. The evocation of rebellion here may be an attempt to dispel certain societal stereotypes where 'older individuals are unappealing, unsexual, and unattractive' (Langer, 2009: 753); therefore necessitating McCall's desire to act in a 'naughty' manner. In addition, here, the term 'fitness' merely conceals the subtle notions of performative ageing which permeate the phrase as a whole. The macro element of the magazine, fitness, therefore, becomes backgrounded.

Performativity is further alluded to through 'skincare solutions for every decade'. The term 'solution' implies that as the 'decades' increase, skin becomes problematic or there is an issue at hand which requires a 'solution'. The term 'every' may invoke a sense of inclusivity, yet the noun 'decade' possesses historic implications, which reinforces the notion

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of old age. To add, 'skin solutions' are an incentive to increase consumer behaviours by proposing the requirement for older women 'to respond to new demands' (Kenalemang, 2022: 2123); and adhere to successful ageing.

Since the magazine cover is a composite text which contains image and text, it is equally important to be cognizant of visual communication. In this case, Davina functions as the representative participant (KvL, 2006: 48) to potentially demonstrate the result of ageing 'successfully' through self-surveillance and action. The participant appears to be laughing on the cover, in an upright position. We can infer that the participant expresses contentment and confidence through her smile and the placement of her hands on her hips, respectively. Such stature places Davina in a position of agency and power. This can be read as a visual 'invitation' which 'is a 'demand' picture with a beckoning hand and a smiling expression' (KvL, 2006: 124). The following may be an 'invitation' for individuals to age 'successfully' so that they can achieve the same degree of contentment or agency as Davina.

The magazine cover (figure 1) demonstrates high levels of modality through heightened colour saturation, which is visible in the brightness of the cover and the glow from the participants' skin. Colours such as baby blue, baby pink, yellow, cream, and black provide an extensive amount of colour differentiation. Since, 'the greater the abstraction (away from saturation, differentiation and modulation), the lower the modality' (KvL, 2006: 160), it could be argued that the intensity of colour and light communicates a high level of realism. This proposes the discourses as fact, thus propagating the notion of 'successful' ageing further.

Conversely, the composite text has been professionally structured and edited, which detracts from the sense of reality because it would be challenging for McCall to maintain such a glow regularly. Talbot (2019) reinforces this, mentioning that 'real women's faces and figures are seldom to be seen', especially in women's magazines (126). Hence, modality is low and 'less than real' (KvL, 2006: 160) on the spectrum of naturalism. Moreover, the participant's face reveals natural wrinkles, creating a sense of realism in the absence of smoothing technologies such as Photoshop. Consequently, readers may feel that they are able to empathise with Davina, thereby generating a sense of trust between the reader and participant. This could strengthen the reader's incentive to follow the advice provided by *Women's Health* magazine.

Similar to Figure 1, McCall is smiling in Figure 2, which elicits an emotional response of happiness and warmth from the reader; and further insinuates a 'visual invitation'. Thus, the participant promptly confirms a sense of positivity or truth in the discourse that is employed within the composite text; consequently, 'the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them' (KvL, 2006: 118). Alternatively, Davina can be seen with her arms on the fence of a boxing ring, which simulates the position of a boxer during a fight; therefore imparting a feeling of threat or supremacy onto the reader. Furthermore, the composition of the text, together with the colours employed provide a more simple yet bold form. However, in the previous illustration (Figure 1), the texts were pink, blue, and black. McCall was also dressed in cream. The text as a whole employs colours which are gentle on the reader's eyes and evoke a sense of purity or innocence. Yet, in Figure 2 the linguistic discourses are presented using the colours red and black while Davina is dressed in blue

and black clothing, which is initially more visually striking than cream. Due to the prominence of the hues blue and black, the participants' garments in Figure 2 may invoke feelings of danger.



Figure 2 : January/February 2022 issue of *Women's Health Magazine*

egalitarian by containing the expression 'any age'. However, 'any age' implies that age could be a barrier to achieving glowy skin. Therefore individuals must be proactive in their journey to ageing 'successfully'. The term 'glowing' signifies beauty (and/or health), indicating that older women do not have a natural glow; but instead, they must go out and 'get' it. 'Get' necessitates glowing skin through its function as an imperative that instructs the reader rather than suggesting. The concept of framing (KvL, 2006: 177) should be considered here. Despite possessing a smaller text size than the rest of the cover, the phrase is the only element of the cover that is framed with a circular border. KvL (2006) mention that the presence of framing devices disconnects elements of the image, signifying that they 'do not belong together in some sense' (177). Here, the framed phrase is in isolation from the rest of the piece which may attract the viewer's gaze. Thus, bringing the discourse to a higher level of significance and strengthening the incentive towards the performance of 'successful' ageing.

The visual discourses within figure two are amplified further through 'Strong, fit and fierce'. Just as the participant is standing in a boxing ring, invoking a sense of combat, strength and ferocity delineate ideas of an aggressive animal. The following yields the desire to possess a specific level of vigour to emulate the 'successful' ageing process, that is modelled by the participant; hence fostering behaviours of self-discipline. Furthermore, the

By drawing all of these elements together, the second illustration portrays the participant as an 'alpha' female which conveys the idea that self-surveillance is necessary to 'successfully' age. Subsequently, the act of discipline must be intentionally practised in one's life which naturally requires an element of performance.

The salient strategies that lie within linguistic discourses in figure 2, serve to reinforce the prevalent theme of 'successful' ageing as performative function. Although the following image includes fewer words that are drawn from a semantic field of age, each component must be examined closely to decode ageist ideologies.

'Get glowing skin at any age' constitutes the only statement on the cover which explicitly refers to age. The current cover, like the first, attempts to appear

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following phrase is the largest on the page and it is adjacent to Davina's head; accentuating the concepts which are communicated.

It is intriguing to examine how the terms 'fit', and 'fitness' are employed across both covers. 'On **fitness** at 52', 'Strong, **fit**, and fierce', and '**Fit** at any age' are a few examples. By using such terminology, the parameters of a health and fitness magazine are briefly satisfied. Yet, once the text is deconstructed, fitness is merely a guise to soften the problematic underlying meaning of discourses; which are ageist and gendered. Such a disguise reflects the notion that ageing women, such as Davina, are obliged to put on an act of defiance for their ageing process to be deemed as correct or accepted.

To conclude this section, it has become clear that the text actively encourages readers to take steps to 'stop the ageing clock' by expressing their sexual desires, using products to fix their ageing skin, and leading a physically fit lifestyle which will enable ageing women to exhibit their efforts to age 'successfully'. Thus, the unnatural circumstances which individuals such as Davina adopt, propagate the idea of performative behaviour to hide ageing symptoms and instead fit in with younger women. In addition, performative ageing requires individuals to meet societal demand and endorse consumer culture. In the following section, I will expand on how discursive techniques are gendered and how this pertains to postfeminism.

3.2 Ageing in relation to gender and postfeminism

While my analysis has been made conceivable by the prevalence of words from the age semantic area on both covers, we must consider that women constitute the majority of the magazine's target audience. Aforementioned, postfeminism is prevalent in media forms such as magazines; thus, I have chosen to identify how notions of postfeminism are pervasive in the representation of ageing in this context.

According to Coupland (2007), 'to age is to lose symbolic capital and self-worth' (39). Davina characterising herself as 'naughty' in figure 1, could thereby be suggested as a means to restore 'capital' or 'self-worth' to undo the effects of ageing through self-empowerment. In the past, studies have revealed that women in the media were portrayed as 'passive objects' whereas present-day women, like Davina, are challenging these representations and perhaps rejecting feminism by asserting that they have the choice to be 'naughty' (Gill, 2003: 103).

Davina's desire aligns with the postfeminism theory of autonomy, as she chooses to be 'naughty' on her own terms, in lieu of being objectified implicitly through discourse. Thus, the text presents Davina as 'no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances', but who instead chooses self-pleasure by expressing her sexual desires (Gill, 2003: 103). Although the narrative implies that Davina has the power to shape her own life, themes of objectification are essentially reproduced. This is reinforced through visual discourse and the location of the text on the cover. The statement is conveniently positioned beneath the participant's breasts, which not only calls attention to established discourses but also virtually objectifies her further as her power is largely shaped by her physical and sexual traits rather than her intellectual or emotional attributes.

With these comments in mind, the cover characterises the participant in a sexual manner which counteracts the supposed emancipation of female oppression. The discourses in Figure 1 could be argued to indicate that females beyond a certain age are required to outwardly express sexual desires to fulfil the standards of successful ageing portrayed by the media. In this case, Davina is the representational participant.

Training 'smart' highlights that individuals must be strategic in their pursuit of fitness, which delineates that fitness is a competition between who can train the smartest. Here, concepts within post femininity such as self-surveillance and autonomy are present. 'Your' directly addresses the reader and further supports individualistic behaviours by suggesting that this is 'your' journey rather than a collective one. Fairclough (1993) recognises direct address as *synthetic personalisation* which is 'the manipulation of interpersonal meaning for strategic, instrumental effect' (141). Here, the reader is held accountable for their ability to be 'smart' in their fitness journey, regardless of their age; which places fitness into a gamelike category as opposed to leisure. Meanwhile, those who have passed their '40s' are dismissed in this circumstance and placed into the category of 'beyond'. The term 'beyond' suggests that those above the age of forty-nine have reached a certain threshold in which they are marginalised from the realm of fitness unless they perform successful ageing. Which ultimately encourages those over forty to match those who are younger in age by practising self-surveillance and reaching normative body 'goals'. Davina exhibits the successful execution of self-discipline (training 'smart'), and therefore conforms to the cultural ideal that 'one has chosen and worked hard to pursue good health' (Roy, 2008: 465).

Although Davina is foregrounded in the text, we must also consider backgrounded elements which may be damaging to readers who are led to believe that self-empowerment, autonomy, and discipline must be practised at a specific age to obtain societal recognition or approval.



Figure 1: October 2020 issue of Women's Health Magazine



Figure 2: January/February 2022 issue of Women's Health Magazine

As illustrated above, although her ethnic background cannot be assumed, we can see that the participant has bronzed white skin. Davina is also partially clothed, allowing us to see her sleek, small form, which is accentuated by her abdominals and muscle definition. Thus, Davina satisfies the criteria of the 'thin body ideal' (Bazzini et al.: 2015) through her physical features, reinforcing the view that fitness is 'worn on the body' rather than through an individual's internal health and competence. Since Davina is evidently of the white race,

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readers may become discouraged, believing that ageing successfully (from a media perspective) is limited and normalised to white, slim, and privileged individuals.

Figure 2, like Figure 1, delineates issues of sexual objectification through discourse, notably 'meet the £10,000 vibrator'. This literary element is located on the participant's right side. *Women's Health* explains that they experimented with 'multiple sex toys for the 1%'. The primary objective of advertisements is 'to persuade consumers to buy a particular product'. However, if this is not the case, they are 'still obliged to refer [...] to a change in behaviour' (Cook, 1992: 4,184). Therefore, it could be argued that the magazine is thereby promoting these goods in the expectation that readers would 'meet' them and then buy them in response to the magazine's evaluations. Even though Davina is not explicitly mentioned in this sentence, all variables of the composite text must be taken into account. Her participation in the eroticized language is illustrated by its placement on the page, which is on the right-hand side of Davina's shoulder. In addition, Davina's name appears on the bottom left-hand side of the cover. The size of her name in text is significantly smaller than the size of the material which is under analysis. This amplifies the sexual connotations of this feature and hence ties Davina with its inferences while reducing the relevance of her identity or name.

Interestingly, the participant's name 'Davina' is in a particularly small text. Instead, the more obvious allusion to her identity is located above as 'Miss Motivator'. This strategy is coined by Machin & Meyr (2012) as 'lexical absence', where 'certain terms that we might expect are absent' (38). This technique is contradictory; on the one hand, it represents postfeminist thought, specifically empowerment. However, it also subtly weakens Davina's identity and lowers her to the role of a 'motivator'. The phrase motivator implies that McCall is a significant individual who is praised for her motivating persona, which may serve to encourage others. This poses the question of what she is motivating readers to accomplish. Based on the study thus far, it is clear that Davina is characterised by the discourses which surround her image on the cover.

The use of coloured text serves to emphasise this in particular. Along with the terms 'glowing skin,' 'lose weight,' and 'total body,' the word 'Davina' is shown in red lettering. The latter terms are drawn from a lexical field of the body and are associated with Davina given that she is referenced through the same coloured text, rather than black text like the remainder of the literary text. The use of the colour red can be interpreted as symbolic. According to KvL (2002), the application of red in discourse corresponds with 'energy, salience, and foregrounding' (357). Accordingly, the red text's meanings are intensified and foregrounded to the reader. Davina thus becomes a participant who embodies the proposed guidance in red text. This is exacerbated by the complete lack of counsel or vocabulary relating to internal health or 'internal qualities (i.e., what it can do),' as highlighted by Harrison and Fredrickson (2003: 217).

Consequently, the cover contains guidance which promotes sexual provocation, strict regimes, consumerist discourses, and exhibiting the body as a symbol of being 'strong, fit, and fierce'. Such elements, once combined, represent Davina as a figure who has applied the 'correct' techniques to age successfully and establish herself as an independent woman

with authority and discipline. The objective here is to empower other women and motivate them to follow her example.

However, these techniques ultimately reproduce issues of ageism, objectification and capitalistic behaviour. Which therefore instils the need for women to prove themselves through rigorous routines and perhaps, to combat stereotypes that women become less desirable as they age. Both covers encourage women to reverse the effects of ageing to fit in with younger women, who may be regarded as 'fun-loving, consumption focused, and more 'empowered,' active, and bold' (Dobson, 2015: 23).

4. Discussion

This analysis has demonstrated, by means of a thorough deconstruction and comparison of discourses across both covers, that *Women's Health* incentivises women to 'stop the ageing clock' and instead age in a socially acceptable manner, which I have referred to throughout the dissertation as ageing 'successfully'.

Women's Health subtly indicates that this is only feasible if women exhibit their sexual practices publicly, use beauty products which produce a youthful 'glow', and exhibit themselves as joyful individuals. However, such are processes that necessitate labour and self-discipline, which are thus externally performed to comply with the belief that a woman must age in a way that the media depicts as 'successful'. Conversely, female readers who prefer to age naturally and embrace signs of ageing may be marginalised, and this could portray them as being unsuccessful in the process of ageing. Additionally, due to barriers including socioeconomic, racial, and health constraints, the proposed advice is exceedingly impractical for many individuals to comply with in reality. It must also be considered that the participant, in this case, is lean, white, and wealthy, which enables her access to resources that women of colour or women with lower incomes may not have.

Additionally, aspects of postfeminism such as freedom of choice and agency have come to light. The cover's admonition on how women should 'train smart' at any age or utilise skin care products to address dermatological issues initially embodies the principles of 'individualism, choice, and empowerment' (Gill, 2007: 153). *Women's Health* may appear to provide women with an opportunity to feel valued regardless of their age, however, discourses encourage strategic lifestyle decisions, which promote individuality and competitiveness among women rather than solidarity. Readers are duped into believing that skin care products will help them reach the same glow as Davina has at '52', yet in reality, the cover is heavily produced utilising artificial light and editing, as emphasised by the spectrum of naturalistic modality. The promotion of skin care products also incentivises consumer culture, yet is disguised as self-care or self-surveillance. Visual semiotic analysis has allowed this analysis to identify techniques such as colour saturation, positioning, posture and clothing choice, which contribute to Davina's sense of confidence and authority on both covers. However, a significant emphasis on her sexual agency and physical presence effectively reduces her to an object to demonstrate that the advice is correct. Readers may be adversely affected by the notion that Davina can be 'naughty,' for instance, because it glamorises self-objectification, which is arguably worse than preceding allusions to objectification through hidden discourses.

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Moreover, Davina is represented as a woman who subverts the stereotype of an aged female form, defined by Hepworth (2004) as 'a bowed and seated figure with sagging breasts and flabby belly' (5). Davina's body, on the contrary, epitomises the 'thin ideal' (Harrison et al., 2003), as evidenced through lighting strategies which highlight her abdominal definition and slim physique. This challenges negative prejudices that ageing women become less desirable with time. According to Kenalemang (2022), in advertisements 'the idealised image of the female body' is created through the 'celebrity endorser' (2128). Thus, the 'lean firm physique' of a white woman has been normalised here which further restrains women of colour. Both covers disseminate advice which strongly pertains to the body which implies that readers over a certain age can only prove themselves physically, thereby eliminating the ability for ageing women to feel healthy from within.

Notwithstanding my remarks, it should be considered that the representation of age, in this instance, should not be generalised or applied to the remainder of the *Women's Health* issues. This is because representation and 'meanings can change depending on the context in which they are used' (Machin & Meyr, 2012: 51). Therefore, my analysis should be rendered as subjective.

5. Conclusion

While magazines have increased the representation of ageing individuals over time, this dissertation has sought to deconstruct how *Women's Health* magazine represents the idea of 'successful' ageing through discourse. This study investigated two issues of *Women's Health* magazine from 2022 and 2020, both of which featured Davina McCall from two distinct vantage points. By applying the analytical framework of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, I have been able to develop a rigorous understanding of how themes of performance and postfeminism interact with the representation of ageing. Both covers initially adhere to the magazine's 'fitness' motif through the frequent use of the term. However, it is now apparent that 'fitness' solely veils the ageist concepts which govern visual and literary discourses.

To conclude, both covers have employed salient strategies such as framing, literary cues, iconography, modality and colour to propagate the idea that there is a one size fits all way for women to age; which I have referred to as 'successful ageing'. Ageism has been reproduced in an alternative manner. While in the past, ageing women were underrepresented, individuals such as Davina McCall are praised for adhering to the notion that older women must reverse the effects of ageing to sustain their desirability in the face of the media and conform to the behaviours of younger women. Therefore, ageing individuals are made redundant from simply being able to exist without ideas of postfeminism which include self-surveillance, discipline and agency; which also brings forth the theme of performativity. This can be detrimental to the perspective of younger women who may fear that ageing requires tremendous work; and that doing so will render them socially acceptable.

The intersections of gender and ageing have received more of my attention within this dissertation than the intersections of race, class, and age. Therefore, my hope for the future is that sociolinguistic studies will focus on how older women of colour are represented in the media and the implications of multimodal discourses.

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Appendices



Figure 1: October 2020 issue of Women's Health UK

<https://go.readly.com/magazines/56583e6bd9e840828500009e/5f48daf0e2b2ca450e77ef55/1>



Figure 2: January/February 2022 issue of Women's Health UK

<https://go.readly.com/magazines/56583e6bd9e840828500009e/61c44234e2b2ca3e6b04ee5c/1>