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Body, Mind and Soul: The Changing Face of Health Issues in the Media

BIRGITTE KJOS FONN

ABSTRACT This chapter gives a short historical overview of the development of personalised traits in health news, ranging from somatic illnesses to mental health to ‘positive’ health advice, in Norway from around World War I to 2010. Where and in what form do we find personalised content, whether it be with regard to topics, the use of individual exemplars, or personalised address? Drawing on a combination of existing literature and new data gathered for this project from selected newspapers and magazines, this chapter explores these questions in a period marked by profound changes in both public health and the media.

KEYWORDS Health news, Private sphere, Personalisation, Feminism, Media history

1 INTRODUCTION

“5 smart exercises for your lumbar regions”. “The dieting food that fills you up”. “Pay well for a larger penis”. These stories, all sampled in spring 2018 from Norway’s major tabloids and discussed in detail in the previous chapter of this book (Hågvar & Alnæs), are only the top of the iceberg. While I write this article, I constantly come across newspaper articles with similar content – about working out, losing weight, looking good, perfecting the body – but also about relationships and sex. They lie side by side with articles about more serious medical conditions, from cancer to pandemic flus. How do we understand this phenomenon, and is it possible to understand it by studying it from a historical perspective?
As pointed out in the introduction to this book, health can be understood in many ways. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as “complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” from the outset and has been committed to this rather holistic understanding of health ever since. Media health is similarly – or even more – diverse. This means we have to take all manner of understandings about health into consideration when we study it – including topics ranging from mental health to how to become or stay happy or fit, or how to have good relationships, and so on. Such a broad view is probably particularly necessary when we look for personalised topics and frames.

Health news does not have to be personalised in itself – it all depends on their topic and form. Hanusch (2012), for example, discusses the difference between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, describing ‘hard’ news as related to the political field, whereas ‘soft’ news revolves around information and advice that the audience can use in their daily lives. Health often falls in the second group, but where do we draw the line? It is likely that ‘proper’ wars will be regarded as harder news than the war against tuberculosis. But the differences are not always clear-cut: the war against tuberculosis, malnutrition, or at the moment of writing, a global pandemic, will again be seen as far harder news than stories about fighting a little extra body fat.

The question pertains not only distinction to the issue in question, but also to how it is handled and presented. For example, some types of soft news correspond to what Eide & Knight (1999) identified as ‘service journalism’, in which the news can take the form of public enlightenment or the mass media can take on the role of helper. Soft news will also often use individual exemplars, and Fairclough (2001, p. 52) has drawn attention to how these and similar news may often include a kind of personalised mode of addressing the public. And all these forms may be accompanied by imagery that in itself sends a message about personalisation, as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, on the basis of an overview of the history of ‘soft’ news in Britain, Holland (1998) has pointed out that when perceived as belonging to the private sphere, media material has tended to be regarded as ‘inferior’ content. Hanusch (2012, p. 2) makes the same point when he contends that soft news falls “outside what many have traditionally regarded as ‘good’ journalism”. According to Holland the distinction between soft and hard news has also tended to be gendered. For one there has been a connection between topics regarded as female and topics

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1. Preamble to the Constitution of WHO as adopted by the International Health Conference that entered into effect in 1948. The WHO still describes itself as “firmly committed to the principles set out in the preamble to the Constitution”.
regarded as inferior. According to Holland, however, there is also some historical reality to this gendering of news since what we normally recognise as soft news grew more common with the increase in female readership, especially with the spread of a ‘yellow’ or popular press from the end of the 19th century. Women were homemakers and at the same time “at the centre of a consumer economy which was increasingly based in the home” (Holland, 1998, p. 20). This point is a good illustration of the debate cited in the introduction of this book (Fonn, Hormoen, Hyde-Clark & Hågvar), that where some scholars see media narratives as threats to public understanding, others see them as examples of democratisation.

The contribution of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the development of health news, with a special focus on ‘soft’ and personalised health content, in Norwegian newspapers and magazines from around World War I to 2010. Whether with regard to topics, the use of individual exemplars, or personalised addressing (and even imagery), where and in what form do we find this type of content? One motivation in writing this book is an interest in how health issues are connected to broader sociocultural changes – political, ideological and public mentality shifts – and how different media actors respond to such social currents. The chapter draws on material from both newspapers and magazines and is based on a combination of existing literature and new data gathered for this project.

2 NORWEGIAN MEDIA AS A HISTORICAL CASE

The Norwegian press has had a rather different structure from that of Britain. There was no dominant popular press at the end of the 19th century. This does not mean that there was no soft news at all. To follow Holland, one would expect that both a modern money economy and increased democratisation of the readership were important factors for the development of the kind of news that she discusses.

The process of modernisation (the transfer from a pre-modern society mainly based on primary industries to a society with industrialisation, specialised work and modern communication) also took place at a slightly later time in Norway than in Britain. Around the beginning of World War I, this process was nevertheless more or less complete (Nielsen, 2011). At this stage Norwegian society had reached a level of development in which an “intense degree of communication” was possible – every household had access to a newspaper, for example – and by 1918, access to radio had begun to spread (Bastiansen & Dahl 2019, p. 158, 166).

Women’s ‘emancipation’, in itself an important project of modernisation, further reached an important milestone in 1913 when Norway (as the third country
in the world to do so) introduced the right to vote for women on the same terms as for men. This is not to say that equal rights were introduced more generally. More women entered the labour market, but they were mostly unmarried or in inferior positions. For a long time the most common occupation was still ‘the proud wife’, and the prevailing view on gender, even among those who worked for women’s rights, was that women and men were inherently different and had complementary roles. This all explains why it is natural to expect those topics from the domestic or private sphere about which Holland writes to be more pronounced in the media as women’s voices became more important in society, and the period just before World War I is therefore a natural place to start.

3 LITERATURE AND MEDIA CORPUS

As far as newspapers are concerned, I have chosen one paper that became what was known as a ‘popular’ early in the 20th century, Dagbladet, and a quality and traditionally more conservative paper that has acquired more ‘popular’ features in recent years, Aftenposten. Both have existed throughout the entire period under study.

The traditionally liberal Dagbladet, which was transformed into a boulevard paper in the 1930s and went on to assume a tabloid format in the 1980s, has had its history written across two volumes (Dahl, 1993; Eide & Myrvang, 2018). As a liberal newspaper, Dagbladet is believed to have been at the forefront when it comes to discerning certain types of social change, whereas Aftenposten in Norway’s press history is described as having been a bit old-fashioned until the recent decades (Flo, 2010, p. 25).

Magazines are included because they have traditionally been an important part of many households’ media consumption, and early magazines and weeklies were furthermore often channels for public enlightenment. Studying magazines can in itself therefore be seen as a way of studying broad cultural developments. Unlike the newspapers, there are no Norwegian magazines that have held and retained their position though the entire period being studied here, so it is necessary to look at different magazines at different stages. There is a certain body of research on Norwegian family and women’s magazines that can be used to shed light on the early stages of the development I am describing in this chapter – including previous work of my own (Fonn, 2013, 2015).

To fill the gap left by the historical accounts, I have gathered some data systematically. For each of the newspapers I have gathered two issues a year every fifth year from 1914 to 2010. I wanted to avoid the periods of the two wars since at those times health issues in the media were not representative – not least due to the
Spanish flu during World War I. I therefore chose the first half of 1914 instead of 1915, and omitted the autumn of 1940 and the spring of 1945, when Norway was under German occupation. I have chosen the available Wednesday closest to 12 March or 12 October each year. From the turn of the millennium both newspapers have also published weekend magazines (Dagbladet from late 1999, Aftenposten from late 2005), so I also included one weekend magazine per newspaper per chosen year from 2000. This gives a total of 85 newspaper issues. For magazines, I base my text on available research mostly until the 1970s, but from 1970 to 2010 I have collected new data from KK, Norway’s oldest existing women’s weekly magazine, which throughout this period became the leader in its genre. Magazine issues are sampled twice a year every tenth year in the same weeks as the newspapers, which gives a total of 10.

In order to cover such a long span of time in one single chapter, the level of detail must necessarily be sacrificed for the sake of trying to capture some broad development traits in terms of both media and society. I have therefore based my work on the same periodisations of modern Norway as in Henrik Bastiansen’s and Hans Fredrik Dahl’s work on Norwegian media history (2019), but have included the period around World War I in my first phase, as Anja Schiøtz (2003) also does in her major history work on the Norwegian health service (Bastiansen and Dahl draw a line in 1920).

4 PERIOD I. AROUND AND BETWEEN THE TWO WARS: HOUSEHOLDING AND HYGIENE

In the decades up to 1914, Norwegian authorities had set out to build institutions and spread information to fight child mortality, general ill health, and epidemic diseases. One of the most extensive health laws in Europe had already been established, with both the responsibilities of the state and of the individual as important factors. Among the individual responsibilities was a strong enhancement of public hygiene that had been going on since the 19th century (Schiøtz, 2003, pp. 269–271). To succeed in spreading knowledge about hygiene and food preservation to the public was a matter of life and death. Fighting epidemics was quite simply an important arena for modernisation.

Norwegian women’s main responsibility at this time was primarily to take care of domestic matters, and this naturally not only involved the family’s health, but

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2. Aftenposten also had a weekend magazine during some other periods of the 20th century that has not been included.
their nutrition and well-being too. As production had been gradually moved out of the home during the previous half century, this age-old female responsibility also came to entail knowledge of the products required. At the same time, more people entered into or aspired to enter into the middle classes, curious about the ways of those already there and how to climb the social ladder. Being able to imitate and then slide into the cultured classes naturally also included healthy living and a healthy look, as poor health had been a hallmark of the lower classes at least since the industrial revolution began. The case for media information about these issues would therefore be strong.

The first finding is, however, that health news is few and far between in Norwegian newspapers in the years before and after World War I, regardless of genre. The news that can be found tends to be small notices concerning the building of new hospitals or temperance work (Aftenposten 11.03.1914, 10.03.1920, 11.03.1925), or slightly more elaborate articles on the introduction of an eight-hour workday (Dagbladet 11.03.1914). In one way or another, most health-related articles I found concerned politics or the economy.

The personalised frames that are not to be found in newspapers are far more common in magazines. In women’s and family weeklies, we find mention of health issues at least as early as 1913. The main health focus at this stage was on illness, but included information about how to avoid becoming ill (to the degree that this was possible to control for the individual reader). Topics we recognise as women’s health were included – dedicated medical columns could even inform their readers about uterine cancer and the fight against it. They were also aware of mental health problems: Some columns resembled the later ‘agony aunt’ columns and handled questions like the condition ‘hysteria’. Occasionally they even touched upon topics that did not entirely conceal the fact that human beings were also sexual beings (Fonn, 2013).

Century-old magazines did, however, also bring up topics that we today recognise as ‘healthy’ health issues. In one magazine, for example, the readers were advised on how to gain weight. In a society where failed crops or a bread-winner out of work could lead to outright poverty, it made sense to have a few extra pounds spare, and this also influenced the beauty ideal. But exercise was also advised, and not merely for health reasons but also for the sake of looks – in 1913 one magazine prescribed long, brisk walks for the condition and special gymnastic exercises to keep shoulders “round and beautiful” (Fonn, 2013). It is also worth noting that at this stage magazines already employed what Marjorie

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3. In this particular case it seems to be related to what we today call ME.
Ferguson (1983) has called woman-to-woman personalisation, in particular in the columns where readers’ questions were answered, but also in articles directed at the whole audience. This is the trait that was identified much later by Fairclough as ‘synthetic personalisation’.

To the extent that there is content that resembles these issues in the newspaper corpus from this period, it is mainly found in ads. The newspapers contained ads for anything from belts to baths to ointments that promised healing from different kinds of illnesses or injuries (Aftenposten 10.03.1920, 14.10.1925, 15.10.1930; Dagbladet 10.03.1920), but also for skin creams, hair tonic and toothpaste with some of the same miraculous effects (Aftenposten 11.03.1925, 15.10.1930, Dagbladet 13.03.1935). We can find both health-related issues and synthetic personalisation in ads – as this one in Aftenposten from 1930: “Hopper’s Cold cream will give you an entirely new experience in skin care” (12.03.1930).

Bastiansen & Dahl (2019, p. 181 ff.) have made a strong point about the emergence of ads in Norwegian news media in the years 1920–1950. They describe the new verbal and visual language of ads as both persuasive and intrusive. The ads could be humorous and cheeky and use sex appeal as a rhetorical tool. The ads were often illustrated by shapely and lightly dressed women, and the situations described were often “laden with eroticism”. Cosmetics and hygiene products were particularly over-advertised.

From the 1920s on, we also see occasional newspaper notices that presented what today we would call scientific communication and reported on medical breakthroughs, but in a fairly cautious manner. However, a lengthier article of particular interest was published in Aftenposten in 1935. In this article, which took the form of an interview with a professor and medical doctor, a number of different health issues were dealt with together – from tuberculosis to workplace chemicals to nutrition. The article also touched upon exercise: the doctor explained that women who worked out would lose body fat and develop muscles. The title of the whole article was surprisingly tabloid for its time: “Do women who exercise become more manly?” (09.10.1935). My material also entails a review of a book about healthy nutrition in Aftenposten in which the recommendations of the book were strongly endorsed – and the title was even formed as an imperative (with implied personalisation): “Live healthy and well for 1.40 per day” (10.03.1940). Both these articles may recall issues that have become regular media content today.

In the Dagbladet of the 1930s, historians have also found interesting content that may point to later topics and genres. The 1930s saw a considerable growth

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4. 1.40 would today be about 1/8 of a Euro.
FIGURE 1 Book review from Aftenposten, 13 March 1940, about nutrition and with personalised address. Reproduced with permission.
in the female reader market, along with a rise in education levels and women’s participation in the workforce. By the 1930s the politically liberal paper had established its own women’s pages, and over the years no less than three different columns covered fashion, food, work, upbringing, make-up, and health issues. These could be about conditions such as breast cancer (Dahl, 2003, p. 407), but it is also possible to detect a more ‘holistic’ understanding of health in these columns, including a rather radical view on both upbringing and sexuality.

One movement in the direction of a broader health focus was particularly important in the 1930s – a strong interest in psychoanalysis (an international movement at the time), described in Dagbladet as a way of “letting the light into one’s inner mind and soul” and fighting everything that might “cling onto the oppressive and the anguished”, to quote Dahl (1993, pp. 197–198) – where the focus on psychoanalysis is highlighted as a special characteristic of this liberal paper. But in 1925 a related field was also touched upon in Aftenposten when a Dr. Hansson published a debate article where he discussed the possible effects of hypnosis – on both mental and somatic ailments (14.10.1925).

Dagbladet’s general freedom-loving policy may have been intended to benefit women as well as men, and its women’s pages were obviously meant to have an emancipatory function. But this was also the period when photo was making its entry into newspapers in full, and any emancipatory content was “combined with a sense of the feminine grace”, fashion features and large photos and a touch of glamour (Dahl, 1993, pp. 406 ff.). It is likely from this description that both ads and newspapers’ general illustration policy contributed to what the novelist John Berger has called the ‘male gaze’: “Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at” (cited in Gauntlett, 2008, p. 41).

**5 PERIOD II. RECONSTRUCTION YEARS: HOUSEWIFE ERA AND TEENAGE CULTURE**

This second period has been called the period of the housewife. Women’s role as homemakers was even more pronounced than in the previous period. One reason was the scarcity of jobs in the reconstruction years – the labour market did not ordinarily have room for more than one breadwinner. Family values were furthermore still held in high esteem and could even be seen as a part of the ongoing ideological war between the two superpowers, believed to protect national values in a situation of international instability.

For Norway, as in many other European countries, the first 15 years after the war were characterised by the reception of the American ‘Marshall Plan’ to rebuild
war-damaged societies. A consumer society now emerged in full, and the housewife was idealised in films and targeted in the governments’ information campaigns, by the entertainment industry, and not least by advertisers (Bastiansen & Dahl 2019, Nielsen 2011, Schiøtz, 2003, pp. 410 ff). Her domestic duties within nutrition, children’s health and hygiene made her the perfect target for the vendors of a range of consumer goods.

The newspapers still concentrated on politics, foreign news, culture and the economy. There were still few articles on health, but Dagbladet had slightly more articles on these topics than Aftenposten, including waves of colds, new sanatoriums for the ‘nervous’, and smoking mothers. One debate article from a relative to a patient also pointed to a genre that would later be adopted by the journalists themselves: malpractice in a hospital that affected individual members of the public. When we look for issues that could have been framed as health issues today, we also find a short article about divorce as a social problem, with the Norwegian Mental Health Association as source (Dagbladet 11.10.1950, 09.03.1955, 11.10.1955).

In news, ordinary people are still not found in our material, let alone any kind of personalised addressing of the readers. The personalised address was still reserved for the ads, where they often targeted both women and men with illustrations (mostly drawings) of young, slim and good-looking women as eye-catchers. In one issue in 1955, we find slim and good-looking women in ads for soft drinks, detergents – and blinds. Some of these ads obviously had the (female) homemakers in mind, whereas the ad for the blinds was illustrated by a semi-naked woman and is likely to have been targeted more at men. Nevertheless, the growth in commercial products and more individualised consumption also gave women increased access to a market for their own well-being, from perms to make-up (including a combined duster and hairdryer that was on the market in 1955!) (Aftenposten 14.03.1955).

In Dagbladet, the contrast between any possible emancipatory content on the women’s pages and in other parts of the paper was conspicuous, but also points to personalised media content. Around 1930, the paper’s second-ever female journalist in a permanent position had been sent out to report on “the best-looking shop assistants”. 20 years later, the paper engaged actively in Miss Norway competitions, with the editor-in-chief on the jury! The paper also introduced frequent ‘page 3-style’ photos of shapely and lightly clothed women ((Dahl, 1993, p. 406 ff.). These were obviously both a service to the male reader and glaring examples for the women readers of what kind of body one should strive for.

The period after World War II was a time of expansion for weeklies (Bastiansen & Dahl 2019, p. 212–213), and they took to the task of teaching their readers how
to become good consumers in earnest – especially women. They wrote about new products that made both house and body maintenance easier. They wrote about health in the traditional, somatic sense and in the psychological sense, and the line between health and general well-being could be blurred. Marjorie Ferguson has described how British weeklies simultaneously promoted products, entertained the audience and provided a form of psychological support. The agony aunts created space where the readers could talk about their innermost feelings, which were often to do with relationships, sex, courtship and married life (Ferguson, 1983, p. 41).

We find the same features in Norwegian magazines. In 1937, Alle Kvinner Blad (All Women's Magazine, AKB) was launched with an ambition to become “a really modern magazine for women” with international role models. AKB became exceedingly popular and reached its peak in the 1950s, when it was read by approximately one sixth of the population (Heidenreich, 2006).

In AKB, both a medical column and an agony column were expressions of this emerging trend. AKB also published special editions on health or health-related issues such as ‘All women’s medical dictionary’, or ‘AK’s Help yourself’. Personal issues, interpersonal relations and marital problems were discussed in an intimate, open and dialogic way. Both beauty and health (somatic as well as mental) were agony column material, and there are also traces of sexual enlightenment among other health-related issues (Heidenreich, 2006).

Only two women’s magazines from this period still exist today. These were Kvinner og klær (Women and Clothes, later only KK), established in 1952, with an adult but relatively young and well-educated target group, and Det Nye (The New), the first magazine that was directed at teenagers and very young women (and the only Norwegian ‘girls’ magazine for the next 40 years).

The launching of Det Nye in 1957 is testimony to how the rise of a consumer society also contributed to the development of youth culture and the youth culture market. Det Nye appeared the same year as the word ‘teenager’ was brought to Norway (Sarromaa, 2011; Gudjonsson, 2008). It was both different and daring, and brought with it an enhanced focus on looks, skincare, working out and clothes – and an even more pronounced emphasis on relationships with the opposite (always the opposite) sex (Gudjonsson, 2008). In hindsight, we can see how most of these issues relate to issues of health, well-being and relationships in today’s media.

5. The name of the agony column in AKB, ‘Klara Klok’ (‘The Wise Clara’), became so well-known that it lives on as a kind of proverb (and almost 40 years after AKB ceased publishing, it also still exists as a public health, body and sex education website for youth).
6. Originally published under a different name from 1874.
6 PERIOD III. 1960S AND 1970S: UPHEAVAL AND WOMEN’S LIBERATION

This third period was one of upheaval in many respects. As Western societies became more and more marked by expanding consumerism, young people also started to protest against increased consumption and environmental damage, and against authoritarian parents, teachers and politicians (Nielsen, 2011).

The Norwegian health service had gone through profound changes in the first two to three decades after the war. By the 1960s, a welfare state was about to be established. Public health challenges had also changed. After a series of medical breakthroughs the major infectious diseases seemed to have been overcome – except for polio, called ‘the last curse’ (Schiotz, 2003, p. 398). The new threats came from lifestyles, largely tied to the intake of sugar and saturated fat (Schiotz, 2003, p. 428–429). This formerly protective diet in times of scarcity had now become a public health problem, along with smoking. By the 1970s, health authorities had identified cardiovascular disease as one of three major public health problems. Musculoskeletal disorders and mental illnesses were the other two (Schiotz, 2003, p. 395–398).

Lifestyle diseases were often regarded as an individual responsibility, especially by health personnel (Schiotz, 2003, p. 397). Simultaneously, public barriers against seeking help had been lowered – another sign that the reverence towards authorities was diminishing. Thus, since prevention is not only better, but also cheaper than cure, prevention became an overarching goal (Schiotz, 2003, p. 429).

Norway’s dominant press form was still the ‘quality’ party newspaper, but there were now two populars or boulevard newspapers, as Dagbladet had been joined by another even more typical popular (VG). Television was introduced in 1963, forcing both papers and magazines to change. The solution was a greater focus on individual politicians in newspapers and more celebrity news in both newspapers and magazines. Notably, there was an emerging focus on the audience and ‘ordinary’ individuals (Bastiansen & Dahl 2019, p. 283 ff., 291-92 ff., Fonn, 2015).

Along with a general liberalising trend in Western societies, the 1960s was also the decade when a new wave of women’s liberation emerged. The movement typically focused on oppression, workplace inequality, and health. Female health became a major topic, ranging from reproductive health to a profound criticism of the female beauty ideal and the legitimating of gender differences that popular culture conveyed.

Women’s liberation was crucial in connecting illness, reproductive health, preventive health work and mental health into one whole. One of the most important expressions of this trend was the informative self-help book Our Bodies Ourselves
from 1970, described as ‘the bible of women’s health’, which since then has sold millions of copies around the world. The book made the case for female health as an important issue in its own right (Davis, 2007), which had previously, to quote Emily Martin (2001, p. xi) been “described in medical terms as if they were mechanical factories or centralized production systems”.

*Our Bodies Ourselves* used media language and tools to reach its audience – and even the title includes a personalised address. The book had a tremendous influence on the general health discourse (Davis, 2007). The first Norwegian versions (1978, 1985) covered the whole field of illness and health, women’s health specifically, food and exercise, and the balancing of body and mind. Sexual health was included. One important aspect here is that women’s liberation cannot be seen independently of a medical breakthrough, the launching of the Pill, which gave women a whole new control over their reproductive destiny. But the choice of sexual orientation was also an important topic, so reproduction was only one of the reasons why sexual topics were brought up.

In newspapers, we see a slight increase in health articles in this period, still mostly in the form of ‘hard news’ on health policies and op-eds from medical doctors. A story about 500 patients on a waiting list in a hospital in a small Norwegian city may be typical of the challenges of the time (*Aftenposten* 10.03.1965), just as “More preventive dental care is needed” (*Aftenposten* 14.10.1970). A number of ads were still illustrated by slim, good-looking and happy women, and in these mainstream papers personalised address continued to be reserved for the ads. But they were not exclusively directed towards women – an ad for “Europe’s best gym for men” in *Aftenposten*, for example, eagerly encouraged its readers to “Get rid of the car-belly” (10.03.1965).

In the issues from the 1960s and 1970s, we do see a fundamental change – individual persons slowly begin to be used as exemplars in newspapers’ health coverage, as when *Aftenposten* portrayed a blind 95-year-old who took care of his own housework (12.10.1960). The tabloid turn was particularly prominent in *Dagbladet*, with for example a report about another blind man, an Italian, who regained his sight through his mothers’ eyes (11.03.1970). *Dagbladet* would generally be more interested in the shocking and deviating, even in health reporting: “Five-year-olds ate tranquilisers” (11.3.1970) or this: “Stripper’s false boobs started leaking” (14.10.1970).

A significant development also occurred when, in 1969, *Dagbladet*’s traditional Q&A column genre was transformed into a famous (or rather, infamous) column about sexual relations. This was a continuation of the policy from the 1930s, but in a new form. According to Dahl (1993, pp. 214–215), the column probably
contributed to considerable changes in what was regarded as acceptable topics in Norway in the 1960s and 1970s. (From today’s perspective the column looks rather innocent.)

In one of our 1970s issues, we also find the first example of a health article that presents health information as news in a form and language that resemble today’s service news. Dagbladet announced that light has a slimming effect: “We get slimmer and live longer with more light.” (11.03.1970). Yet the personalised news about anything from sex tips to how to exercise one’s lumbar region had still not been invented.

Where weeklies are concerned, magazines and journals that emphasised the idea of feminism and female health in the same way as in Our Bodies Ourselves popped up at the fringes of the traditional media. Some of them even imitated traditional women’s weeklies but took a different political stance. These magazines would often focus on bodily freedom, sexual freedom, and the freedom to accept oneself exactly the way one was under the slogan ‘the personal is political’, but other female health issues were also raised regularly (Farrell, 1998, Lindtner, 2013, Fonn, 2015).

Winship (1987, cited in Gauntlett, 2008, p. 56) has pointed out that although the commercial weeklies were not a part of the “real” women’s liberation movement, feminist ideals were nevertheless becoming a part of the general mentality also in magazines at this stage. They were obviously inspired by women’s liberation, but in an ambivalent way. De Vibe (1993) makes a similar claim concerning Norwegian magazines: that during the 1970s and 1980s, a mainstream magazine such as KK had a ‘problematic consciousness’ of what their feminist sisters were doing.

We can see clearly how magazines from this period walk a thin line between confirming established norms and hitting upon new trends. By this stage AKB had ceased publishing, but Kvinner og Klær (KK) was about to take over as the dominant women’s weekly, with Det Nye as the alternative for the younger generation. Both previous studies and my own material point in the same direction. According to a study of KK in the 1970s, women’s traditional routes to happiness continued to be presented in ways that did not differ much from the 1950s, but at the same time included an increasing focus on female health, sexual relations and female liberation (Langaas, 2001). In KK no. 11 1970 I find tendencies towards feminist protests against having to act like a ‘lady’, attempts to turn gender roles on their head (‘dad sews, mom drives a car’), and a call for ‘the liberation of the chubby woman’ (who should be freer and happier) (no. 42 1970) – but also a massive bout of advertising on how to be young and good-looking. Other studies show how the lines between different types of health coverage were becoming more and more
blurred: another study of KK points out that the authoritarian biomedical expert that often featured in the magazine’s columns in earlier periods, the doctor, had now been replaced by both a social worker in cooperation with a psychologist, and thereby an apparently more ‘holistic’ approach to health (Lauritzen, 2005, pp. 36–39).

Similar changes were apparent in Det Nye. As late as 1965 the magazine’s agony aunt advised her readers to avoid sex before marriage, but attitudes changed quickly. Sarromaa (2011, p. 60) describes Det Nye’s implied reader as becoming increasingly independent and with new, emergent sexual norms. It must however be noted that this was the magazine for the generation that would read (adult) women’s magazines 10–15 years later. Subsequently, new attitudes in Det Nye can also be seen as an important testimony to profound changes in mentality in society (Sarromaa, 2011).

Yet, at the same time, titles such as “What to eat”, “How to look good”, “What to weigh” (all 1966) indicate that women’s liberty still had some shortcomings compared to men’s. Articles in Det Nye focused intensely on the soon liberated readers’ need to watch their food intake: “You should bring a lunch bag including meat or fish from yesterday’s dinner, 1 crispbread or a thin slice of whole wheat bread, 1 slice of cheese, 1 carrot, and some cabbage or a turnip”. The magazine also responded to letters from readers by publishing the basics for a diet, including a calorie table (Gudjonsson, 2008, p. 39).

A direct relationship was constructed between losing weight and working out, being slim and toned, beautiful, attractive and sexy, and on how to obtain a partner, love and sex – and how to be happy, a trait familiar from magazines in general. Ferguson (1983) has tried to explain this paradox. The general liberating trends of the 1960s and 1970s, and women’s liberation in particular, entailed a focus on the right to individual and personal happiness. In order to be happy (i.e. avoid mental problems stemming from low self-esteem and even loneliness), magazines and other sectors of the culture industry translated this into a need to strive for perfection (i.e. show strong self-discipline) (Ferguson, 1983, p. 50ff). In that way, magazines could fuse the well-being and happiness that everybody desired with a strong message about one’s individual responsibility for achieving it.

The feminist movement also took different forms as it travelled into the magazine world. Oullette (1999), for example, has studied the influential international and highly commercial magazine Cosmopolitan, which she describes as the vehicle of a class-related quest for female social mobility (1999, p. 359). Cosmopolitan’s target group were so-called ’pink-collar’ workers – the vast group of e.g. secretaries
who, in the 20th century, were predominantly women. ‘Cosmo’ directed a twofold message at these readers: Have fun, and then land a man (Ouellette, 1999, pp. 371-72). Looks, sex and fashion (and subsequently content that in different ways bore a resemblance both to the content of the magazines and books of women’s liberation and the more modest versions in mainstream women weeklies) were as much tools as they were ends. The magazine’s implied reader (‘the Cosmo girl’) may have owed a lot of her freedom and happiness, bodily or otherwise, to feminism, but was unlikely to identify with it: “She just wanted to go out there and enjoy her independence” (Winship 1987, cited in Gauntlett, 2008, p. 57). This included the freedom to use all the commercial (and other) means available to present oneself as a female sexual object.

7 PERIOD IV. 1980S AND 1990S – INDIVIDUALISM AND INTIMACY

The 1980s and 1990s stand out as a new period of change. Many European countries entered the 1980s with an enhanced belief in the market and its so-called ‘invisible hand’. Living standards continued to rise to a level where even luxury consumption was becoming socially legitimate. In Norway, health and social services were developed and exceedingly regarded as one entity as a result of the extended and increasingly holistic notion of health. At the same time the pressure on the national health service was increasing further as a healthier and longer-living population demanded even more from the sector. This turned attention further away from lethal diseases to those that caused suffering (and that also cost public money), and led to a greater focus on individual responsibility for health, including individual lifestyle choices – rather than genes and bad luck (Skaset, 2003, pp. 538–541). This was also mirrored in civilian life. Gyms were now established all over the country, and jogging became a common habit.

At the same time, the Norwegian media system underwent a profound transformation. Century-old party-owned newspapers were taken over by commercial owners. The state monopoly on TV and radio was dissolved, with increased commercialisation, market orientation and internationalisation of the media as the result.

In our newspaper corpus we find both larger and more elaborated health articles. The papers had also expanded considerably in terms of pages and stories, but the same development is supported by a large study of health news in six major Norwegian newspapers throughout 1985, including Dagbladet and Aftenposten.

Eide & Hernes (1987) concluded that health issues had become a salient topic in both ‘qualities’ and ‘tabloids’. Health policy or advances in medical science were still the domain of the qualities, whereas the populars were now more likely
to publish single-case stories about the little man (or woman) and their struggle against authorities and red tape (ibid., p. 171).

One example from Aftenposten shows more than anything else how health was still an ‘immature’ field in the media compared to today. In 1980, a new medical encyclopedia was launched, based on a major international publication of the same sort. A variety of themes outside traditional somatic medicine were included, from alcoholism to bringing up children to sexuality. But the idea behind the Norwegian version of the encyclopedia was the most interesting: the need to spread medical knowledge to the public since health information did not reach everybody. The doctors had so far had a monopoly on health knowledge, the paper wrote (15.10.1980).

From here we start to see interesting changes. The individual exemplar was now entering the scene in full, even in the quality paper. In 1985, Aftenposten devoted one whole page to the case of an anonymised bulimic who recounted her daily challenges in which just one slice of bread could set off a food binge (09.10.1985). In another instance in this period, the front page featured a woman with a heart condition who was not receiving proper help from the health service (13.03.1990). In 1995, the same paper stated clearly that individual choices were the most decisive when it came to the danger of getting cancer (Aftenposten 11.10.1995). In this period, Aftenposten also had an evening issue where it seems there was more room for ‘personal’ framing and topics, such as under the headline “Family, consumer, health” where low-fat or reduced-sugar foods, for example, were tested.

One evening issue article is particularly interesting. At the bottom of one page, covering only about one-eighth of it, was a text about the fact that exercise makes you live longer. The text was said to be based upon what was then the most comprehensive international research on exercise and health to date. But the article was not a news article, and there was no “this is how you live longer”. The modest placing and equipment, a hand-written signature instead of a byline and also some inclusion of personal reflection, made it seem no more than a ‘paragraph’ (15.03.1990). The most likely explanation is that Aftenposten had not yet seen the tremendous sales potential in content of this kind.

At the same time, the scope of health content in magazines had increased considerably. The dialogue with the reader had also changed and become more intimate and confidence-inspiring, even when questions from readers were answered by traditional medical doctors. Lauritzen (2005, pp. 60–61) noticed how relationship problems were now as prominent as the more physical ones – even when they were answered by a somatic doctor. The magazine doctor wore a flowery dress under her open doctor’s coat (and in that way represented a profound break with
the austere doctorly image of a man with a white coat and a stethoscope around his neck).

At this stage, Norwegian women had gone from mainly being housewives to being working women in the course of one generation, and more and more women completed higher education. This affected the choice of topics. In KK, workplace success and stress alike were combined with articles on anxiety, bags under the eyes, breast cancer, menopause, working out, how to quarrel with one’s spouse, vitamins for the eyes, alcohol use, better sex habits, upbringing, and problems with the lumbar region (nos. 11 and 42 1990, 11 2000, and 42 2000).

Service journalism within the realm of health with a personalised way of addressing the public was now emerging as a steady genre. KK developed a separate four-page column with ‘useful’ tips, another two-page column called ‘Impulses’, and a third two-to-four-page column called ‘Medicine – health’. The first contained greater focus on ‘innocent’ health conditions and advice than the last, while ‘Impulses’ was more geared towards relationships. But they also overlapped in many ways. KK no. 42 1990 devoted ten pages in all to “cheering up, simple tips, useful advice”, where health and consumption were combined into a greater whole. A pink foam bath could, for example, help against light depression: “Think pink, surprise yourself”. At the same time, we see that it could also be difficult to distinguish the imagery of commercials from that of editorial content. Beautiful, long-legged women with perfect skin were even used to illustrate articles about the benefits of magnesium and calcium.

Anything from losing weight to sexual matters had now come to be construed not only as a health issue, but also as an individual responsibility. Being slim and beautiful was still an important way of achieving happiness, but mental training and cosmetic surgery were added to the list of tools. And in order to take the right routes to happiness, one still had to be in control of one’s own life. This was all presented as a way for the reader to create her own identity (e.g. nos. 42 1980, 42 1990, 11 and 42 2000).

By 1990, the assumed reader was also expected to be happier with her body regardless of its shape – the rhetoric revolved around ‘accepting yourself the way you are’. At the same time, other texts focussed on being slim and toned, just as the images showed slim and toned bodies (see also Langaas, 2001, pp. 223–225). Det Nye also had a series where they published tips for different ways of dressing depending on the readers’ different shapes. Not totally wholehearted, though: The bikini tips for women with ‘large breasts and wide hips’ were illustrated with photos of skinny models (Gudjonsson, 2008, p. 44). Winship detected the same contradiction in Cosmopolitan – be content with your body on one page, diet on the other (cited in Gauntlett, 2008, p. 57).
FIGURE 2  KK Magazine no. 42 1990, column on medicine and health. Reproduced with permission.
In the 1980s, individual health stories seem to have become potential front page material in *Dagbladet* – as in 1985, when one politician’s diabetes filled the whole front page. The front page pointed to a 20-page special theme on health, equipped with individual exemplars and the use of ‘we’ and ‘you’, and topics ranged from vitamins, via hormonal therapy, to strokes. Under the title “Give us our health back”, the editors stated that only a few years ago, health and medicine information was kept ‘secret’ from the public, but that this was now set to change (09.11.1985).

Then something profound happened. After an abrupt fall in circulation in the 1990s, *Dagbladet* decided to change its front-page policy, among other things by trying to attract more female readers. ‘News for Use’ was the new mantra. From 1996 onwards, service articles with personalised address became more and more common. Many of these articles were about personal finances or homemaking, but many were also about relationships and health. In the early 1990s, *Dagbladet* established a column called ‘On your side’, with health and diet as important topics from 1994-95 (Eide & Myrvang, 2018, p. 158). In 1995, for example, we find articles on the good and bad sides of stress, or how to stop smoking (15.03.1995). A later infamous front page from 1996 is reprinted in Eide & Myrvang (2018, p. 162–163): “Dust the house and lose weight”, as is this, from 1997: “How to stay young: Sex, food and exercise”. The first of these stories included a long list of the calorie use from a number of domestic daily duties, like dusting, cleaning the car, baking a cake. Not before 2000 (no. 11) do I find a similar article in *KK*, where a loss of 110 calories is promised if the reader makes the beds.

### 8 PERIOD V. 2000S – INTO OUR TIME

In the 2000s, health pages in *KK* had increased to almost 14 per issue. Health pages had changed their names to ‘Health and well-being’ (see also Lauritzen 2005). Both body and soul were taken into consideration, and mental health had become an important topic, but the main focus was on feeling well and grooming oneself in general.

In my corpus from the year 2000 and after, the doctor had been allotted three to four pages every week. She answered questions about everything from salpingitis to hepatitis B, but her first page was always devoted to questions about love and relationships. Apart from that, *KK* had up to 20 pages about somatic health and mental health, relationships, sex, weight, diets, exercise – many with the twofold

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7. My quotation marks around ‘secret’.
communication discussed above. Not the lucky owner of a perfect body? No problem. It was just as possible to have a beautiful gait with short legs. Need to lose 15 kilos in five weeks? Could be done, the magazine knew how (no. 11 2000). A later issue showed four different ways of obtaining a ‘new body’ before Christmas – including different sorts of treatment, such as muscle stimulation (no. 42 2000).

During this period, health issues had also become regular content in newspapers, and service journalism was a natural part of it. Dagbladet again wrote about how to stop smoking and published expert articles about the so-called blood-type diet (11.10.2000). On a 2010 front page, the reader was urged to check for hidden eye conditions, whereas a well-known comedian stated over two full pages how depression made her a better artist (14.10.2010). In Aftenposten in March 2000 we find five health articles in one issue, female health and mental health included, and two of them even on the front page (15.03.2000). Aftenposten also published articles about children being overweight, including a breakfast diet. The front page read: “Parents’ fault if children gain weight” (09.03.2005).

When we turn to weekend issues, we see that the focus on general well-being is particularly prominent. In March 2000 the front page of Dagbladet, with reference to the paper’s Saturday magazine, read: “It is lovely to be fat.” (18.03.2000). Five years later: “Healthy and fit in mid-life” – “Learn how to give yourself a treat. Lovely food. Forget the slimming hysteria. Be active” (12.03.2005). Aftenposten had started to give exercise advice (12.03.2010), and relationships were also becoming regular content in this quality paper. Aftenposten’s Friday magazine introduced its own agony aunts (of both sexes), where psychologists answered questions about infidelity, family problems, sexual problems and upbringing (11.11.2005, 12.03.2010).

8.1 EPILOGUE: 2010 ONWARDS

Whereas all these developments have been long and slowly changing trends, ten years is a long time in the media in the age of the internet. Now, we find that health is an area of commitment in news media. We find well-being and relations side by side with journalism about ‘proper’ illnesses. In the course of a few weeks in 2020 (before the coronavirus broke out in Norway) the following appeared: “From overweight to super-body”, and “How to get rid of extra fat under the chin” in Dagbladet (03.03.2020 and 13.02.2020), with “This is how you can easily avoid losing muscle mass with age” and “This is how music can help you (start working out)” in Aftenposten (05.02.2020 and 16.02.2020).

8. My addition in parentheses.
Sex and sexual health are now quite common in Dagbladet, with e.g. “How to have simultaneous orgasms” or “When you should accept a one-night stand” (23.02.2020 and 31.01.2020) – whereas Aftenposten is more occupied with how the right food can improve the quality of men’s semen (24.01.2020). In Aftenposten content of this sort has been more modest, but these topics and genres have become more common in this paper too.

Most of the stories above either apply synthetic personalisation or individual exemplars – or both. They are often accompanied by images of perfect female bodies and faces. At the same time, the ‘perfect’ male body has become more and more common. Today both sexes encounter the double message in the media that you should be content with the way you are, happy and worry-free – and strive for perfection.

This kind of content fits hand in glove with digitalisation (Eide & Myrvang, 2018) and is generally believed to be even more salient in online papers than print. The interesting and rather new development is however affected by the tendency described in the previous chapter to put these issues behind a paywall and promote them on print fronts, a signal that this is popular content with considerable sales potential.

9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The studies cited in this chapter show how over the years different kinds of health coverage have gained importance, not only in magazines but also in news media. The newspapers in this study did not originally seem to take much interest in health issues, with the possible exceptions that have been mentioned in Dagbladet’s histories: columns for women at least from the 1930s that also contained health issues; and a focus on psychoanalysis in the periods between the wars. With the years, body, mind and soul all became regular media content.

This implies an increasing focus on aspects of health that can be said to belong to the ‘private’ sphere. A more holistic approach to health also implies more interest in general well-being and relations, and increased use of individual exemplars or personalised address. At the same time, the difference between magazine and newspaper content has become increasingly blurred.

A study of this scope can in no way shed light over the whole interplay between newspapers, magazines and other social forces in this field, but it may give us some ideas about influential factors or co-development of certain features. A wide array of forces seems to have influenced the changes in media health. For decades, the major infectious diseases appeared to have been fought in Norway as in other Western countries. Welfare states were built, followed by a healthier and at
the same time more demanding population. Political and medical advances quite simply made good health more available. Strong political currents also placed greater emphasis on individual responsibility, whereas both increased consumption and increased commercialisation were factors that in themselves contributed to changing the news media.

Among the relevant political currents, one should not least take into consideration the tremendous effect the ‘second’ wave of women’s liberation had from the 1960s, particularly when it comes to establishing personal health as a media issue. The development was not linear: aspects of women’s liberation seem to have merged with more traditional women’s weeklies’ issues, with advertisement language and with the news media’s awareness of a growing female readership – and probably also with a development in the direction of a more holistic and personal understanding of health.

REFERENCES


