



# (UN)healthy bodies – gendered discourses about health and physical activity in Denmark–

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# Introduction

- Health is currently one of the most debated issues in Denmark
- Interrelations between health/fitness and weight/obesity as well as nutrition and physical activities are in the focus
- Policies aim at the well being of the individuals but also at the prosperity of the Danish society



# Aims of the research

- To re- and de-construct the current policies and discourses surrounding health and physical activities with a focus on the state, the sport federations and the market.
- To identify the health/PA messages of selected media
- To explore the appropriation of these discourses by the individuals who neglect, adapt, transform, resist the “official” discourses and develop their own agenda

# Aims of this paper

- In this paper, I present the discourses in the journal I Form, which focuses on health, weight, food and PA



Flat belly now

# Theoretical considerations

- Health as moral imperative
- Healthism has negative effects
- Gender, age, ethnicity and health are processes embedded in social institutions, intertwined with everyday life and ingredients of images and identities.
- They follow scripts of the social and the gender order.
- Gender, age, ethnicity and health are anchored in the body

# Effects – activity rates

- Activity rate of the Danish population: around 60 % are moderately active (at least one time a week)
- Only 30% of both genders were active at least 3 times a week
- Physical activity is beneficial– but high drop out rates from the health and PA courses



# Public discourses and "I form"

- Health, physical activity and obesity became increasingly one of the favorite topics on all types of mass media
- Obesity is looked upon as an enemy which together with the lack of physical activity and the wrong eating habits threatens the Danish society



# I Form

- Without mentioning – it is orientated at women and women’s lives (200, 000 female and 100, 000 male readers)
- Promises to “coach” the readers to slimness, fitness and health- in the WHO sense that means including wellness and well being. Fitness is in the first line – body shape and appearance.
- PA is advertised as the most effective means to reach these aims



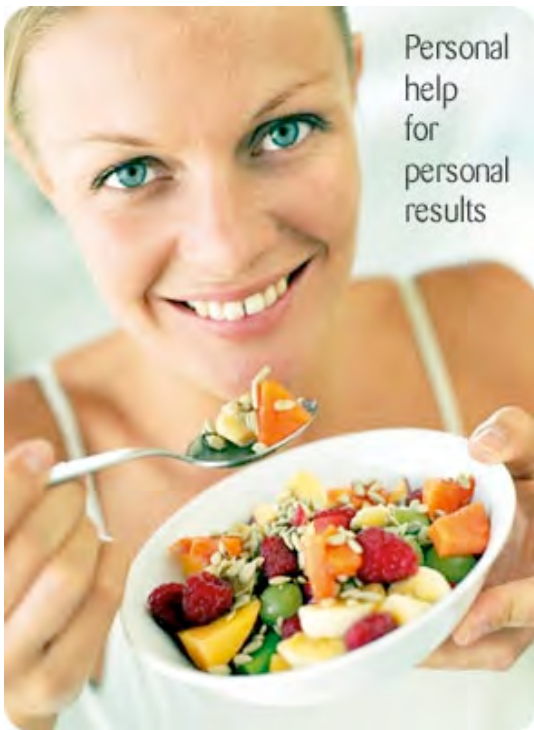
# Aims

- **The aims** of the journal and also its promises are to provide the readers with slimness, fitness and health.
- I form as a personal coach
- PA is advertised as the most effective means in the fight against fat, all sorts of diseases and lack of fitness.



# The body

- Body ideals
- BMI - the most important issue
- Norms and ideals
- Life styles and models

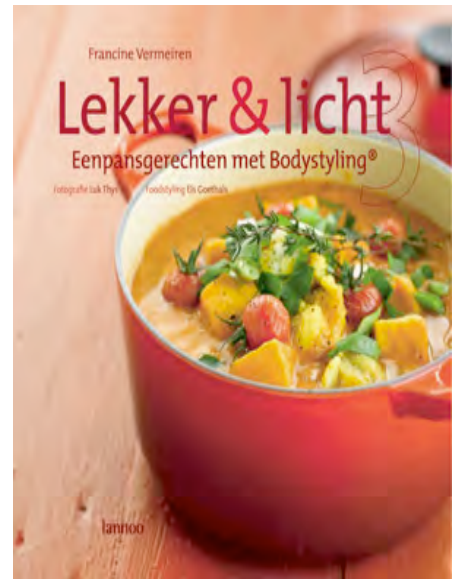




# Food

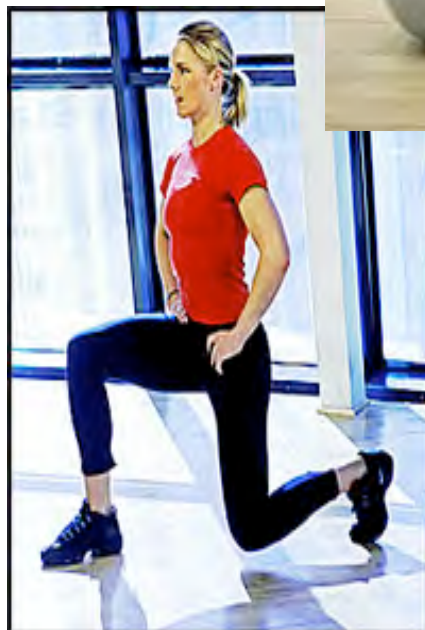


- Information
- Good food
- Bad food
- Guidelines
- Recipes
- Dietary supplements
- Diets



# Physical activities

- Endurance
- Strength/shaping the body
- Information, programs, guidelines
- Slimness and appearance
- Performance plays only a secondary role



# Strategies

- Scientification
  - hailing/addressing,
  - personalization,
  - appeal to emotions,
  - use of collective symbols and metaphors,
  - normalization.
- 
- Striving for fitness, slimness, health is a war
  - Fat is the enemy
  - Physical activity one of the weapons
  - Close interrelations between health and slimness and physical activity (they are almost identical)

# Resistance

- Campaigns are not very successful
- There is a relatively high percentage of the population which cannot be reached
- No change of the life styles
- Information is not enough to change the life style
- Too much information, too high demands leads to "drop outs"
- Individuals are blamed
- Healthism



# Thank you very much for your attention



# The Welfare State

- Health and physical activities as mission of the welfare state
- Free health care
- Equality myth
- Equality and economy



# Health promoting strategies and programs

Physical activity is a central focus

Support of sport clubs and projects

- E.g. cycle paths, obese children or “physical activity on recipe”
- In 2002, Healthy throughout Life – a campaign with many actors
- In 2006, transfer of tasks of prevention to the reorganized regional authorities (communities)

# Sport federations

- Clubs are the main sport providers, they form the lowest level of a sport system which is based on democracy, autonomy and voluntary work and leadership.
- Two competing umbrella organisations
- Legitimization via health programmes



