Health Trends and its Effects on our Society:
How Media is Impacting our Lives

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Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Brand Characters and How They Affect Children's Diets 4

The Obsession with Being Vegetarian/Vegan and Going Organic 5

Whole Foods and its Cultural Impact 7

The Paleo Diet 8

Juicing/ Juice Cleansing 9

Why Companies See a Business out of the Health Fads 11

How the Media and Diet Fads have Helped Us become more Health-Conscious 13

Health Fads are (not always) Necessary and Helpful 16

Incorporating the Benefits of Media into our Health 19

Conclusion 22

Works Referenced 24

Introduction

It struck the doctors odd when a 16-year-old that was previously healthy and had a normal growth and sexual maturation suddenly had "severe low bone mass at lumbar spine," along with an abnormally low level of calcium and vitamin D.[1] Though he had been diagnosed with asymptomatic hypocalcemia previously, his visit to the doctors this time was for an unrelated complaint: he suddenly felt very ill in a short period of time. When the doctors asked the teen what he changed in his lifestyle, he answered that he was on a strict buckwheat diet with no nutritional supplements, highlighting just one out of the countless fad diets that have emerged over the years.[2] A fad diet is "a subjective term used to label dietary regimens that restrict food choices and dietary patterns."[3] Commonly, these diets eliminate important food groups or suggest "unusual or unrealistic eating patterns" to "highlight one facet of eating behaviors or food choices."[4] The obsession with diet fads comes from the fact that these diets promise "to prevent or cure cancer, cleanse the body, enhance human performance or stimulate quick, effective weight loss"[5] when in reality, these anticipated results are often not even backed up with credible scientific research. In a society like the United States where there is a strong obsession with appearance and beauty, the "elusive promise of quick weight loss"[6] lures in individuals, desperate to lose weight quickly and easily.

Whether it be cold-pressed juice, Instagram models showing off their curves they were

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[1] Sevket Yigit, Priya Phulwani, Donna Steben, and Elizabeth Estrada, "Severe vitamin D deficiency and low bone mass in a teenager on a fad diet." *Journal of Clinical Densitometry* 14 (2011).
[2] Yigit.
[3] Connie Mobley, "Fad diets." *The Journal of the American Dental Association* 139 (2008): 48.
[4] Mobley, 49.
[5] Mobley, 48.
[6] Marjolijn Bijlefeld and Sharon K. Zoumbaris, *Encyclopedia of Diet Fads*, 1st ed, Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2003.

"born with," or even the growing popularity with expensive organic food at Whole Foods, health trends and fads have become a crucial part of our everyday lives, especially among the millennials who are heavy users of social media. Our society has always been obsessed with diets[7]; yet, the ease of access to information through technology has hyped the obsession even more. As much as these over-publicized diets and trends are great for businesses that can easily make lots of money by hopping on the wave, there are many negative consequences for our society that often times goes unnoticed. Spreading health advice by social media tends to distort the quality of the advice and health fads often exploit oversimplified nutritional claims to produce unhealthy diets. The advancements and improvements in media encourages the younger generation to take part in these fads due to the social pressure. However, further investigation reveals that health fads are doing worse, both for our bodies and our lives. By understanding the impact of media on our eating habits, we will be able to take the issue of health into our own hands.

The media and our health are actually very strongly correlated. Many, if not most of us, rely on media for up-to-date information, whether it be related to our health or even medical information.[8] Because of the heavy reliance on information that may or may not be scientifically backed up, people can get mixed messages about not only health, but also about the dangers of fad diets. The emergence of social media in these past few years has made the distinction between accurate facts and personal opinion even more difficult since the social media platform is mostly user-driven in terms of the content generated and the utility.[9]

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[7] Janet Polivy and C. Peter Herman, *Breaking the Diet Habit: The Natural Weight Alternative* (New York: Basic Books, 1983): 8.

[8] Raegan Johnson, "The Rise and Fall of Fad diets." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (2006).

[9] ND Bowman, DK Westerman, and CJ Claus. "How demanding is social media." *Computers in Human Behavior* 28 (2012): 2298.

Teenagers are often seen to be spending hours on interactive sites such as Facebook or Twitter, and even YouTube. These sites allow for users to "define themselves in a comfortable, positive fashion and communicate with friends."[10] However, what users don't realize is that "[m]edia images and messages offer powerful cues about how we need to look, what we need to eat, and what we must buy."[11] Having teens watch hours of YouTube videos and scrolling endlessly through their Instagram means that they are unconsciously influenced into thinking that a certain health fad may be good for them, even without any other additional research. This discourages individuals to "make [an] informed decision about which diets are best for them and how certain diets may affect their health and well-being"[12] because of the surplus of information that we are required to interact with everyday.

In this paper, I will start by discussing how media impacts us starting at a young age, and becomes inescapable because of how our society relies heavily on it. I will then go into detail about the cultural impact and obsession with organic foods, vegetarianism, and stores like Whole Foods, as well as the different fad diets that have gained widespread attention over the years. I will also be discussing the relationship between social media celebrities and millennials and the reasoning behind why different companies see a business out of these health fads. I will present both sides of the argument, for whether health trends or fads are important or not, and will conclude with my vision for how we should approach health in the future.

Brand Characters and How They Affect Children's Diets

The media, such as through television programs, starts impacting children and their diets at a very young age. Results from multiple studies conducted by Kraak and Story showed that

[10] Marjorie Hogan, "Body Image, Eating Disorders, and the Media." *Adolesc Med* 19 (2008): 5.
[11] Hogan, 6.
[12] Johnson, 4.

"cartoon media character branding can positively increase children's fruit or vegetable intake compared with no character branding."[13] The more time kids spend watching their favorite cartoon characters eating a certain food, the more they are inclined to like it, regardless of what the food is. As a young child with "limited ability to differentiate between facts and persuasive marketing communications," they easily fall into the traps of marketing techniques put on by different companies.[14] Media and entertainment companies influence children through, including but not limited to, "cable and satellite television, magazines, music, videogames, and Internet advertising."[15] Cartoon mascots and character promotions are used to maximize the sales of branded food products,[16] not necessarily because companies want to improve or worsen children's diets. This pattern of external media influencing our dietary patterns continues on even as we grow older; though there will be less emphasis on character branding as we gain maturity, companies will continue using different marketing strategies to promote their "healthy" products.

The Obsession with Being Vegetarian/Vegan and Going Organic

The number of young adults becoming vegetarian or vegan has been increasing significantly in the past decade because of its societal and environmental benefits[17] that are communicated through the media. Graphic campaigns launched by organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment for Animals (PETA) brings awareness to the poor treatment of animals raised for food, causing many teenagers to "give up meat to protest those conditions."[18] These vegetarians and vegans are usually socially conscious, philosophically opposing any product

[13] V.I. Kraak, and M. Story. "Influence of food companies' brand mascots and entertainment companies' cartoon media characters on children's diet and health." *Obesity Reviews* 16 (2015): 107.
[14] Kraak, 108
[15] Kraak, 108
[16] Kraak, 108
[17] Bijlefeld, 143.
[18] Bijlefeld, 144.

made from animals, such as wool and even cosmetics.[19] For these individuals, their food choice is no longer just a dietary pattern, but also a lifestyle. Unfortunately, it is also the case that that young adults commonly misuse vegetarian eating, making them twice as likely to diet frequently than their meat-eating peers, even though they may be eating more fruits and vegetables.[20] Furthermore, according to a report in the *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, these "meatless teens were also four times as likely to diet intensively and eight times as likely to abuse laxatives."[21]

Another trend that has been on the rise amongst environmentally conscious individuals is the act of eating organic foods. Advertised as richer in nutrients and environmentally beneficial because of how it practices pesticide-free agriculture, organic foods have been in high demand among paranoid shoppers this past decade.[22] Organic food items are generally priced at a premium in supermarkets, but consumers still purchase them because they think they are benefiting both their health and their environment, a message conveyed through "heavily subsidized marketing gimmick[s]."[23] In fact, "The *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* last year published a study of 162 scientific papers from the past 50 years on the health benefits of organically grown food and found no nutritional advantage over conventionally grown foods,"[24] which interestingly contrasts the public image of organic foods being healthier for our body than conventionally grown foods. While some do recognize that there may not be any health benefits by converting to an organic diet, they still do adhere to the practice because of the environmental

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[19] Bijlefeld, 143.
[20] Bijlefeld, 147.
[21] Bijlefeld, 147.
[22] "Is organic food worth the higher price?" Cleveland.com. January 18, 2017. http://www.cleveland.com/food/index.ssf/2017/01/is_organic_food_worth_the_high.html.
[23] "Is organic food worth the higher price?"
[24] Robert Paarlberg, "ATTENTION WHOLE FOODS SHOPPERS." *Foreign Policy*, no. 179 (2010): 84.

benefits and social status that can be achieved through being environmentally aware. In other words, our society is no longer choosing certain foods because of their nutritional benefits, but are doing more so for their cultural and societal impacts.

Whole Foods and its Cultural Impact

The success of Whole Food "the world's largest 'natural' foods empire"[25] may largely be due to how there is an emphasis on going healthy and environmentally conscious. Even though most of the products sold at Whole Foods are not on the cheaper-side of the scale, there still seems to be a large and loyal customer base because of their brand and culture. The media has been raising awareness to the fair-trade movement these past few decades, which in a sense is them piggy-back riding on "the anti-corporate message of some global justice activism."[26] By having customers engage in the movement that they may not know much about, through encouraging the purchase of fair-trade "sugar, bananas, coffee, [and] chocolate,"[27] customers feel like they are helping their own society. Josée Johnston, a sociology professor at the University of Toronto, acknowledges that Whole Foods is very skilled at encouraging their customers to "change the world by changing what I eat."[28] However, in reality, we do not know how much of an impact we are actually making on our environment and on our society. Perhaps people are buying into the image associating with being advocates for fair-trade and societal issues, as well as living a healthy lifestyle, when they actually may not know what and how they are really supporting an organization.Whereas in the past there was more of a heavy emphasis on the direct nutritional benefits that can be gained through a certain diet, our current dietary

[25]Josée Johnston, "The Citizen-Consumer Hybrid: Ideological Tensions and the Case of Whole Foods Market." *Theory and Society* 37, no. 3 (2008): 239.
[26]Johnston, 239.
[27] Johnston, 239.
[28] Johnston, 230.

lifestyles seems to connect to the social and environmental impacts that can be achieved and is highlighted by the media. Alongside teenagers practicing extreme fad diets to lose weight are individuals that are purchasing overpriced products in hopes of attaining the social status that is associated with being environmentally conscious.

The Paleo Diet

These past few years, everyone around the globe have been raving about "going Paleo"; different websites and social media have been encouraging society to practice a Paleo diet and/or follow a Paleolithic lifestyle as a "[call] to arms for health-conscious individuals seeking information about the latest health and fitness trends."[29] Unlike many other fads, the Paleo diet has roots in anthropological science and was "inspired and informed by the writings of biological anthropologists and anthropologically trained scientists."[30] The Paleo diet, also known as the Stone Age diet, emphasizes animal protein and less carbohydrates, which is the complete opposite of what the modern-day meal looks like. This fad closely resembles the diet of the people during the Stone Age because it is presumed that these carnivorous meals, high in protein and fat, are what our bodies digest the most easily and naturally.[31] Though the diet has been around for a while, it had only started trending upwards since 2014, especially among the millennials, "as an extension of the gluten-free movement"[32] and has gained even more attention as a result of it being "touted by movie stars, reality TV personalities, and professional athletes, including LeBron James and the entire Miami Dolphins NFL team."[33] In fact, "[the] Paleo diet

[29]Melanie L Chang, and April Nowell. "How to make stone soup: Is the "Paleo diet" a missed opportunity for anthropologists?" *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews* 25 (2016): 228.
[30] Chang, 228.
[31] Walter L. Voegtlin, *The Stone Age Diet*. 1st ed. New York: Vantage Press (1975): 2-7.
[32] Alan Richman, "Fad diet or healthy trend?" *Progressive Grocer* (2016):130.
[33] Chang, 228.

was also the most Googled diet in both 2013 and 2014," and was the second most popular weight-loss diet, only to be surpassed by the Weight Watchers diet.[34] Although there has been many successful weight-loss stories achieved through the Paleo diet, such as how a television personality lost 61 pounds in 6 months by practicing a meat, fish, and egg centered diet,[35] the issue with going Paleo is of how it offers a distorted and exaggerated view of history.[36] The concentrated and high intake of animal products "creates an excess of branched-chain amino acids, which [can] further inhibit insulin function," can worsen diabetes control, and can even increase blood pressure.[37] Continuing on, according to a study conducted by the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition, it was found that every 5 percent of calories consumed from animal protein increased the risk of diabetes by 30 percent.[38] Unfortunately, Paleo diet devotees rigorously follow the diet and lifestyle as if it is a religion[39] without even knowing some of the associated side effects because the diet is exaggerated by wellness bloggers and celebrity chefs.[40]

Juicing/ Juice Cleansing

The juice cleanse diet initially gained attention because of how simple it seemed to be and because of the immediate results that it promised. The concept is rather straightforward: dieters are only allowed to consumer water or juice during the designated amount of time,

[34] Chang, 228.
[35] Voegtlin, 9.
[36] Voegtlin, 72.
[37] Voegtlin, 70.
[38] Voegtlin, 70.
[39] Chang, 229.
[40] Christopher E. Pitt, "Cutting through the Paleo hype: The evidence for the Palaeolithic diet." *Australian family physician* 45, no. 1 (2016): 35.

usually ten days, to "rid the body of so-called toxins"[41]; it was an innovative way to practice fasting. Users can make their own juices themselves, but many companies also specialize in the selling of prepackaged juices, arguing that it is more "convenient and comforting"[42] for the user.

However, recently, this fad has been gaining attention because of the negative side effects that have resulted from being on it. Medical practitioners have warned consumers to not practice this type of diet for more than a day or two because of the nutritional deficiencies that are associated with diets such as this one.[43] Similar to how the Beverly Hills Diet was highly controversial back in the 1980s because of how the fruit-based diet caused nutrient deficiency,[44] the juicing cleanse can also result in many serious health consequences. Even though individuals may seem like they are meeting their daily calorie intake through juicing, all those calories come from sugar and only a very small portion will "provide any protein or dietary fat," causing a protein deficiency that can lead to a loss in lean muscle mass rather than a loss in fat.[45] The heavy intake of fruits can also cause diarrhea and gas,[46] and even "fatigue, irritability, headaches, pains, nausea, vomiting, [and] hot bowel movements,"[47] which are all symptoms that are viewed in a positive light among the followers.

If there is so much negativity around the diet, then why did people start practicing it to begin with? According to some, juicing is "a convenient and tasty way to boost their intake of fruits and vegetables, touting cold-pressed juicing methods as superior for extracting the health-

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[41] Judith Newman, "The Juice Cleanse: A Strange and Green Journey." *The New York Times* 27 (2010).
[42] Newman.
[43] Richman, 133.
[44] Bijlefeld, 16.
[45] Bijlefeld, 16.
[46] Bijlefeld, 17.
[47] Newman.

boosting vitamins, minerals, enzymes and micronutrients in fresh produce."[48] Our generation and society is very well-known to be lacking in many of the essential nutrients, such as certain vitamins. Therefore, juicing seemed like an alternative to cooking and preparing fresh fruit and vegetables every single day. This diet was also heavily endorsed and advertised through social media; Instagram models and celebrities promoted these trendy "cleanse diets," where they were "replacing meals with fresh juices for weight loss or detox purposes, catching the eyes of teenagers that are desperate to lose weight to meet society's definition of beauty.

Why Companies See a Business out of the Health Fads

Though the juicing fad had multiple negative side effects associated with it, different companies were making use of the opportunity to make extra money by jumping on the bandwagon. According to an article published by Lisa Jennings about the juicing business, over the past few years, many independent juice bars have been opening across the country, "putting a contemporary spin on a trend once relegated to the back of health-food stores."[49] In fact, even the popular coffee chain Starbucks decided to purchase the premium-juice company Evolution Fresh in 2011 so that they could add bottled juices to their product line.[50] In just the United States alone, more money is being spent on beauty products and weight-control services than on social services and education.[51] The health-and-wellness category is a $50 billion market,[52] which explains why many companies are starting to incorporate "health" into their products and services. Therefore, these companies are in this market for the money and not necessarily to help

[48] Lisa Jennings, "Juicing up business: Beverage brands look to tap into wellness movement with fresh-squeezed options." *Nation's Restaurant News* 46 (2012): 2.
[49] Jennings, 1.
[50] Jennings, 1.
[51] Kandi M. Stinson, *Women and Dieting Culture: Inside a Commercial Weight Loss Group*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (2001): 3-4.
[52] Stinson, 1.

their customers have a "better" life. For example, the popular diet company Weight Watchers had an ad where it showed "a piece of pie with the caption: 'Feel free to act on impulse.' Why would Weight Watchers encourage indulgence in Boston cream pie? It is '[b]ecause it is in their best business interest to fatten people up and then want them to diet or fail to lose weight so that their revenues will continue to grow."[53] Health fad diets "have some value, but this value is principally a matter of inflated earnings by diet authors and their publishers. Your (repeated) failure to lose is their gain."[54]

Social Media Celebrities and their Relationship with Health Fads

Recent reports have found that teens spend approximately nine hours a day using media, such as but not limited to social media and television, which is more hours than the amount of time they normally spend sleeping.[55] Thus, it should be no surprise that these millennials put so much emphasis on the information that they gain from the internet. Our media has been known to negatively influence body image; teenagers use social media as a way to portray their "chosen image,"[56] and not their actual selves. This "could potentially influence the content they post relating to their health behaviors (e.g., I want people to think I exercise and eat healthy so I 'like' exercise and nutrition pages on Facebook)."[57] However, the media tends to dramatise and/or even simplify health stories,[58] which can spread false assumptions and information through the

[53] Hogan, 10.
[54] Polivy, 85-86.
[55] Kelly Wallace, "Teens spend 9 hours a day using media, report says." CNN. November 03, 2015. Accessed April 02, 2017. http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/03/health/teens-tweens-media-screen-use-report/.
[56] Hogan, 5.
[57] JM Vaterlaus, EV Patten, C. Roche, and JA Young. "Getting healthy: The perceived influence of social media on young adult health behaviors." *Computers in Human Behavior* 45 (2015): 153.
[58] B. Gough, "'Real men don't diet': An analysis of contemporary newspaper representations of men, food and health." *Social Science & Medicine* 64 (2007): 327.

"pseudo professionals"[59] and celebrities that may have a huge presence online.

With the increase in usage of sites such as Instagram and YouTube, where everyday people like us are gaining popularity for their content, viewers feel more connected to these celebrities because they think that these vloggers or Instagram models are more real and relatable since they were once like them. Therefore, when these social media celebrities endorse these diet fads with a photo of their toned bodies, their followers instantly think that they will be able to achieve that too by using those products. Health icons are taking advantage of the realm of social media and the potential to reach a wide audience to "promote their health and fitness courses and guides, especially to young women."[60] Results from an online survey of over 1000 individuals, ages 15-29 and 72.23% of them being female, showed that "just under 40% of participants reported consuming at least 1 of the 3 types of health and fitness- related social media content: 308 (30.77%) 'fitspiration' pages, 145 (14.49%) detox pages, and 235 (23.48%) diet/fitness plan pages (much like that of Ashy Bines, Emily Skye and Kayla Itsines)."[61] These statistics are only just a glimpse into how much of an impact social media is having on young adults trying to become healthy.

How the Media and Diet Fads have Helped Us become more Health-Conscious

Despite some of its negative connotations, the media has actually helped our society become more health-conscious in some ways or another. The increased emphasis on social media is "credited with providing apps that increased exercise accountability, informational page that provided exercise and nutrition advice, and inspirational quotes that were perceived to motivate

[59] Vaterlaus, 153.
[60] Jasmine Reimers. "The Facebook Fitness Revolution." *Wordpress*. May 08, 2016. https://jasminereimers.wordpress.com/2016/05/08/the-facebook-fitness-revolution/
[61] Reimers.

people to exercise."[62] Instagram posts such as "#transformationtuesday" where users post photos from before and after their weight-loss, serves to be an incentive and motivation to get healthy and fit for many.[63] In fact, for the diet community, Instagram is a very popular app to use, particularly because of the nature of the app. Not only are users able to "expand one's network with other like-minded individuals who are also posting about the same topic" through the use of hashtags, the anonymity that exists on the platform allows for users to "post pictures of their changing body, but without their real name being tied to their account."[64] These pictures posted on Instagram may be "almost-naked pictures of themselves" to showcase their bodies before and after a workout, "a behavior that would normally be considered inappropriate in the majority of other social networks"[65] but may be crucial for some to visually see their progress.

When used wisely, "social media could be a tool to learn about health behaviors and seek support."[66] Studies have shown that individuals with social support "lose more weight than those who attempt a program alone."[67] Users are encouraged to not only use their social media accounts to inform their followers and supporters about what they eat through posts, recipes, and pictures,[68] it also discourages the act of "cheating" during their diet. In the past, people were able to just "cheat" when they were not hanging out with their friends[69] because they felt like no one was watching them indulge in a chocolate brownie. However, the presence of a support group on social media means that they are constantly being surrounded in a community full of hundreds of

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[62] Vaterlaus, 156.
[63] Vaterlaus, 154.
[64] Hillary Stark, Abdulrahman Habib, and Duha al Smadi. "Network Engagement Behaviors of Three Online Diet and Exercise Programs." *Proceedings from the Document Academy* 3, no. 2 (2016): 02.
[65] Stark, 3.
[66] Vaterlaus, 153.
[67] Stark, 1.
[68] Vaterlaus, 153.
[69] Polivy, 17.

people, following the user's health journey online and keeping them in check to make sure their health goals are being met.

The rise in social media allowed for an increase in the number of health programs being offered online as well. For example, Kayla Itsines' "Bikini Body Guide" program is a paid, monthly-subscription-based app program that is a "fitness-driven 12-week exercise guide" marketed towards young women.[70] There is flexibility within the program, allowing for users to choose different types of meal plans and workout guides to meet their specific needs and goals.[71]The founder of the program, Kayla Itsines, often reposts and praises the women that have successfully went through her program by posting about them on her social media accounts. Acts like this help form a sense of community and belonging because participants share similar goals and aspirations; the people come together "in an environment of acceptance and support,"[72] which is especially important for some of these women that may not have a supportive environment at home. Users of social media for health benefits are able to create and experiment with a "new me"[73] in an external space that does not involve physical communications and interactions. The self-regulation of their diet and exercise may be "too daunting an effort to complete on their own," but the step-to-step guidelines offered in different apps and the supportive community online[74] allows for these individuals to become more health conscious.

The social media platform of Twitter is also seen as impactful to the health community. In a research conducted by Turner-McGrievy and Tate, it was revealed that "greater engagement

[70] Stark, 06.
[71] Reimers.
[72] Stinson, 18.
[73] Stark, 04.
[74] Stark, 01.

through Twitter was associated with greater weight loss."[75] Though Twitter users who use the platform for online weight loss may follow different accounts to gain health-related information in a more convenient way, these users mainly used the app for their own informational support.[76] "Status updates were seen as one's efforts, such as restraining oneself from indulging in a donut in the office breakroom or having just completed a gym workout, and were posted to garnish emotional support in one's activities"[77] The pressure that we feel from always being watched on social media forces us to reach our health-related goals faster.

The improvements in technology itself has also allowed for us to stay healthier. Wearable devices, such as the Fitbit, allows for individuals to self monitor their health behaviors, including their physical activity, in an engaging manner.[78] Fitbit users can compete against their friends or even against their past records, through the app.[79] This encourages individuals to stay in shape by treating fitness as if it is a video game. The tracking feature also allows for users to visually monitor their progress without external work. Wearing a device like Fitbit publicly states that the individual is health-conscious, an identity that is positively viewed in today's society.

Health Fads are (not always) Necessary and Helpful

While the media and technology may be helping us become more health-conscious and fitness-driven, health fads are not always necessary nor helpful as they may be portrayed to be. For one, the information presented on social media, regarding health can often be very inaccurate because anyone can post anything they want. Social media users may not do an in-depth research

[75] Stark, 03.
[76] Stark, 03.
[77] Stark, 03.
[78] Julie B. Wang, Lisa A. Cadmus-Bertram, Loki Natarajan, Martha M. White, Hala Madanat, Jeanne F. Nichols, Guadalupe X. Ayala, and John P. Pierce. "Wearable sensor/device (Fitbit One) and SMS text-messaging prompts to increase physical activity in overweight and obese adults: a randomized controlled trial." *Telemedicine and e-Health* 21, no. 10 (2015): 782-792.
[79] "Fitbit Adventures." Fitbit. Accessed May 03, 2017. https://www.fitbit.com/challenges/adventures.

of the newest health fad that they saw on Snapchat before actually trying it out themselves. Dieters, being so desperate to lose their weight fast, will spring upon any opportunity that will help them achieve this goal. However, because of their desperation, they often do not even think about the credibility of their sources and the information, and thus rely heavily on them.[80] The language that is being used to highlight these fads, such as the term "clean-eating," makes it seem as if any other form of eating is "dirty or impure and thus bad," which can consequently lead to self-shaming for many individuals.[81]

Another, and perhaps more crucial fact to note, is that the media often times does not mention or even highlight the negative side effects that can result from these fad diets. For example, high-protein diets can increase body water excretion and thus leading to xerostomia, and the one or two meals a day diet can interfere with the salivary flow unless other stimulants are included with the diet.[82] In fact, the diets that "recommend the intake of caffeine-rich calorie-free drinks or herbal supplements might cause dehydration of oral tissues and dental erosion,"[83] which can be permanent damage to our bodies. The cons are often hidden and the pros are glorified for health fads,[84] but they are not brought to the public attention until the diet goes completely wrong.

Diets in general, whether it be a diet fad or an actual weight loss program, are known to have high failure rates and for the effects to be short-lived.[85] Statistics revealed that 95 percent of all dieters who have done a fad diet will regain their lost weight within one to five years.

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[80] Polivy, 167.
[81] Ruby Tandoh, "The Unhealthy Truth Behind 'Wellness' and 'Clean Eating'" *Vice*. May 16, 2016. Accessed March 03, 2017. https://www.vice.com/en_se/article/ruby-tandoh-eat-clean-wellness.
[82] Mobley, 49.
[83] Mobley, 49.
[84] Polivy, 8.
[85] Stinson, 4.

Unfortunately, 35 percent of the fad dieters will also transition into pathological dieting or even a full-blown eating disorder due to the extreme nature of these diets.[86] Fad dieting especially "demands that hunger be to some extent ignored. Eventually, the dieter may lose altogether the ability to eat naturally, on the basis of hunger and satiety cues. The end result, paradoxically, may be periodic bouts of overeating or even binge eating, which may drive the dieter's weight above what it might have been had he or she not begun to diet in the first place."[87]

Though there are multiple benefits of joining a health-related social community to meet personal goals, one of the main issues with getting engaged in a group as such is that some people participate in them, not for the health benefits, but because they want to believe that "a certain way of eating is the best way because it gives them a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging."[88] These individuals become delusioned, "partly self-imposed, partly imposed by the culture - in which it often seems (correctly) that the harder one fights, the further one is from victory,"[89] victory in this situation meaning self-acceptance.

In our society, there is a much more narrow ideal of beauty and attractiveness for women. Many women believe that they have to be a certain body shape and weight due to the massive stigma that others put on overweight women.[90] These ideals and images are further supported through our media, where we often encounter skinny, young girls posing in a bikini suit on the beach. The comments that users see and receive on social media also heightens this concept as well. These external sources cause women to not only overestimate their own weight, but also encourages an unhealthy cycle of continuous dieting because they start believing that slimness

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[86] Bijlefeld, viii.
[87] Polivy, 21.
[88] Matt Fitzgerald, *Diet Cults: The Surprising Fallacy at the Core of Nutrition Fads and a Guide to Healthy Eating for the Rest of Us*, New York: Pegasus Books, 2015.
[89] Polivy, 8.
[90] Stinson, 38.

will result in happiness.[91] Until our media stops emphasizing this body image and encouraging girls to lose weight through even extreme actions like diet fads, there is only so much that our society can do to prevent individuals from participating in trends that may have severe and serious consequences to our bodies.

Incorporating the Benefits of Media into our Health

Though the media can be a poor source of information and advocates for a flawed view of beauty that many women may take to heart, it can be useful and may help us become healthier, when used wisely. As long as we are fully aware of the consequences and potentially dangerous side effects associated with some of these fads, it may be fun, once in awhile, to try out these different trends that our favorite celebrities are endorsing.

Our society has a very strong food-centered culture: a "birthday party without cake and ice cream, or other appropriate culinary delights...depending on the age of the celebrants, would be second-rate affair."[92] We use the phrase "Let's go grab food" as a way to catch up with friends and grab drinks with coworkers to get to know them better. By partaking in these extreme health fads, it cuts out an essential part of our culture that is so much more than just submersing ourselves in food. To me, the interactions that occur and the relationships created in these settings carry so much more significance than the amount of likes that I can get from a photo I post on Instagram.

Being a marketing major and a health-conscious individual myself, I have also tried out a fair share of different diet fads just for fun, including but not limited to some that I have

[91] Stinson, 38.
[92] Polivy, 208.

mentioned in this paper. Diet fads are not meant to be practiced long-term,[93] but because these "'miracle' diets are supposedly capable of riding one of 10 or 20 pounds in a week,"[94] users often times go overboard with the diet. I believe that people are unable to escape out of the vicious cycle of fad diets because of the flawed and false information that is circulated in our media. One source may say that the diet will decrease the chances of developing certain cancers,[95] while another source may argue that the diet causes a nutrition deficiency.[96] Because our lives do center around social media and technology, it is difficult for us to escape from being bombarded with an overflow of information, some being false and some being true.

The benefits that are associated with media and technology in making our society more health-conscious should certainly not go unnoticed; social media platforms allow for more users to become involved in different fitness programs with just a single touch. The supportive health-community online increases the chances of us meeting our health-related goals, whether that be losing weight or simply just trying to become more active. However, the more our society puts emphasis on the image that we portray on social media, the more we start lying to ourselves as well. What may have started as a personal decision to become vegan may eventually become something more extreme, such as having to be aware of what pages you've shared and photos you post in fear of being attacked by others for not being loyal to the cause.

The obsession with diet fads stems from it being a quick and easy weight-loss scheme.[97] After all, if you were handed a bottle of juice and was told that you are guaranteed to lose weight in just a few days through only drinking that juice, you'd probably take it as well. The quick,

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[93] Polivy, 86.
[94] Polivy, 79.
[95] Bijlefeld, 143.
[96] Bijlefeld, 17.
[97] Bijlefeld, viii.

simple, and healthy nature of fads as well as the feeling of being up-to-date with the current trends and culture is what makes them so attractive to many. However, a fad is a fad, and just like with other diet programs, the results usually last short-term and are meant to be practiced short-term.

Instead of following a health fad and expecting short-term results, I advocate for a well-rounded health style, that can be attained through the correct use of media. Whether we are living in the late 1800s when the concept of diets first emerged,[98] or in a society like today where we are surrounded by technology and countless diet options, the ultimate best way to stay healthy and to lose weight will always be to "eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain food, fewer junk and fast foods, and, most important, exercise."[99] Though fads and diets will be easier than exercising and making sure that we are meeting all of the recommended nutritional criteria, how good really is it if we are torturing ourselves only to see short-term results.

I believe that weight loss should not be the only and ultimate goal, which is why I also strongly disagree with how the media portrays diets and health. If you really wanted to lose weight, you "can lose weight by smoking cigarettes or snorting cocaine."[100] In fact, with the extreme nature of health fads and with how media hypes them, it wouldn't be a surprise if smoking cigarettes and snorting cocaine become the next diet fad in our society. Individuals should want to become healthier, which may be to lose weight for some, to be able to live a better quality life. If we continue to "settle for second-class nutritional advice," like the advice we can get from social media and health endorsing celebrities, we encounter the risk of

[98] Bijlefeld, x.
[99] Bijlefeld, xiv.
[100] Fuhrman, 75.

"suffering from medical problems that could have been avoided."[101] I believe that instead of diets being food-centered, they should be lifestyle centered. There is certainly potential in how our society is choosing foods because of the desire to be societally and environmentally conscious, such as becoming vegan or shopping at Whole Foods, but at times even that goes off in the wrong direction because of the social status that seems to be obtained through those practices.

The media should be used to promote a healthy and active lifestyle, not just emphasizing aesthetics and beauty. The more we raise awareness to a well-rounded dietary practice, the more people will be encouraged to practice it. Media campaigns should be centered not just on the end result of how much weight an individual loses, it should focus on the journey that they took to get there. A fad diet that worked for one person may not work for another, but that shouldn't mean that they didn't try hard enough or is less worthy because they aren't as skinny. At the end of the day, your own personal happiness can only be obtained through your own actions, and if our society puts less focus on the appearance of each other, then perhaps the obsession with these flawed diets may also calm down as well.

Conclusion

As a society, we need to shift the topic of health fads from being a media issue to a health issue because of the effects, some dangerous, that they can have to our bodies, both physically and emotionally. Instead of completely saying yes or saying no to all food fads or social media influences, we need to raise awareness to the fact that some of these health fads are caused by business trying to make money, and not necessarily because our society wants us to be healthier. As shown through programs such as Kayla Itsines' BBG app, social media can be a positive influence in the health community by being a support system for individuals who are

[101] Fuhrman, 75.

trying to be healthy or achieve a certain personal goal. Not everything needs to be about body image and expensive food trends, even though that is what the media seems to currently emphasize.

Our perceptions on health is severely impacted by these corrupt health fads. These trends can influence negative body image that can lead to eating disorders in especially young teenagers, magnifying the issue that “good” foods will be premium-priced and thus negatively skewing our ideas on “healthy living.” Being healthy doesn’t always have to mean looking attractive and should not necessarily be measured by how much weight you lose. By encouraging a shift in perception of how we view health and by advocating for a more well-rounded healthy lifestyle, we will be able to also change the nature of health trends and fads. The media cannot function without any viewers and users; if we as a society change, then we can change how the media depicts health as well.

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