Parasecoli (2008) Feeding Hard Bodies - Food and Masculinities in Men's Fitness Magazines

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This article, found in Food and Culture, addresses the growing prevalence of men’s health and body image. The issue of body image has classically been associated with women, but in today’s society men are increasingly becoming the target of body shame. Many magazines, including Men’s Health, are targeted toward men of all ages who wish to improve their physical appearance. The particular body ideal they reinforce is one of high muscle and low fat, a body that can be hard to achieve for the average man. The main focus of the article is the advertisements and food stories that dominate the pages of these magazines.

The advertisements seen in most men’s health and fitness magazines are for supplements, protein shakes, protein bars, low-fat food products, and muscle building products. The ads focus on pure nutrition and have almost no emphasis on flavor or taste. Flavor is only seen as a way to diversify the often bland taste of the products advertised. There is no emotional or pleasurable relation to food, which seems very strange to most food lovers. These products are not meant to provide the consumer with the delight of eating something tasty; they are meant to enhance the consumer’s physical appearance and “health”. This deviance from most people’s thoughts on and relationship to food is a curious one that completely dominates these magazines. It is not normal human behavior to analyze food’s specific nutritional content before eating, although many people do just that. In most cultures food is seen as an extremely important feature of a society particular identity. The experience and indulgence of eating is valued as a necessary and sometimes religious part of culture. This new trend of reducing food down into its basic function, as fuel for a body, is strange to say the least.

An interesting point the author makes about the use of food in these magazines is also related to gender roles and cooking. Nearly all of the articles and advertisements focus on ready-to-eat food and food that requires no preparation. The rare ads for cook books or recipes usually display a woman as the main subject. This is clearly implying that it is “unmanly” to cook and that cooking is a woman’s job. A lot of men enjoy cooking very much and it seems bizarre to demonize a man who cooks. The magazines emphasize quick and easy food preparation, which cuts out a whole aspect of food culture. Those who prepare and cook their food often enjoy and appreciate it much more. The only mention of a man cooking is when he is making breakfast for a woman after a night of intimacy. The act of cooking for one’s lover can be a very sensual experience leading to attachment. The article addressing this focused only on the nutrients in the particular recipe that would boost libido and increase blood flow to the penis. This treatment of food and bonding is not a very romantic one.

Overall, this article was very insightful and interesting. It was fascinating to read about the strange relationship between fitness magazines and food culture. These ideas about food are certain to increase as men and women are continually pressured into a certain ideal body.

Great choice for this assignment.