

PERCEPTION OF FEMALE BODY FROM THE END OF 19th CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Pregledni članak

Review article

UDK: 611/612-

055.2"18/19"

Primljeno: 11. ožujka 2021.

Summary

In this work, the author analyses the perception of female body from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the Second World War. The notion of "beauty" of a female body is analysed within the scope of socio-economic and social changes that affected woman's position in society and in family. The author analyses articles from women's magazines such as Ženski list and Hrvatica that promote the "new" look for women, i.e. slender figure. She analyses the possible connection between women's physical appearance and their role in the society and the consequences that ensued.

Keywords: *modern woman; slender figure; beauty; Ženski list; Hrvatica.*

Introduction

Throughout history, female body has often been an object of adoration and admiration, but at the same time, the source of passion, shame and anxiety. Due to this ambivalence, there were varying attitudes towards female body, which were often poured into written social rules. Their content was often reduced to prohibitions, judgments, critiques, disapproval, even scorn. One inevitable constant that has always been associated with the notion of female body is "beauty", socially determined, but also accepted by

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women as a norm to define their role or power in their surroundings. That is why women often adapted their bodies to the given parameters. Regardless of today's possibilities of education, gaining skills and knowledge that promise women independent life, the identification of women with their bodily assets is still present. Today's woman is emancipated, however, her recognizable role is more difficult to define. Traditional women's roles such as the role of a mother and the reproductive role, as well as the role of a housewife and an educator, are combined with other societal roles, and the choice is her own to make. These new demands have shaken woman's confidence. She has been given various roles, but her primary, biological identification is still connected with the body that must be "pretty" according to socially accepted standards. When the body is "pretty", all other roles are tackled more easily, from motherhood to being a businesswoman. Keeping the body "pretty" has throughout time become the imperative, the woman got her confidence through "attention" or "admiration". In order to remain pretty, she has turned towards using everything that helps, from cosmetics to house appliances. A woman's opinion has become important, just like her appearance that has been shaped by commercial and societal notions of "pretty". From the beginning of 20th century to this day, with "pretty" female body the adjective "slender" has become inevitable. Each deflection from this, causes a woman to feel anxiety even fear.¹

1. New women roles – 19th/20th centuries

1.1. Fashion, sport and self-awareness in women

The second half of 19th century was marked by many changes in people's everyday lives that were results of revolutionary inventions. Production became mass-production, goods and services exchange became more convenient and faster. Communication was easier thus making information exchange faster.²

¹ Cfr. Dunja Bonačić, „*Ljepota i funkcionalnost ženskog tijela od Hipatije do Hannah Arendt*“, final thesis, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Osijek, 2016, pp. 18-20; Naomi Wolf, *Mit o ljepoti: Kako se prikazi ljepote koriste protiv žena*, Jesenski and Turk, Zagreb, 2008, pp. 29, 33, 49.

² Production became mass-production due to work on assembly lines. The development of new technologies enabled faster information exchange, and their application caused changes in usual patterns of behaviour. Due to the invention of generator, alternating current, electric light bulb, telephone

The role of a women also changed in these circumstances, especially for women who lived in cities. “The new women” are starting to live according to the rules of the “modern” society. In order to keep up with new technologies and progress, they are starting to get education, to travel and find employment. Education enabled them to become economically independent, self-confident and more creative. As their social status changed, so did their fashion style. Clothes and fashion style are gaining wider importance, the exterior became important because it reflected woman’s life attitudes.³ After the invention of sewing machine in 1864, fashion and new fashion postulates spread rapidly. Due to faster production, clothes became more available to everyone so mass purchase of textiles began. Fashion magazines that gave advice to women on what suits them best, what to wear in which occasion and how to be well-dressed in general, started appearing very quickly.⁴

Croatian readers could also get acquainted with new fashion trends through the magazine “Parizka moda”, which was first published in 1895 in Zagreb, and in 1888 “Dom i svijet” started being published and it had fashion clothes drawings. Thus, women in Croatian cities were also informed about all events related to the fashion world, and stores offered a wide range of fashionable clothes at popular prices for most of their customers.⁵

Fashion was constantly advertised in magazines, it put the accent on female body, so in time, fashion style became a constituent part of ideal beauty and femininity. Women started building their visual identity based on women’s magazines content. Women were expected to be slim and to keep their bodies in “perfect” shape. Sports such as golf, cycling or riding were recommended in order to keep this shape. Therefore, shorter skirts are worn, shirt cut is simpler. Doing sports affected female body, but women also tried to accommodate new fashion and social processes. Apart from visual identity, magazines also emphasized the new female personality that was desirable with their new

and fax machine, people communicated faster and more easily. The traffic was quickened by usage of oil. People’s health also improved extending life expectancy thanks to medical discoveries. Discoveries: Robert Koch, Louis Pasteur, Pierre and Marie Curie (author’s comment).

³ Cfr. Margareta Škulac, “Društvene promjene i njihov odraz na dizajn ženske odjeće od XIX. stoljeća do početka Drugog svjetskog rata”, *Povijest u nastavi*, 14 (2016) 27/1, p. 73.

⁴ Cfr. Aleksandra Muraj, “Svakodnevni život u 19. stoljeću”, Vlasta Švooger – Jasna Turkalj (ed.), *Temelji moderne Hrvatske: Hrvatske zemlje u “dugom” 19. stoljeću*, vol. 6, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 2016, p. 339.

⁵ Cfr. *ibid.*

role in society. They were supposed to spread free spirit and be charming, determined and resourceful.⁶

It can be concluded that, at the turn of the century, women became economically more independent, but also susceptible to marketing influences of magazines on their behaviour, actions and finally, their overall appearance. This is the beginning of a trend that tied a woman to her body, and has persisted to this day. The imperative of “the beauty of body” resulted in further changes and transformation of female body and her roles in society.

1.2. Slenderness and vigour – the ideal of the 1920s

During the First World War, women entered the world of work because of workforce shortage. They participated more actively in various professional occupations, and they are often given credit for the economic survival during and after the war. New social norms were reflected in their looks as well. Female body and the whole physique lost its “feminine” appearance which was popular until then emphasizing female curves and assets. Female body started to “reveal” itself, clothes became more scarce and women became more visible not only on the work market but in competitive sports as well. The new ideal of a modern woman was distinctly slender figure, athletic, almost boyish shape with narrow hips and small breasts. Clothes had to emphasize this figure, so corsets were out, the waist was lowered to hips, skirts were knee-length, and hair was cut straight. Pants, which had been until recently only man’s attire, became a part of female attire. Fashion magazines had a growing influence on female population because they were filled with numerous advice on how to diet to have slender, youthful figure that was fashionable. Restrictive diets were promoted as a part of female health.⁷

Demands for equality and participation in every part of social life, influenced further transformation of a woman’s appearance. A beautiful woman was the same as a slender woman, and slender figure required a certain lifestyle even strict dietary regime. On the other hand, “women were shown as active and energetic citizens,... the idea of freedom was promoted: freedom

⁶ Cfr. Ines Lukin – Katarina Nina Simončič, “Razvoj modnog novinarstva od 1900. do 1940.”, *Tedi: International Interdisciplinary Journal of Young Scientists from the Faculty of Textile Technology*, 3 (2013) 3, pp. 40, 43.

⁷ Cfr. I. Lukin – K. N. Simončič, op. cit., p. 44.

of movement, freedom of press, freedom of body,... freedom to choose a spouse...”⁸

The women of the 1920s became confident, more energetic, more free-spirited. Their role and importance in the society became tangible and notable. Despite all this, femininity and female body were censored, it “had to be” controlled, and this was achieved by constant promoting of slim figure from which women “drew” their femininity and strength. This freedom of spirit and social engagement slowly waned in the 1930s due to new political and social circumstances. However, the set postulates of female beauty connected with slender shape gained a new meaning.

2. Women's magazines and “new” trends

2.1. A working woman, a traditional woman or/and a slender woman

The insecurity caused by the great economic crisis influenced the “freedom” of the 1920s to be exchanged for traditional values such as marriage and family life whose functionality and content changed as the consequence of forming a “new” and “modern” woman.

“Ženski list”⁹ and “Hrvatica”¹⁰, women’s magazines that were published in Zagreb between the two world wars, kept women informed about contemporary trends, but they also revalued the values that women identified with during the 1920s (physical activity, vigour, economic independence). Within the scope of new events, it is emphasized that women should “reconcile the demands of the modern society and the system of values in which they had been raised.” A magazine editor Marija Jurić Zagorka, concludes that the new way of life caused a modern marriage crisis. “Women are getting education, they are free to move, they do not spend their youth waiting for a husband.

⁸ Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije – Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji*, Central Europa, Zagreb, 2014, page 159.

⁹ I. Ograjšek Gorenjak, op. cit., “Around 1925 a magazine ‘Ženski list: za modu, zabavu i kućanstvo’ was published. It dealt with traditional female topics such as fashion, marriage, morality, household and children in a fun and dynamic way, giving short notes, paragraphs from contemporary books, starting surveys, and adding pictures. The editor of the Ženski list became Marija Jurić Zagorka who edited the magazine until 1939”, p. 137.

¹⁰ Cfr. *ibid.*, in 1939, Marija Jurić Zagorka, under the pressure from conservative parties, starts a new magazine “Hrvatica: časopis za ženu i dom”, p. 138.

They start to earn their own living. The way out of a marriage crisis is its transformation. A marriage can no longer be defined as a need but as an aspiration, a place where love and happiness will be fulfilled. "A real husband and a real wife share their work and love."¹¹

During the 1930s, women became aware of many new opportunities for work, employment and education. On the other hand, all the modernisation and traffic of goods, information and people, was a process demanding great adjustments from both an individual and a family. Magazines publish discussions on how much good the acceptance of "modern" brought. Thus, the "modernity" in the 1930s gets negative connotations: "Girls who are to susceptible to fashion, are usually bad housewives" or "Personal freedom is paid by loneliness in the old age."¹²

The freedom and awareness of their own value, was not discarded by women in the 1930s. They "added" doubts meaning that marriage and family were not the only interest and personal fulfilment for a woman.

Economic independence gave women autonomy from their husbands and family, but they "supplemented" their emotional confidence with their looks, slender figure and well-tended body. Even though women could be independent, while at the same time versatile, they still wanted the feeling of belonging which was accomplished through their family's or society's approval.

Earning an income and a professional development gave her economic stability, but the appraisal of her appearance dictated by the society, was even more of a success for her. It gave her the feeling of self-esteem necessary to perform everyday chores. By liking themselves, women gained "stability" which helped them deal with "failure" regardless of being employed or only a wife or mother, and this was usually dictated by generally accepted attitudes.

Testifying this to be true are many articles in women's magazines in the decade prior to the Second World War which regardless of the seriousness of political and social events, "seriously" dealt with woman's physical appearance and ideal figure. Between 1932 and 1939, "Ženski list" and "Hrvatica" published five interesting articles that I have selected. Their common theme is: how to keep your body slim, is women's slenderness desirable, slender or skinny body, illness as a consequence of starvation and making restrictive diets and healthy nutrition popular.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 162, 184.

¹² Ibid, p. 160.

"THE ONLY SUCCESSFUL AND HARMLESS INSTRUMENT AGAINST GAINING WEIGHT"

Slim figure is the most important factor for women. To this, she devotes all her care, she feeds, clothes and lives by it. It must be specifically said, that the whole world is wrong when it comes to slender figure. Slender figure has become a code that nobody understands correctly. Woman has almost been deformed by slender figure. The world calls slenderness: thinness. According to today's tastes, a slender woman is a skinny woman. Skin and bones to be precise. Sometimes she has some muscles if she plays sports, and if not, she is horribly thin. Women suffer because of this skinny figure from early age and that is exactly what makes them flabby, weak. Young girls are unable to lightly reach the second, let alone fourth floor!

Most men are slim as well – that is to say, they are not fat. Even sportsmen are slim. Men,... they are usually slim which means well-built, so they are not fat, but all these slim men are strong, tough, healthy and with muscles. Skinny men always differ from well-built i.e. slim, moreover they are comical. While they are comical, women see this thinness as an ideal. Slim figure should be understood as men's figure is, that is: slim figure means that a woman is not fat or skinny. But a fat woman can be good-looking and much better built than the skinny who is seen as having an ideal female body.¹³

The author of the article analyses the extremes in which women are caught because of too excessive care about their figure. Keeping slender figure was a sign that a woman took care of herself, but young women and girls often mistook slenderness for thinness. For the author, a healthy body is not a thin body. He connects slenderness with health and beauty of a woman, and thinness is seen as a reflection of bad physical fitness. For the author, these women are not hardy, they do not have enough energy. He compares the perfect female figure with a man's body, they are seen as equal, they are pretty if they are in good physical shape. The author concludes that a woman's physical appearance can be shapely regardless of kilograms, woman's figure should reflect a healthy, shapely and strong person.

¹³ *Hrvatica*, no. 11/1, Zagreb, 1st November 1939, p. 386.

"SLENDER WOMAN'S FIGURE DESTROYS THE WORLD!"

This breaking news came from an Italian magazine that also states that the wise Mussolini directed his doctors to prohibit women from starving themselves and taking different "treatments" to prevent gaining weight. He also advised papers not to publish pictures of famous beauties with slender figures. All magazines publish articles telling Italian women that men are tired of this slender figure! There is a new theory spreading amongst youth that a woman with slim waist who has no hips or curves is neither beautiful nor desirable, she's not a woman at all! Some kind of monster.

In many Italian medical books and magazines, doctors claim that women who have attained unusual thinness are not fit to be mothers or wives! A starving woman who strives to be thin and tall, cannot give birth to healthy and resilient offspring to her nation. An Italian woman – they say, was rarely ever slim except as a girl. And now suddenly they all want to be thin, slim, flat! Mussolini said: The ideal of all women and all men should be and must remain as it has always been – Venus de Milo. Only a woman with a figure like the one Venus de Milo has, can be beautiful, she is the only one capable of giving birth to healthy children.

The Italian magazine promoting curvaceous figure says: "Almost never in history has a slender, i.e. thin woman been the centre of attractiveness for men. Thin women could never entice men to do great deeds that the world would benefit from. Women who captivated men's hearts and thus drew great deeds from their spirit, great minds, poetic and artistic works of everlasting value, were curvaceous. Women who ruled their husbands and inspired them for great national reforms, for great social and political achievements, all had curves. Even famous women who ruled socially the spirits of greatest poets, composers, painters, who ruled kings and who ruled countries themselves, wisely and were ahead many of their statesmen – they were all curvy, sometimes more than just curvy.

In the Roman age, all women had curves. The queen Theodora who ruled Byzantine Empire wisely, was also curvaceous. Cleopatra is imagined only by today's people as slight because if she had been thin, not even Julius Caesar nor Antony would have had her as a slave, let alone a co-ruler! All the beauties in the 18th century who ruled over kings and ministers of state, were curvaceous. And did not authors in their operettas and jokes show a slender i.e. thin woman as comical until twenty-five years ago?

This promoter still speaks for a curvy woman with so much zeal that his every female reader should be thrilled to try “treatment” to get – fat. Has he achieved this? It cannot be checked, but it is interesting that he goes on saying quite seriously: “A thin woman is desolate, without charm, femininity, weak, unable to thrill her husband, make him burn from desire to make famous works so he often looks for other silly ways to burn his unused power.” If this is true, the culprit for today’s state of the world is only one – woman’s thin figure!...¹⁴

Not long after the beginning of the Second World War, only a month later, the magazine “Hrvatica” published the article about the look of women that had previously been published in an Italian magazine. The author who relayed the article may have wanted to popularise the Nazi attitude about the role of a woman in society. However, the “problem” of women’s thinness is ironically put as the main trigger for all world problems. Therefore, it is just to ask if a slender female body reflected a woman’s strength or weakness? The popularisation of slenderness was not, according to the Italian journalist, in accord with the respect that women had always been given, and that is what nature had given them, i.e. motherhood. Apart from that, history proves him right that women’s thinness was never held in high esteem. Femininity is connected to fertility, natural beauty and sensuality that can inspire men to do great deeds. The author who conveyed the article finishes with a witty conclusion that all problems in the world were caused by slender women, thus anticipating numerous political and social changes after the Second World War, created, amongst other things, in the context of the “new” slender figure.

“THE FEAR THAT WE WILL GET FAT”

It is known that different treatments for rapid weight loss have already brought on many problems. Not less dangerous is the constant fear that we might put on weight.

Here is one example: A young and gentle girl prone to anaemia or bronchitis is begged by her mother: “Drink this milk!”

The doctor prescribes a mild treatment to gain weight and rest. But it would be a shame to ruin her slim sporty figure. Milk, butter and sweets are discarded, and

¹⁴ *Hrvatica*, no. 10/1, Zagreb, 1st October 1939, p. 347.

she continues to dance, sleigh ride and swim until a severe disease ruins one young human life.

Or a busy woman who works outside her house the whole day, takes care of the household in the evening, has social obligations and interests, when she puts make up on her face in front of the mirror, is comforted to see her flawless slender figure which is the envy of all her lady friends. The fact that she suffers from severe exhaustion, cold feet and loss of appetite, in her opinion is insignificant.

Caring friends advise her to take stout food, various sweet food or to undergo a medical treatment with arsenic. But God forbid! It is all fattening! And she keeps to her old way of life, dieting which perfectly agrees with loss of appetite and it goes on for so long that she suffers from complete nervous breakdown with possibly irreparable consequences.

Or a young modern mother hearing from all sides that a woman gains weight after childbirth. –During pregnancy, since there is a new life growing, vanity is somewhat subdued, but after the birth, one has to make up for the loss. Even though physical efforts exhausted the young woman, along with duties of motherhood, all smart advice to lead a sensible life are of no avail. The young woman resumes her old habits and diets to be as slender as she was as a girl. She does not think if her body is up to the task. And the young family happiness can be easily shattered because of this stupidity. Of course, not all cases have to have bad consequences, but the very thought about them should be reason enough to take care of oneself a bit better. Slender figure is beautiful and desirable, but health and strength are much more valuable. One should keep that in mind if we do more sports or eat less only because we want to be pretty because it could be dangerous for our health. Our body will sooner or later get its revenge for this with much worse consequences than a few extra kilos.

Dictated by strict fashion rules, many young girls, as well as mature women, imagine that they are less worthy if their figure does not suit exactly the measures of today's beauty ideal.

Unless it is true that only the exterior determines whether someone will like us or not. Of course, slender figure is more attractive than a chubbier. But that is not the whole appeal of a person. A gentle character, cheerful mind and female charm will always create stronger bonds than beauty which is often just a vessel of a worthless person full of themselves. There are numerous examples where amongst many sisters or friends, the ones who are less pretty get husbands. Therefore, there

*is no need for fasting or starvation. "But I want to like myself!" some readers will say. - "And I can do that only if my figure fits the modern demands!" - This is a reasonable wish. But to like oneself means to be pleased with oneself, and, with a few rare exceptions, this can happen only when our health is in harmony with our inner equilibrium. This cannot happen with great and irritable nervousness caused by starvation. Thus, a reasonable woman should not be blinded by the ideal slender figure. She had better make peace with a few extra kilos if her health demands it.*¹⁵

The author of this article describes eating disorder¹⁶ that he thinks is caused by restrictive diets and excessive desire to be slim. The article was written a year before the beginning of the Second World War. However, it points out that despite numerous political changes in Europe, there was a "parallel" world in which individuals fought their own demons. As I have stated before, in as early as 1920s and 1930s, women succumbed to the fashion industry which demanded slenderness as an ideal framework of female beauty. On the other hand, the social development set new expectations before a woman that she more or less successfully performed, very often displeased with the results, so the pleasure of having a slender body was her only source of happiness. The author warns about health issues caused by this i.e. if a woman sticks to conventions too much, at the same time trying to stay thin at all cost. His piece of advice, even though it is more than 80 years old, is still applicable today, health is the imperative for any woman, it brings happiness and content, and maintaining a slender figure should not be a priority.

The next two articles give recommendations and scientific proof about proper and balanced diet. Even though they came out in 1932 and 1935, they are valid even today: starving is not recommended, one should have four to five meals a day, we should lower the fat intake, sugar and carbohydrates, and eat more fruit and vegetables. Gaining ideal weight should be in harmony with the body's needs, and medical advice is necessary if malnutrition or obesity is still present despite adhering to healthy diet recommendations.

¹⁵ *Ženski list*, no. 4/14, Zagreb, 1st April 1938, p. 34.

¹⁶ Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are the most common eating disorders. More in: Kristina Sambol – Tatjana Cikač, "Anoreksija i bulimija nervoza – rano otkrivanje i liječenje u obiteljskoj medicine", *Medicus*, 24 (2015) 2, pp. 165-171.

"WHAT AN EXPERT SAYS ABOUT SLENDER FIGURE"

I do not know why the twentieth century is so into the ideal of slender woman and I do not know how they gained this slenderness, but I know that one day all women lost weight. They look almost like skeletons! A slender, lithe woman is surely beautiful, but God forbid the thinness that is crawling slowly in fashion tastes of - women. Us, men, never gave women any reason to think that we like thinness! Men have always liked beautiful, perfect bodies with curvy shapes, curvy – which does not mean obese.

Women discarded their pretty, curvaceous figures like an old-fashioned dress. I repeat. I do not understand why, but as a doctor and an aesthete I conclude that there is no more pitiful picture than women's bodies after they had starved and suffered to gain "slenderness". The weight loss mania is harmful to health just as it is unnecessary to carry extra fat. However, not all figures are fit to be thin. Many women lost all their appeal as well as their joy after starving themselves. A reasonable woman will try to achieve a pretty body shape, but in accordance with her anatomy and health. In order to achieve a pretty body shape, they need to live according to certain rules, not starve or exaggerate in sports. Body's volume is dependant of our food. Fat grows from eating. Science has established today exactly which food fattens a body and has given people a chance to lose the fat without having to starve for even a minute. It gave people a chance to achieve and maintain a shapely body figure even if we eat four or five times a day.

Fat comes mostly from lipids (not only pork lard but butter and oil etc.). Also from sugar. We count as sugar all the substances that disintegrate into sugar such as carbohydrates. They can be found in all meals made with flour, rice and potatoes. All sweets are fattening, most of which chocolate candies. No stage or film actress who wants to deepen her art with her figure as well should ever try chocolate candies. Chocolate is the surest way to gain weight, it is also helped by all kinds of candies. People with healthy appetite can have four to five meals a day, but their menu should consist of lean meat, vegetables with little roux or only stewed on very little oil or butter etc. They should also eat fresh fruit. I have already said: meals must not be seasoned with too much lard, butter or oil. Obese people should eat only milk and toast one day a week. Fasting is also very important from medical point of view. Many religions promote a weekly fast to cleanse the body not only the spirit. Once a week stomach must rest, and on other days one can eat as much as they want as long as their menu is as agreed above.

Just like chocolate, bananas, dates and figs are fattening. In winter, an apple and an orange are suitable, in summer cherries, melons, plums (cooked prunes in winter).

There are people who eat very little, but are constantly fat and cannot lose weight even when they starve themselves. This can be due to a disease or at least an abnormal digestion problem. They should undergo medical examinations and only under their doctor's supervision can they do something about their obesity.

Slender figure was like some kind of plague to woman's health on all continents where women were so obsessed with being thin that they achieved their goals by eating lemons and tortured their bodies in various ways. Science helped women by giving them a menu that could be used to eat one's fill and at the same time keep their bodies from getting fat.¹⁷

The growing popularity of women's slender figures caused starvation in many women. The authors point out that in the meantime rules about a healthy diet were established. That is to say, how with proper choice of food and way of life, everyone can prevent health issues and maintain slender figure without endangering their health.¹⁸ Being too thin can cause many serious health problems and, according to the author, it is not recommended. In order to achieve the balance, it was necessary to conduct a certain eating regime just as with obesity.

"SLENDER FIGURE"

In the recent years, the fashion of a slender figure led many women to starve themselves in order to lose a few kilos of their weight. However, they did not become "slender" - because slenderness is genetically determined and cannot be achieved through starving – they became dry. In these cases, the body was weakened through its resistance and women who starved themselves were more likely to suffer from various diseases, especially lung diseases. This slenderness craze is slowly disappearing today. Human body needs a certain amount of fat so the body that lost weight rapidly due to insufficient quantity of food becomes inert, kidneys, if there is not enough fat, start to "float". Creases and wrinkles appear on the face and neck.

¹⁷ *Ženski list*, no. 12/11, Zagreb, 1st December 1935, p. 49.

¹⁸ At the turn of the century (19/20 ct.), nutrition develops more rapidly, more in Zvonimir Šatalić, "Povijest znanosti o prehrani", *Medicus*, 17 (2008) 1, pp. 149-156.

*Gaining weight is not always easy. Sometimes not even generous food helps. In some cases, nothing helps people to gain weight. The “fat-treatment” can help these people, but it is important to know the deeper causes of thinness. The cause is the fact that a body is not ready to store fat, i.e. it does not store enough of it. In these cases, various medications are used. It is proven that such body often needs sugars and other substances besides proteins and lipids. For the “fat-treatment” to achieve good results, one needs enough sugars, broths, lentil, water and fats. The doctor will prescribe medications necessary to improve storing fat in the body. In many cases, success is rapid, whereas in nervous people it is slower and weaker. One needs to be patient and persist with the treatment. Once we gain the desired weight, we will keep it for a long time.*¹⁹

2.2. A working, slender and healthy woman – the new ideal

Magazine articles from the 1930s are much more careful when “women’s figures” are concerned. They set a strict line between what is slender and what is thin, what healthy diet is and what a restrictive diet is, also the consequences of strict diets to a woman’s health. This cautiousness probably stems from the fact that many authors see that multiple tasks set before a woman ruin her function in a family as well as her health. Slender, “fashionable” women and their virtues as such are not the centre of attention. In the 1930s, there appeared a new outlook on a woman’s looks in relation to her health. In other words, the concern is mainly about reconciling successfully the role of a “modern woman” with the role of a mother and a wife. The authors of these articles think that too thin a woman cannot “perform” this role successfully. These are ailing women and it is doubtful whether they can become mothers, and if they do succeed in this, can they have a good marriage because they are this type of a woman: “flabby and weak.” They cannot bear healthy offspring, they do not inspire men to do great deeds because they are empty, without charm, femininity, in a word, they are weak, and as such very often comical as well. Slenderness is most often the opposite of health, and diets are recommended only if they are done under a doctor’s supervision. Women who have just given birth should not be on restrictive diets. Slenderness is no longer related to a woman’s beauty. A slender woman should be as a slender man, she has to be strong, virile, healthy even muscular. According to the author, slenderness

¹⁹ *Ženski list*, no. 6/8, Zagreb, 1st June 1932, p. 32.

represents joy only to working women, it is a victory over oneself that despite all obligations she had maintained her slender figure even though she suffers from tiredness and exhaustion. Women are afraid of extra kilograms, they think that would be the reason they remain unmarried, but according to the author, the wish to be slender stems from women themselves, they rank it highly, whereas men appreciate character traits such as kindness and cheerful spirit.

During the 1930s, esthetical criteria of a woman's body were connected to the general role of a woman in society, primarily family, as a mother and a wife. This attitude surely comes from a political context before the beginning of the Second World War. The role of a woman as a mother was emphasised along with her physical fitness and strength. However, the articles hint at a new spirit of the time unrelated to war affairs that will ask a woman to "choose" her own appearance as well as the role she wants to have regardless of what society or family expected.

This is what an article published in 1936 writes about, it brings the look into the future of a woman in the 21st century. The prediction that a woman's looks will have a very important role in the 21st century sounds almost prophetic. That is to say that the people's global focus on their bodily appearance reached its peak in the 21st century. Caring for a body today encompasses a wide range of activities: from physical care, working out and sports to healthy eating, aesthetic treatments, hiding or removing "imperfections", and all with the aim to remain youthful looking. The author of the text also emphasises youthfulness stating that all women over 25 are old and unattractive. The author says that men are the most important judges of woman's beauty, and women are said to be the prime culprits because they showed off their looks all the time thus making it very important in everyday life. He is a bit more moderate when he talks about slenderness, from his description of a woman's physical appearance and his personal attitude, it can be concluded that a woman in the 21st century is primarily seen as healthy and not too thin. In the end, he writes about a woman's capability, knowledge, character traits and morality. He claims with certainty that the role of a woman in the 21st century will be significant, her looks, intellect, abilities, character will be appreciated, and her influence and responsibility will therefore become bigger.

"WHAT A WOMAN WILL BE LIKE IN THE FUTURE"

An interesting prophecy

A famous American publicist Charles Klod in a work entitled "The ideal woman of the future" dwells on prophecies about what an ideal woman will be like that men will find most attracted to and he writes:

"Should a woman be short, tall, fat, thin or curvy? Will woman's physical appearance play an important role in the future? Will men in the 21st century find a woman's age important. Woman's physical appearance will be more important than today. Women themselves are to blame for this. They have already spoiled men with their beauty treatments, their elegance and flirting so men do not even want to hear about stopping these beauty treatments. On the contrary, they want women to spruce up even more. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, men will be very strict judges of a woman's beauty. They will certainly demand that their ideal be a girl with fresh, rosy cheeks, young. Twenty five years of age will be the upper limit of the age that men will take into consideration. Older girls and women do not even have to count on being liked by men, except if they do not hide their date of birth with a clever mask.

The woman of the future will no longer be slender, that is certain: she will be taller, chubbier, with round, fatter legs. Instead of "dangerously thin" there will be s dangerous "round shape" which will dominate.

Whether woman's intelligence and soul will play a greater role, cannot be predicted so far. It is certain that a harsher fight for survival will require women to be armed both with knowledge and men's determination in this fight. Complete equality between both sexes is a perfectly understandable thing, women will win easily in this aspect. Will a woman's "past" determine anything? One cannot say. Widows and divorced women may not be asked about their "past" by men. The woman of the future will have a better and maybe easier life, but her personal responsibility towards family and society will also increase significantly.²⁰

²⁰ *Ženski list*, no. 3/12, Zagreb, 1st March 1936, p. 33.

Conclusion

A woman's identity, from the end of the 19th century until today has been built on the notion of beauty and physical approval. Beauty included behaviour and looks, and the criteria has been changing through time. This has always tested woman's self-confidence, and made her quest for her own identity arduous. The growing development of technology and the social environment have influenced social changes that put a woman in the new context. Working abilities, bodily strength and fertility were the values desired in a woman, "physical attractiveness had its role, but the "beauty" was not obligatory in the marital market. Today's concept of beauty stems from the middle of the 19th century when commercials that "show" pretty women appeared."²¹

The notion of a woman's beauty and slender figure are almost synonymous today. This perception of a woman started after the First World War. A slender female body with smaller or bigger "variations" remained desirable until today. In the 1920s, slenderness was associated with youthfulness, rebelliousness and wildness so fashion adapted accordingly. In the 1930s, slenderness of a woman's figure assumed completely different connotations. It was a reflection of a woman's success as a mother, a wife, but more and more as a working woman. The scope of woman's activities, duties and actions at home and in the society were getting broader and more demanding, but to stay or become slender, became the "proof" to the environment that she succeeded in all that. Even though women became more financially independent, they worked and were mother and housewives, a woman felt her own triumph, and she probably feels it to this day, she felt self-content, when she saw her own body. The body is the first to be noticed, regardless of her education, profession, the joys of motherhood and family life. It is the first to be exposed to looks and comments. Therefore, it is not surprising that at the very beginning of the Second World War, in women's magazines one can find articles which talk about appearance and recommendations on how to remain slender, but also the danger for mental health due to many restrictive diets and losing weight. The question of personal happiness and satisfaction was pushed back, a woman starts to feel accomplished through satisfying social expectations, damaging even her own health to gain approval. The freedom that women got by being materially and economically independent of their

²¹ N. Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

family and men, soon turned into a fear of rejection. Women are confused when choosing their own direction of development, how to reconcile work, career, motherhood, family, and still look attractive. Therefore, they often took “advice” from women’s magazines, current fashion and trends, which mostly dealt with woman’s body and looks. Thus it is not surprising that women’s magazines that were published in Zagreb, had answers to women’s “imperfections” in the form of diets, healthy eating and a healthy way of life. “Beauty” became popular, especially slender female figure, which became almost an imperative for women. At the same time, excessive desire for this look caused unconscious anxieties and fears in many women. The development and influence of fashion, spreading of consumer culture, only increased this insecurity. The idea of a “modern woman” that spread after the First World War particularly, put new limitation before a woman. Despite the chances for economic independence, a woman’s self-confidence faced new temptations, new limitations were created that women more or less accepted.²²

PERCEPCIJA ŽENSKOGA TIJELA OD KRAJA 19. STOLJEĆA DO POČETKA DRUGOGA SVJETSKOGA RATA

Sažetak

U ovome radu autorica analizira percepciju ženskoga tijela od kraja 19. stoljeća do početka Drugoga svjetskoga rata. Pojam „ljepote“ ženskoga tijela analizira se u okviru društveno-ekonomskih i socijalnih promjena koje su utjecale na položaj žene u društvu i obitelji. Autorica analizira članke iz ženskih časopisa kao što su Ženski list i Hrvatica, koji promiču „nov“ izgled žena, tj. vitku figuru. Također analizira moguću vezu između tjelesnoga izgleda žena i njihove uloge u društvu te posljedica koje su uslijedile.

Ključne riječi: *moderna žena; vitka figura; ljepota; Ženski list; Hrvatica.*

²² Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 26-29.