

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN  
ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Florida International University**  
*University Graduate School*

Doctoral Dissertation Defense

**Abstract**

The Battle of the Bulges: Black Women's Dieting Culture and Healthcare Practices, 1965-1990

by

**Melina Haberl**

This dissertation examines the cultural, social, and political meanings of Black women's dieting culture in the United States from 1965 to 1990. Drawing on Black popular media, personal notes, cookbooks, and medical literature, it traces the links between body size, gender, and race. By analyzing how Black women articulated ideals of embodiment, I argue that in the mid- to late twentieth century, they turned to weight-loss advice in popular magazines as a form of self-care and health preservation, even as these practices reinforced the pursuit of health as a personal responsibility. Instead of viewing dieting only as a beauty practice, this project highlights Black women's agency in shaping these practices amid shifting political, economic, and social contexts. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, dieting was closely tied to Black nationalist thought and community health movements. Articles and advice columns in newsletters and magazines promoted dietary practices as a means of reclaiming bodily autonomy and addressing persistent inequalities in the healthcare sector, while also reinforcing expectations that Black women were responsible for the well-being of their families and communities. By the 1980s, however, this discourse shifted. Influenced by neoliberal ideology, media portrayals increasingly emphasized personal responsibility, willpower, and self-discipline. Drawing on diet advice from self-help guides, popular Black magazines and newspapers, and cookbooks, this dissertation demonstrates how Black women both engaged with and challenged these developing discourses. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that dieting was an important arena through which Black women articulated ideas about Black identity, health, and social belonging.

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