

AFRICAN PEOPLE'S
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Our Mission

* Develop and institutionalize programs addressing the grave disparities in education, health, healthcare, and economic development faced by the African community.

* Defend the human and civil rights of African people.

Healthy Connections

OCTOBER 2008

Weight Loss Tips Differ in African-American and Mainstream Magazines

African-American women's magazines are more likely to encourage fad diets and reliance on faith to lose weight, while mainstream women's magazines focus more on evidence-based diet strategies, according to the study by Univ. of Iowa associate prof. Shelly Campo.

"Three-quarters of African-American women are considered overweight or obese, compared to one-third of all U.S. women," said Campo. "African-American magazines tend to embrace a mission of advocacy for the African-American community, but if you're not covering evidence-based weight-loss strategies, you're not really helping your community."

Campo and co-author Teresa Mastin from Michigan State Univ. analyzed 406 fitness and nutrition articles published between 1984 and 2004 in three major African-American women's magazines: Ebony, Essence and Jet -- and three popular mainstream women's magazines: Good Housekeeping, Better Homes and Gardens, and Ladies' Home Journal.

The magazines suggested many of the same weight-loss strategies, but mainstream magazines were twice as likely to suggest eating more whole grains and protein, smaller portions, and low-fat foods. Relying on God or faith was suggested by 1 in 10 weight-loss stories in the African-American magazines, but in almost no weight-loss stories in the mainstream magazines.

Fad diets were promoted as legitimate strategies in 15 percent of weight-loss stories in the African-American magazines, compared to only 5 percent in the mainstream magazines. Fad diets, defined as diets that may work in the short term but often do not result in sustained changes, included the Dick Gregory Bahamian, South Beach, Hilton Head, and Atkins Diets.

Mainstream magazines offered more strategies

per article than African-American magazines, and increased fitness and nutrition coverage as the obesity epidemic has increased.

in Oct. 2006 Mastin and Campo published a study that showed that food and nonalcoholic beverage ads outnumbered fitness and nutrition articles 16 to 1 in Ebony, Essence and Jet between 1984 and 2004. The 500 ads were primarily for foods high in calories but low in nutritional value.

In the new paper, Campo and Mastin note that both types of magazines tend to place responsibility for weight loss on the individual, rather than examining environmental and economic factors that make weight loss difficult. More than 83% of strategies focused on behavior changes, while less than 7% focused on environment. For example, magazines recommended eating well and staying active, but rarely addressed issues like availability and cost of healthy food, recreational opportunities in communities, or school- or work-based fitness programs.

"Both genres are highly guilty of over-reliance on individual strategies," Campo said. "We blame individuals too much for circumstances that are not entirely within their control. We know people living in unsafe neighborhoods are much less likely to exercise. And fast food is cheap compared to fresh fruit and vegetables. To tell a poor person that they made a bad choice because they couldn't afford salad fixings raises ethical concerns."

African-Americans represent at least 90% of the readership of Ebony, Essence and Jet, but 11% or less of Better Homes and Gardens, Good Housekeeping and Ladies' Home Journal. The magazines were selected for the study because of their large circulation and longevity over the 20-year period.

[www.sciencedaily.com/
releases/2008/01/080114142312.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/01/080114142312.htm)

Our Mission

The African Peoples Education & Defense Fund strives to develop and institutionalize programs to defend the human civil rights of the African community, and to address the grave disparities in education, health, healthcare, and economic development faced by the African community.

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