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Sizing Up Fat Talk: Women's Reactions to Fat Talk as a Function of Target's Weight

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Abstract

In an effort to extend the current literature on “fat talk,” a 2 (Target’s Self-Presentation Style: Fat Talk or Self-Acceptance) x 2 (Target’s Relative Weight Status: Thinner Than Participant or Heavier Than Participant) between-groups experiment was conducted. A sample of 142 women read one of four online scenarios describing a hypothetical shopping trip, and then gave feedback about their responses, reactions, and perceptions concerning a target woman who tried on a dress. Consistent with predictions, a thin woman was viewed most positively when she engaged in self-acceptance, whereas a heavier woman was viewed most positively when she engaged in fat talk. Our findings suggest that fat talk can inspire negative emotions and attitudes in others, and thus an awareness of these consequences (both by individuals and the media) is important in order to help lessen the perpetuation of female body image issues in our society.

Sizing Up Fat Talk: Women's Reactions to Fat Talk as a Function of Target's Weight

A casual glance at modern American society reveals that poor body esteem is rampant among women. It seems that women are constantly striving to achieve a more flattering figure by dieting, toning up, or even undergoing plastic surgery. Indeed, it seems increasingly rare to find a woman who walks out of a dressing room without criticizing her "fat stomach," who does not cringe at the panorama of "fattening foods" during the holidays, or who does not groan while trying on a swimsuit. Unfortunately, such self-criticism may have detrimental consequences for both the women who actually engage in this behavior and for those who merely observe this behavior in other women. As such, an investigation into the potentially negative aftermath of this common behavior seems warranted.

Women's desire to achieve the infamous "thin ideal" has been investigated extensively, with the bulk of the literature confirming women's vulnerability to poor body image, especially compared to men (e.g., Cash & Henry, 1995; Cohn & Adler, 1992; Furnham, Badmin, & Sneade, 2002). According to a recent survey by a British radio station, half of women reported that they are willing to pursue plastic surgery, with nearly one third of these women desiring a liposuction (Olinka, 2007). Moreover, a nation-wide survey reported that nearly half of all women were unhappy with their physiques and were greatly concerned about being overweight (Cash & Henry, 1995). However, in light of the current obesity epidemic, it is reasonable that many of the women in these surveys—perhaps as much as one half --are actually overweight (Ogden, Carroll, Curtin, McDowell, Tabak, & Flegal, 2006) and have realistic and rational concerns about their body size. A more convincing body of research demonstrates that women, relative to men, have greater desires to be thin (Furnham et al., 2002; Keel, Baxter, Heatherton, & Joiner, 2007). In general, women are also more likely to exercise for body-enhancement, to demonstrate

an eating-disorder mentality, and to associate their self-worth with their body weight (Furnham et al., 2002). Finally, prior research has demonstrated that women are more prone to internalize cultural norms about their bodies and that they tend to make upward rather than downward social comparisons when evaluating their physical appearance (Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, & Buote, 2006). Although as a group women are clearly more dissatisfied with their bodies than are men, body esteem among women is subject to cultural variation (Logio, 2003). Most notably, the literature confirms that African American women, compared to their Caucasian counterparts, are less susceptible to body dissatisfaction and the "thin ideal" (Logio, 2003).

A large body of research suggests that such poor body image in women may stem from societal pressure for physical perfection. In fact, Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) conducted a provocative study of food-related advertisements and found many messages that glorified the thin ideal, emphasized women's bodily imperfections, and implied that dieting is a sign of responsibility and a strong moral character. Moreover, a number of the women featured in these suggestive advertisements were underweight models, leading Wilson and Blackhurst (1999) to conclude that if extremely thin women ostensibly need to watch what they eat, all women must believe they need to diet and improve their figure.

Although women's poor body esteem has been well-documented, the translation of this body esteem into verbal self-criticism is of particular interest to researchers. A major turning point in this topic was the introduction of the term "fat talk," first coined by Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) after extensive research on female adolescents. Specifically, fat talk refers to verbal complaints about one's figure or weight, and it typically occurs within female social groups (Nichter &Vuckovic, 1994). For instance, women who engage in fat talk may express a need to diet or to lose weight, or they may convey guilt about eating high-calorie or fattening

foods (Guendouzi, 2004). Many women simply complain about feeling “fat” in general (e.g., Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Nichter, 2000). After analyzing the comments made by teenage girls in focus groups, Nichter (2000) concluded that fat talk is an important aspect of female lifestyles, as it provides women with a means to communicate and connect with female peers. Additionally, Nichter (2000) found that the adolescents voiced numerous motivations for engaging in fat talk, such as the need to be included in social circles, the need to compare oneself to peers, and the desire to receive positive feedback from others. Interestingly, she also identified fat talk as a means to excuse poor eating behavior, which seems to imply that fat talk is a type of self-handicapping behavior (Jones & Berglas, 1978). Described by Jones and Berglas (1978), self-handicapping occurs when people draw attention to personal weaknesses in order to provide excuses for failure or to receive personal credit for success. Thus, it seems plausible that by engaging in fat talk, women are able to emphasize their lack of self-restraint and perhaps feel less ashamed about eating “fattening” foods.

Although fat talk has been explored primarily among adolescents and college students, the behavior has also been documented in young girls (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996) and in older women (Guendouzi, 2004). Specifically, Grogan and Wainwright (1996) found that girls ages 8 and 13 both expressed desires to lose weight and to achieve a thin figure. Both groups of girls also criticized certain aspects of their body that they wish to change (e.g., a “fat” stomach). Moreover, Guendouzi (2004) explored conversations among older women (i.e., school teachers) and teenage girls and found that body-size, body-weight, and eating habits were frequent topics of conversation among all women. Both groups of women also criticized and expressed envy of a skinny peer.

Expanding on the research of Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) and Nichter (2000), Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, and LeaShomb (2006) conducted a controlled, empirical study that sought to explore college undergraduates' perceptions about the social acceptability and typicality of fat talk. Importantly, they confirmed that men and women consider fat talk to be a normative female behavior. Their findings also showed that women consider fat talk to be more socially attractive than self-acceptance, whereas men considered fat talk to be less socially attractive than self-acceptance. Britton et al.'s (2006) study was one of the first to quantify people's general perceptions of fat talk, and importantly, suggested that women perceive this common behavior as socially acceptable and even likeable. However, the participants in their study were predominantly White young adults, which prevents these findings from being generalized to people of all ages and especially of all races.

In addition to people's perceptions of fat talk, one recent line of research has explored the emotional and cognitive effects of fat talk among women. Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance (2003) studied the role of a woman's self-presentational style and the moderating role of setting on the cognitive performance and psychological state of other women. Specifically, female participants were asked to try on either a sweater or a swimsuit in a dressing room while they listened to a female confederate in an adjacent dressing room who either engaged in fat talk or complained about computers (i.e., as the control condition). Importantly, they found that women who were inherently prone to trait self-objectification, as determined by scores on the Trait State Self-Objectification Inventory, performed better on various cognitive tasks (e.g., a math test, logical and spatial reasoning tasks) when they heard the confederate talk about computers (i.e., no fat talk), whereas women with low trait self-objectification performed better when they heard the confederate engage in fat talk. This finding suggested that women who tend to objectify

themselves may experience cognitive impairments upon hearing other women engage in fat talk. Interestingly, Gapinski et al. (2003) also found an interaction between the clothing worn by participants and the self-presentation of the confederate women; that is, women who wore sweaters had more negative emotions when they heard fat talk (compared to computer complaints), but women who wore swimsuits had more positive emotions when they heard fat talk. From this finding, Gapinski et al. (2003) proposed that hearing fat talk by others can validate a woman's bodily insecurity and therefore reduce the negative emotions she experiences when exposing her body in a swimsuit. Overall, their research indicates that fat talk can influence the emotions and cognitive performance of female observers, and that its effects can be mediated by women's tendency for self-objectification and level of body exposure.

Further exploring the complex nature of fat talk, a recent body of research has investigated the situational factors that may inspire poor body esteem and consequently, fat talk. For instance, Tucker et al. (2007) assessed the influence of a woman's self-presentational style on her female observers, and surprisingly, they found that participants liked a woman equally regardless of whether she criticized, accepted, or praised her body. However, the participants seemed to mirror the body esteem conveyed by the confederate, such that the more positively the confederate spoke about her body, the more positively the participants rated their own bodies. Interestingly, Craig et al. (2007) explored the role of an audience on women's tendency to engage in fat talk, and although they expected a hypothetical male audience to elicit more body dissatisfaction in women (compared to a female audience), they found that women's self-reported body image was not influenced by the gender of the audience. As such, their study suggested that women may be equally likely to engage in fat talk whether they are in the presence of men or women.

Although research (e.g., Britton et al., 2006) and everyday experience suggest that fat talk is a typical female behavior, it is reasonable to assume that fat talk is more acceptable or likeable for some women than it is for others. For example, given people's frustrations with skinny women who want to lose weight, it can be argued that fat talk is viewed more negatively when it done by underweight rather than average-weight women. This notion is well-demonstrated by the provocative title of a recent Internet article: "How Not to Murder Skinny Women who Complain About Being Fat" ("How Not To," 2007). Moreover, empirical research demonstrates that women associate thinness with happiness, success, and perfection (Evans, 2003), and that thin women can elicit feelings of envy or jealousy in their female peers (Guendouzi, 2004).

In addition to the envy that thin women evoke in other women, Lin and Kulik (2002) studied the effects of a target woman's weight on participants' emotions, namely anxiety and body image. Interestingly, they found that photos of a thin target decreased women's body image (compared to photos of an overweight target); however, a photo of an overweight target did not boost participants' body image. Furthermore, photos of thin women induced more anxiety in participants (compared to the overweight and control photos), but only in participants who did not have a boyfriend (Lin & Kulik, 2002). Taken together, it follows that thin women can elicit insecurity and psychological stress in their female peers; however, other factors that boost women's self-esteem (such as having a romantic partner) can counteract this negative effect.

Although substantial insight can be obtained from previous research on thin women, the role of weight status in people's perceptions of fat talk may be better understood by considering other weight-related stereotypes. For instance, previous research (Crisp, 2002; Mond, Robertson-Smith, & Vetere, 2006) has found that people with anorexia are victims of negative stereotypes; they are often blamed for their condition and are perceived as narcissistic and antisocial. There is

also a profoundly negative stereotype of obesity (e.g., Teachman, Gapinski, Brownell, Rawlins, & Jeyaram, 2003; Klaczynski, Goold, & Mudry, 2004), in which overweight individuals are considered to be lazy, unskilled, and unintelligent relative to their average-weight or underweight peers. Teachman et al. (2003) and Klaczynski et al. (2004) also concluded that people attribute obesity to a lack of self-control and therefore blame overweight individuals for their physical condition. Consequently, it seems reasonable that overweight women would be viewed more positively by engaging in fat talk, as this behavior likely conveys a sense of responsibility for one's body that would contradict the stereotypes associated with overweight individuals.

After reviewing the existing literature on body image and fat talk, it is evident that female fat talk is a normative behavior (e.g., Britton et al., 2006; Guendouzi, 2004) and a manifestation of poor body image (e.g., Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999). Additionally, preliminary research on the perceptions associated with fat talk as well as the effects of fat talk on a female audience has also been conducted (Gapinski et al., 2003). However, no research to date has investigated the role of women's weight status in female fat talk, especially concerning women's perceptions of and reactions to this behavior. Finally, there is a dearth of research on women's motivations for engaging in fat talk as well as on the verbal feedback that women receive when engaging in this behavior.

In an effort to address these gaps in the literature, a 2 (Target's Self-Presentation Style: Fat Talk or Self-Acceptance) x 2 (Target's Relative Weight Status: Thinner Than Participant or Heavier Than Participant) between-groups experiment was conducted. One hundred and forty-two women read one of four hypothetical scenarios that asked them to imagine themselves and several friends on a shopping trip. In the scenario, one of the friends (the target woman), who was either thinner or heavier than the participant, tried on a dress in the fitting room and then

engaged in either fat talk or self-accepting talk about her body. Participants completed follow-up questions that assessed their hypothetical verbal responses, their hypothetical emotional reactions, their general perceptions of the target's behavior, and the perceived motivations for the target's behavior.

Hypotheses

Based on anecdotal evidence and the literature reviewed thus far, several hypotheses were made concerning the impact of the target's relative weight and self-presentation on participants in the current study.

Predicted main effects of target's relative weight. It was expected that participants would show more negative reactions and would form more negative opinions of the target woman when she was presented as thinner, rather than heavier, than the participants.

Predicted main effects of target's self-presentation. In terms of the target's self-presentation, it was hypothesized that fat talk, compared to self-acceptance, would elicit negative reactions and perceptions from the participants; that is, it was predicted that participants in the fat talk condition would be more likely to criticize their own bodies, to experience negative emotions in the situation (e.g., they would report less body esteem and feel more awkward), and to form negative perceptions about the target in general as well as the target's behavioral motivations.

Predicted interactions between target's relative weight and self-presentation. In addition to the main effects, we expected interactions between the target's self-presentation style and relative weight on participants' reactions to the situation and perceptions of the target. Specifically, it was predicted that participants would view a thinner target in a more positive light and would experience more positive reactions to the scenario if she engaged in self-

acceptance rather than fat talk. By contrast, it was predicted that participants would view a heavier target more positively and would react more positively to the scenario if she engaged in fat talk rather than self-acceptance.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants included 142 female volunteers between the ages of 18 and 55 (M = 29.18, SD = 10.12); the sample was 84% European-American, 7% Native American, 4% Hispanic American, 2% Asian American, and 3% were of an undisclosed race. Participants' BMIs (body mass indexes) were calculated from their self-reported height and weight and ranged from 17.54 to 44.63 (M = 23.84, SD = 5.14). According to the BMIs, the participant sample was predominantly of average weight.

In the current study, participants were recruited via snowball sampling. Specifically, emails were sent to women both within and outside of the Southwestern University community, including undergraduate students, faculty, administrators, and other women who were known by the researchers. The email asked participants if they would be willing to participant in a short psychological study for a research project on "female social dynamics," and it provided a link to the survey, along with a code number that assigned participants to one of four specific conditions. As such, participants were assigned to conditions via simple random assignment, which was conducted to reduce potential confounding variables (e.g., participant age, weight, body esteem). The assigned code numbers were distributed relatively equally among participants in order to create four conditions of similar size. In order to increase sample size, snowball sampling was also used, in which participants were asked to forward the link to other women (e.g., friends, family members, colleagues) who might be interesting in participating.

After clicking on the email link, participants were directed to the first page of the online survey--the consent form. If participants selected the "I accept this consent form" button, they were directed to the background information page. Any participants who did not accept the consent form were not allowed to complete the survey and were directed to the final page of the survey.

In order to ensure that the four conditions did not differ on any relevant variables at the outset of the experiment, one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare each of the four conditions in terms of participants' age, BMI, and body esteem. Importantly, there was no significant difference among the conditions with respect to participants' age ($F < 1$, *ns*), participants' BMI ($F < 1$, *ns*), and participants' body esteem, $F(3, 140) = 2.15$, $p = .10$.

After finishing the survey, which required approximately 5 min to complete, participants were redirected to the home page of SurveyMonkey.com (Finley, 1999).

Design

In order to assess the effects of the target's relative weight-status on perceptions and reactions pertaining to fat talk, a 2 (Target's Self-Presentation Style: Fat Talk or Self Acceptance) x 2 (Target's Relative Weight Status: Thinner Than Participant or Heavier Than Participant) between-subjects design was used.

In the present study, relative weight-status was defined as the weight of the target woman compared to the weight of the participant (i.e., *thinner* or *heavier)*. In the scenario, the relative weight of the target was manipulated by specifically indicating whether the target (i.e., a friend trying on a dress) was thinner or heavier than the participant. Thus, this variable was a subjective quality and did not necessarily refer to an underweight or overweight person, but simply conveyed the relative relationship between the size of the target and the participant.

The target's self-presentational style referred to the manner in which the target woman (a friend trying on a dress) spoke about her body in the scenario. In the *fat talk* condition, the target woman complained about her body while trying on a dress. For example, she mentioned that she "felt fat" and needed to start dieting and exercising. However, the target in the *self-acceptance* condition accepted her body while trying on a dress and expressed no desire to lose weight or to diet.

In the present study, four sets of dependent variables were measured in order to determine participants' reactions to fat talk and their perceptions associated with a woman who engages (or does not engage) in this behavior. These measures included the participants' verbal response to the target, which would indicate how a woman would outwardly react when another woman asks her to provide feedback about her body. In addition, the current study measured the participants' emotional reactions to the target's behavior (e.g., body esteem, self-esteem, enjoyment, frustration), their general perceptions of the target's behavior (e.g., the target's modesty, femininity, likeability), and their perceptions of the target's motivations (e.g., to receive positive feedback, to evoke sympathy). All measures were designed specifically for the present study, and are discussed in detail below. After they were assigned to one of the four conditions, participants completed an online survey in which they read one of four scenarios and then answered follow-up questions about the scenario.

Measures

Participants completed a 5-page online survey that was designed using SurveyMonkey.com (Finley, 1999). The first page consisted of a consent form that described what participants would be asked to do and assured them of their ability to discontinue the study at any time. The second page assessed participants' background information. First, participants

entered their designated code number and then gave information about their age, height, weight, and ethnicity. Next, a set of five questions measured participants' level of body esteem. These items included such statements as "I am happy with my weight" and "I worry about what others think of my body." All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) and they formed a reliable 5-item index ($\alpha = .87$).

Scenario. Following the background information was one of four possible scenarios, which corresponded with the code numbers given to participants. In two of the scenarios the target engaged in fat talk, whereas the target engaged in self-acceptance in the other two scenarios. Within both the fat talk and self-acceptance conditions, the target was presented as heavier than the participants in half the scenarios, and as thinner than the participants in the other half of the scenarios. The first paragraph of each scenario was identical; it mentioned that the participant and three female friends were going on a cruise together and were browsing in a store for dresses to wear on the trip. Two of the women (not including the target woman) began to engage in fat talk, criticizing their bodies and expressing a need to diet before going on the cruise. The next paragraph included the self-presentation and relative weight manipulations. In all conditions, the scenario described a target woman trying on a dress--which appeared to be too small--and the target then asked for the participant and the other women to come into the dressing room to provide feedback. After engaging in fat talk or self-acceptance in the dressing room, the target then asked the participant for her opinion. In the fat talk condition, the target began to criticize her body in the dressing room, talking about feeling "fat" and stressing that she needed to diet and exercise before the trip. In the self-accept condition, however, the target mentioned that she liked the dress and that although she may need a bigger size, she was not going to worry about dieting before the trip. Finally, twice in the second paragraph, the target

was specifically identified as being heavier or thinner than participant. This designation was given in the first and last sentence of the paragraph. An example of the *heavier target/fat talk* condition appears below.

> You and a group of 3 female friends are going on a cruise together in several weeks, and you all decide to go shopping for dresses to wear on the trip. While browsing for clothes in a store, 2 of the women say that they're not looking forward to being around all of those "perfect" and toned women on the cruise. They complain about how "fat" they've been feeling lately and say they need to lose some weight before the trip.
>
> Your other friend, who is HEAVIER THAN YOU, finds a form-fitting dress that she likes and decides to try it on in the dressing room. After putting it on, she asks you and the other girls to come into the dressing room so that you can give your opinions.
>
> After you walk into the dressing room, you notice that the dress appears to be too small. Your friend begins to criticize her body in the dress, and claims that it makes her feel fat. "I'm really upset about my "bulging" stomach," she says. "I need to start eating healthier and to get serious about working out so I can fit into cute clothes." Finally, turning around in front of the mirror, she asks you what you think. Again, your friend is HEAVIER THAN YOU.

In order to reduce extraneous variables, each of the four scenarios was of similar length and word count--including both the overall scenario and the specific dialogue of the target.

Follow-up questions. After the scenario, the next page of the survey consisted of four sections of follow-up questions with six items each. The first section assessed the likelihood that participants would provide a particular verbal response when the target woman asked for feedback. All items were measured on a 5-point scale from 1 (*Not at all likely*) to 5 (*Very Likely*),

and participants rated the likelihood that they would "offer positive feedback about her body," "give positive feedback about the dress," "begin to criticize my own body," and "remain silent and not say anything," and "change the topic of the conversation."

The next section assessed participants' emotional reactions to the target's behavior. Specifically, participants were required to rate the extent to which they agreed with six statements, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The six statements referred to the situation in the dressing room and participants rated the likelihood that they would "feel awkward," "be enjoying myself," "feel negatively/positively about my own body," and "be annoyed with my friend."

The third section evaluated participants' general perceptions of the target's behavior. Using the previously mentioned scale, participants rated the extent that they believed the target's behavior was "socially acceptable," "typical of other women," "likeable," "admirable," "feminine," and "modest."

The last section assessed participants' perceptions about the target's motivations for her behavior. Specifically, there were six motivations for participants to rate using the 5-point scale mentioned previously. The items assessed the likelihood that the target was attempting to "receive positive feedback," "express genuine thoughts," "be accepted by others," "seek attention from others," "receive the honest opinions of others," and "evoke sympathy from others."

After the follow-up questions, the last page of the survey thanked participants for their involvement and provided contact information for both the primary researcher and the director of the Institutional Review Board. This page also informed participants that they would be provided with an e-mail summary of the results within several weeks.

Results

The data were analyzed using a series of 2 (Target's Self-Presentation Style: Fat Talk or Self-Acceptance) x 2 (Target's Relative Weight Status: Thinner Than Participant or Heavier Than Participant) Multiple Analyses of Variance (MANOVAs). Separate MANOVAs were conducted for each subset of related dependent variables (i.e., verbal responses, emotional reactions, general perceptions, and perceived motivations) in order to determine the main effects and interactions of the target's weight status and self-presentation style on participants' responses, and to control for Type 1 error. Additionally, correlational analyses were performed on all dependent variables, several of which are reported here.

Verbal Responses

Main effect of target's self-presentation. As expected, a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the target's self-presentation style on participants' verbal responses, $F(6, 132) = 6.22$, $p < .001$. Separate univariate analyses indicated that self-presentation style had a significant effect on whether participants would provide positive feedback about the target's dress, $F(1, 132) = 9.75$, $p = .002$, or would criticize their own bodies, $F(1, 132) = 20.95$, $p < .001$. Specifically, participants were more likely to praise the target's dress when the target self-accepted ($M = 3.37$) than when she engaged in fat talk ($M = 2.76$). As predicted, participants were also more likely to criticize their own bodies when the target engaged in fat talk ($M = 2.56$) rather than self-acceptance ($M = 1.77$). Interestingly, the target's self-presentation did not determine whether participants would give positive feedback about the target's body, $F(1, 132) = 1.52$, $p = .22$. Contrary to predictions, there was also no significant effect on participants' tendency to change the topic of conversation, $F(1, 132) = 1.07$, $p = .30$, or to remain silent, $F(1, 132) = 1.04$, $p = .31$.

Main effect of target's weight. As hypothesized, a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the target's relative weight on participants' verbal responses, $F(6, 132) = 3.27$, $p = .01$. Specifically, univariate analyses indicated that the target's relative weight determined whether participants would give positive feedback about the target's body, $F(1, 132) = 12.85$, $p < .001$, would change the topic of conversation, $F(1, 132) = 5.16$, $p = .03$, and would remain silent and not say anything, $F(1, 132) = 7.01$, $p = .01$. That is, women were more likely to give positive feedback about the target's body if the target was thinner ($M = 4.13$) rather than heavier ($M = 3.61$), women were more likely to search for another topic of conversation when the target was heavier ($M = 1.87$) rather than thinner ($M = 1.53$), and women also tended to remain silent ($M = 1.76$) when the target was heavier rather than thinner (M = 1.39) than them.

Interaction between target's self-presentation and weight. According to a MANOVA, there was no significant interaction of the target's self-presentation and relative weight on participants' verbal responses, $F < 1$, *ns*. No predictions concerning this interaction had been made prior to data analysis.

Emotional Reactions

Main effect of target's self-presentation. As hypothesized, a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the target's self-presentation style on participants' emotional reactions, $F(6, 132) = 3.73$, $p = .004$. Separate univariate analyses revealed significant main effects on how awkward participants would feel in the situation, $F(1, 132) = 4.56$, $p = .04$, how much participants would enjoy the situation, $F(1, 132) = 16.73$, $p < .001$, and how annoyed participants' would feel with the target, $F(1, 132) = 5.68$, $p = .02$. That is, consistent with predictions, participants believed they would feel more awkward ($M = 3.04$) if the target engaged in fat talk rather than self-acceptance ($M = 2.58$), participants believed they would be more

annoyed (with the target) if the target engaged in fat talk (M = 2.46) rather than self-acceptance (M = 2.05), and participants also believed they would enjoy themselves less if the target engaged in fat talk (M = 2.25) rather than self-acceptance (M = 3.03).

Main effect of target's weight. As predicted, a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of the target's relative weight on participants' emotional reactions, $F(6, 132) = 7.93$, $p < .001$. Univariate analyses indicated that relative weight affected how awkward participants would feel, $F(1, 132) = 14.79$, $p < .001$, and how much they would enjoy the situation, $F(1, 132) = 11.43$, $p = .001$. As predicted, participants believed they would feel more awkward when the target was heavier (M = 3.23) than when she was thinner (M = 2.47), and they believed they would enjoy themselves more when the target was thinner (M = 2.94) rather than heavier (M = 2.29). Contrary to expectations, however, the target's relative weight did not significantly impact participants' change in body esteem—whether the change involved an increase, $F(1, 132) = 2.84$, $p = .09$, or decrease, $F < 1$, *ns*, in body esteem. Contrary to expectations, the target's relative weight also had no significant effect on participants' general self-confidence, $F(1, 132) = 2.88$, $p = .09$.

Interaction between target's self-presentation and weight. As predicted, a MANOVA revealed a significant interaction between the target's self-presentation style and relative weight on participants' emotional reactions, $F(6, 132) = 3.10$, $p = .01$. Specifically, univariate analyses indicated that the extent to which participants felt annoyed with target was determined by an interaction between the target's self-presentation and weight, $F(1, 132) = 9.03$, $p = .003$. As Figure 1 shows, the simple effects tests revealed that if the target was heavier than the participants, they were equally annoyed whether the target engaged in fat talk (M = 2.12) or self-acceptance (M = 2.21), $t(60) < 1$, *ns*. By contrast, if the target was thinner, participants became

more annoyed when the target engaged in fat talk (M = 2.79) rather than self-acceptance (M = 1.96), $t(59) = 3.74$, $p < .001$. According to univariate analyses, the effect of the target's self-presentation on participants' level of enjoyment, $F(1, 132) = 3.18$, $p = .06$, was also qualified by an interaction with the target's weight. Figure 2 shows that when the target was heavier, participants' enjoyment was the same, whether the target engaged in fat talk (M = 2.12) or self-acceptance (M = 2.50), $t(60) < 1$, *ns*. However, when the target was thinner, participants enjoyed themselves more when the target engaged in self-acceptance (M = 3.36) rather than fat talk (M = 2.38), $t(60) = 4.52$, $p < .001$.

General Perceptions

Main effect of target's self-presentation. As predicted, a MANOVA revealed a significant main effect of target's self-presentation style on general perceptions of the target, $F(6, 132) = 13.54$, $p < .001$. Specifically, univariate analyses revealed main effects on the target's perceived likeability, $F(1, 132) = 53.85$, $p < .001$, perceived modesty, $F(1, 133) = 9.95$, $p = .002$, perceived admiration, $F(1, 132) = 69.54$, $p < .001$, and perceived typicality, $F(1, 132) = 22.78$, $p < .001$. Consistent with predictions, women viewed the target as more likeable when she engaged in self-acceptance (M = 2.29) rather than fat talk (M = 3.36). In addition, participants believed the target was more admirable when she engaged in self-acceptance (M = 3.15) rather than fat talk (M = 1.90), and they also believed the target was more modest when she engaged in self-acceptance (M = 2.93) rather than fat talk (M = 2.43). Not surprisingly, participants also believed the target's behavior was more typical of other women if she engaged in fat talk (M = 4.09) rather than self-acceptance (M = 3.41).

Main effect of target's weight. There was no significant main effect of the target's relative weight on general perceptions of the target's behavior, $F < 1$, *ns*.

Interaction between target's self-presentation and weight. As predicted, a MANOVA indicated a significant interaction between the target's self-presentation style and relative weight on participants' general perceptions of the target, $F(6, 132) = 2.90$, $p = .01$. Specifically, univariate analyses revealed significant interactions on perceived modesty, $F(1, 132) = 14.06$, $p < .001$, and perceived femininity, $F(1, 132) = 4.49$, $p = .04$, of the target. As shown in Figure 3, participants rated the heavier targets as equally modest whether they engaged in fat talk ($M = 2.76$) or self-acceptance ($M = 2.68$), $t < 1$, *ns;* by contrast, the thinner targets were perceived as more modest when they engaged in self-acceptance ($M = 3.09$) rather than fat talk ($M = 2.09$), $t(75) = 5.24$, $p < .001$. Similarly, Figure 4 shows that if the target was heavier, ratings of femininity were the same regardless of whether the target engaged in fat talk ($M = 3.29$) or self-acceptance ($M = 3.11$), $t < 1$, *ns*. However, as predicted, participants believed that the thinner targets were more feminine when they engaged in self-acceptance ($M = 3.47$) rather than fat talk ($M = 2.97$), $t(60) = 2.21$, $p = .03$.

Perceived Motivations

Main effect of target's self-presentation. As expected, a MANOVA revealed a significant effect of the target's self-presentation style on perceptions of her motivations, $F(6, 132) = 4.27$, $p = .001$. These motivations included the desire to receive positive feedback, $F(1, 132) = 9.90$, $p = .002$, to be accepted by the other women, $F(1, 132) = 13.62$, $p < .001$, to receive the attention of other women, $F(1, 132) = 4.15$, $p = .04$, to receive the honest opinions of other women, $F(1, 132) = 8.37$, $p = .004$, and to evoke sympathy from the other women, $F(1, 132) = 17.20$, $p < .001$. Specifically, women believed the target was more motivated to receive positive feedback when she engaged in fat talk ($M = 3.87$) rather than self-acceptance ($M = 3.33$), to be accepted by others when she engaged in fat talk ($M = 3.76$) rather than self-acceptance ($M = 3.19$), to draw

the attention of others when she engaged in fat talk (M = 3.29) rather than self-acceptance (M = 2.93), and to evoke sympathy when she engaged in fat talk (M = 3.09) rather than self-acceptance (M = 2.36). Also consistent with predictions, participants believed the target was more likely to desire honest feedback from others if she engaged in self-acceptance (M = 3.99) rather than fat talk (M = 3.50).

Main effect of target's weight. A MANOVA also revealed a significant main effect of the target's relative weight on perceived motivations, $F(6, 132) = 3.03$, $p = .01$. According to univariate analyses, these motivations included the target's desire to receive the honest opinions of others, $F(1, 132) = 4.22$, $p = .042$, and to evoke sympathy from others, $F(1, 132) = 4.67$, $p = .03$. Thus, participants thought that a heavier target (M = 3.91) was more likely than a thinner target (M = 3.55) to desire honest opinions, but they believed that a heavier target (M = 2.95) was also more likely than a thinner target (M = 2.52) to desire sympathy.

Interaction between target's self-presentation and weight. There was no significant interaction between the target's self-presentation style and relative weight on perceived motivations, $F(6, 132) = 1.70$, $p = .13$.

Correlational Analyses

In order to better understand the role of fat talk and weight status on participants' reactions to the target, we conducted correlations among all participants' responses to the scenario. It was expected that the more awkward participants felt in the situation, the more annoyed they would be, the less they would enjoy the situation, and the more likely they would be to remain silent and to change the topic of conversation. Moreover, it was expected that the perceived motivations of the target would predict the participants' general perceptions of the target and even their emotional reactions to the target. That is, it seemed reasonable that if

participants thought the target desired positive feedback or was attempting to evoke sympathy from others, participants would view the target in a more negative light (e.g., less likeable, less admirable, less modest) and would experience more negative emotional reactions to the situation (e.g., be more annoyed with the target, enjoy the situation less).

Awkwardness. As expected, there was a significant positive relationship between participants' level of awkwardness in the situation and their tendency to remain silent, $r(141) = .30$, $p < .001$, to change the topic of conversation, $r(141) = .20$, $p = .02$, and to feel annoyed with the target, $r(141) = .24$, $p = .004$. In other words, the more awkward participants rated the situation, the more likely they were to remain silent, to talk about an alternate topic, or to feel annoyed with the target. As predicted, the results also revealed a significant negative correlation between the level of awkwardness and the level of enjoyment, $r(141) = -.47$, $p < .001$; thus, the more awkward the participants felt in the situation, the less enjoyment they experienced.

Genuineness. Interestingly, there was a significant negative correlation between ratings of the target's genuineness and ratings of her modesty, $r(141) = .23$, $p = .01$, such that women who believed the target was expressing more genuine feelings believed the target was also behaving more modestly. Consistent with predictions, there were also significant negative correlations between the target's perceived genuineness and her perceived desire to receive positive feedback, $r(141) = -.19$, $p = .02$, to be accepted by others, $r(141) = -.24$, $p = .004$, and to receive attention from others, $r(141) = -.36$, $p < .001$. Thus, women who believed the target was expressing genuine feelings were less likely to believe that the target desired positive feedback, acceptance in a social circle, and the attention of other women.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to further explore the emerging topic of female fat talk, specifically its impact on women who observe this behavior exhibited by their female peers. Of particular interest were women's verbal responses and emotional reactions, as well as their general perceptions of a target and their beliefs about the target's motivations. Most importantly, the current study addressed the role of women's body size in fat talk situations by investigating how the effects of a woman's fat talk could be moderated by the relative weight status between a woman and her female peers. Taken together, the results revealed that there are individual effects of both fat talk and the target's weight status on women's responses to fat talk and that these two variables interact to influence women's responses.

As predicted, the way the target woman presented herself influenced participants' verbal responses in the situation. That is, when the target engaged in fat talk (compared to self-acceptance), women were more likely to start criticizing their own bodies-- suggesting that women's outward behavior tends to resemble the behavior they observe in other women. This finding corroborates those of Tucker et al. (2007), who found that women tend to report low ratings of body esteem after hearing another woman engage in self-degradation (rather than self-praise or self-aggrandization) of her body. Interestingly, the target's self-presentation style did not determine whether participants would give her positive feedback about her body, nor did it affect women's likelihood to change the topic of conversation or to simply remain silent. Although positive feedback has been cited as a common reason for engaging in fat talk (Nichter, 2000), the current study suggests that women are just as likely to receive positive feedback about their bodies when they engage in self-acceptance as when they engage in fat talk. It seems plausible that the hypothetical nature of the current study may have attenuated participants'

natural responses. Perhaps in a real-life situation, women who criticize themselves would indeed be more likely to receive positive feedback than those who accept themselves.

The present study also demonstrated that fat talk negatively affects women's emotions in a social situation. For instance, women in the current study believed they would feel more awkward when the target (their "friend") engaged in fat talk. Perhaps this awkwardness stems from women's hesitation about how to respond to fat talk, an assumption that is supported by the relationship between participants' awkwardness and their verbal responses: the more awkward the situation, the more likely participants were to remain silent and to change the topic of the conversation. Although fat talk created an awkward situation, other reactions to a fat talk situation--including participants' level of annoyance with the target and their level of enjoyment in the situation—were dependent on the weight of the woman engaging in fat talk. That is, when the target woman was thinner than the participants, they considered her most annoying when she engaged in fat talk (compared to self-acceptance); however, the participants thought a heavier target was equally annoying regardless of how she presented herself. Thus, the findings were consistent with the hypothesis that women want thinner women to accept their bodies; contrary to the hypothesis, however, women did not seem to prefer fat talk to self-acceptance among heavier women. In light of the current findings, and those of previous research (Evans, 2003), one could argue that women believe thinner women should be content with their figures and that heavier women (compared to thinner women) are more justified in their body dissatisfaction. Contrary to predictions, fat talk did not affect participants' body esteem or general self-confidence, although it did seem to inspire fat talk in the participants. These unexpected findings are inconsistent with our predictions and contradict previous research showing that women tend to adopt the body esteem conveyed by other women (Tucker, 2002). A likely explanation for the

discrepant findings is that participants in Tucker's (2002) study actually listened to another woman talk about her body, whereas the participants in the present study only read a transcript of a woman's self-talk.

Contrary to Britton et al.'s (2006) assertion that women find fat talk to be more socially attractive than self-acceptance, the current study indicates that women find fat talk to be less likeable and less admirable than self-acceptance. Thus, although the current findings support the notion that fat talk is a female norm (Britton et al., 2006; Guendouzi, 2004; Nichter, 2000), our results do not support the assertion that women view it in a positive light (Britton et al., 2006). Perhaps more importantly, the current findings seem to contradict the notion that women want other women to show concern with their physiques. For example, previous research has demonstrated that women rate other women more favorably when they consume diet products (as opposed to non-diet products; Mooney, DeTore, & Malloy, 1994), and that they are more favorable toward women who exercise over those who do not (Ginis & Leary, 2006). Although the women in our study generally viewed fat talk as less likeable and less admirable, the notable finding was that several perceptions of fat talk, namely modesty and femininity, varied according to the weight of the woman who engaged in the fat talk. Thin women were perceived to be more modest and more feminine when they accepted their bodies, whereas the opposite was true for heavier women, who were believed to be equally modest and more feminine regardless of their self-presentation style. At first glance, it seems counterintuitive that fat talk—an obvious form of self-criticism—is not perceived as modest in the eyes of others (at least in relatively thin women). However, it seems plausible that fat talk is a type of self-handicapping behavior in which women attempt to draw attention to themselves and make excuses for their appearance and eating behavior. In fact, previous research has revealed that the behavior of self-

handicapping is indeed viewed negatively by others and may not be a positive impression management strategy (Rhodewalt, Sanbonmatsu, Tschanz, Feick, & Waller, 1995). Although thin women may be perceived as narcissistic when they engage in fat talk, heavier women may seem to have a more legitimate reason to complain about their bodies, and therefore do not appear to be immodest when they criticize their figures. Taken together, these findings affirm that women's perceptions of fat talk depend on whether they are heavier or thinner than the woman engaging in fat talk.

Another focal point of the present study was the role of the target's self-presentation style in predicting her behavioral motivations. Interestingly, participants associated fat talk with a desire to seek attention from others and to receive positive feedback: women who engaged in fat talk, according to the participants, did not seem to desire the honest opinions of others, nor were they expressing their genuine feelings. These findings are consistent with Nichter's (2000) focus groups of adolescents, which revealed that one of the primary reasons for engaging in fat talk was to receive positive, uplifting comments from an audience, regardless of whether one was actually overweight. Importantly, the present study indicated that these common motivations for fat talk (i.e., to receive positive feedback, to evoke sympathy, to get the attention of others) are perceived more negatively by other women. That is, the women in the present study were more annoyed with the target, were less likely to enjoy the situation, and viewed the target as less modest when they believed the target was motivated by these self-enhancing behaviors. In sum, the findings revealed that sincere motivations for fat talk are more positively received by other women.

Beyond the effects of self-presentation style and its interaction with weight status, the current study also found several important main effects of the target weight status on her

audience. For instance, we found that when a woman is heavier than them, women are more likely to feel awkward and to withdraw from the conversation, and importantly, are less likely to give a woman positive feedback about her body.

Theoretical Implications

In light of the current findings, the present study makes several contributions to existing literature on fat talk, female social dynamics, and weight-related stereotypes. First, the current study expands Gapinski et al.'s (2003) research on the emotional impact of fat talk. Gapinski et al.'s (2003) found that hearing fat talk can inspire negative emotions such as self blame, contempt, and revolt, whereas the present study showed that fat talk generally creates an awkward situation for a female audience and that it has the capacity (if the target is thinner) to make the audience feel annoyed with the target and to experience displeasure in the situation. Next, the current findings contradict the notion that women find fat talk to be more likeable than self-acceptance (Britton et al., 2006). More importantly, the present study suggests that women who engage in fat talk are less admirable than those who accept their bodies, and if they are heavier than their female audience, can be perceived as less modest and less feminine. These latter traits of admirability, modesty, and femininity are important constructs that have not been addressed by previous literature on fat talk.

In addition to expanding previous findings, the current study investigated many dependent variables that had not been investigated by prior research. For one, the present study was the first to systematically explore women's verbal responses in fat-talk situations. Whereas several studies have performed content analyses of fat talk conversations and have conducted interviews of women who engage in this behavior, no other study that we are aware of has measured the verbal responses that are provoked by fat talk; this variable is important to address

given the social nature of the behavior. The current study was also the first to investigate the perceived motivations behind fat talk. Although it is commonly believed that women engage in fat talk in order to receive positive affirmations and to draw the attention of others, the present study provides empirical support that fat talk is associated with self-enhancing motivations and that such motivations are viewed negatively by others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the present study is the first to explore the ability of a woman's weight status to moderate the effects of her fat talk. Although weight status has been addressed in research that explores perceptions of eating (Ginis & Leary, 2006) and exercise behaviors (Mooney, DeTore, & Malloy, 1994), previous research has not addressed the implications of body weight in the perceptions of and reactions to fat talk. Importantly, the current study did find that fat talk is perceived differently--and even evokes different reactions--according to the relative weight between the target and audience. Taken together the many insights offered by the current study supplement Nichter and Vuckovic's (1994) original depiction of fat talk.

Practical Applications

Beyond the valuable contributions to the literature and to the theoretical framework of fat talk, the current study has far-reaching practical implications. For example, although fat talk is considered to be a normative behavior (e.g., Britton et al., 2006; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996), the current results suggest that women who engage in it may jeopardize their interpersonal relationships, as they may inspire negative emotions and attitudes. Women who are thinner than their peers should be especially careful to consider the negative implications of their fat talk on their female audience (i.e., feelings of frustration and displeasure). On the other hand, women who are larger than their peers should be aware that their own fat talk can potentially create uncomfortable situations for others. Women may not know how to respond politely to a heavier

woman's fat talk and may consequently withdraw from the conversation. Beyond their interpersonal relationships, women should be cognizant of how their own bodily self-criticism can encourage other women to criticize themselves, thus perpetuating the behavior of fat talk. Rather than completely inhibiting their emotions and denying their body dissatisfaction, perhaps women could portray their bodily concerns in a more positive, self-accepting light. For instance, if a woman finds that a pair of pants are too tight, it might be more tactful for her to say that "the pants are too small…I think I need a bigger size," rather than to complain about how she has "recently gained 15 lbs" and "feels so fat." By undertaking such efforts, women might help to cease the trend of fat talk, to create a more positive social environment, and perhaps to boost their own self esteem.

The current study also provides important implications for the media, particularly in the field of advertising. Based on the current findings, it appears that the media is perpetuating a behavior in women that is not flattering to others. Most importantly, the media's promotion of the "thin ideal" probably encourages women to engage in fat talk, which in turn contributes to women's ever-worsening body esteem. Consequently, the media should make an effort to promote satisfaction with one's body and to denounce self-degradation. Such efforts--exemplified by the new television series *Ugly Betty* and the film *Real Women Have Curves*--could reduce women's desire to fat talk and therefore enhance women's overall self-image. Similarly, great attention should be given to improving the marketing industry. As proposed by Wilson and Blackhurst (1999), advertisements often communicate that all women can afford to improve their physiques. However, upon seeing a thin woman in advertisements (e.g., women selling clothing or food products), a female audience may become annoyed and disengaged. As such, marketers might be losing the interest of consumers who feel insecure while viewing

advertisements. Thus, marketers may be more successful (i.e., more persuasive and engaging) by evoking positive rather than negative emotions in female consumers.

Potential Limitations

Despite the important findings of the present study, several limitations warrant mention. Most notably, participants did not actually observe or interact with the target woman, but instead read a hypothetical scenario. As such, participants' anticipated reactions and even their perceptions of the target may have been different had they actually witnessed the fat talk. For example, participants' body image and self-esteem may have been worse if they were actually standing in a dressing room, observing themselves in the mirror, and listening to a friend criticize or accept her body. In a real situation, women's concerns for social-desirability may have also influenced their verbal responses to the situation. That is, whereas participants in a real situation may feel pressured to give positive feedback, the hypothetical scenario used here gave participants the opportunity to provide answers without fear of the target's reactions. Future research could address this issue by conducting an experiment in which the target woman is an actual person (e.g., a confederate) and participants are led to believe that their verbal responses will be seen or heard by the target.

In addition to the hypothetical nature of the scenario, another limitation of our study was its potential inability to provide an accurate representation of the variables of interest. This concern is especially relevant to the self-presentation variable: the self-acceptance condition may have seemed awkward to participants, as self-acceptance is rarely encountered among women in real life. Moreover, as the participants in the self-acceptance condition had no knowledge of the fat talk condition, they may have perceived the target's self-accepting behavior as a subtle form of self-criticism, as the target did mention that she needed a larger dress size and even made

references to her body. Such a limitation might be eliminated by presenting participants with both a fat talk and a self-acceptance situation. A within-subjects manipulation might allow participants to compare the two types of self-presentation and to make more informed judgments about the target. In a similar vein, some of the participants may have been unable to internalize the target's weight status. The written statement in the scenario that emphasized the target being thinner or heavier may not have been as salient of a manipulation as seeing an actual photograph of a heavier or thinner woman. Consequently, participants may have skimmed over the scenario without encoding the relationship between themselves and the target.

The fact that snowballing was used to recruit participants could also be a potential area of concern. That is, participants might have forwarded the email to other women who were similar to them on several background variables, which could potentially have created pre-existing differences in the four conditions prior to the introduction of the independent variables. However, the present study was able to rule out this potential confound by demonstrating that participants in the four conditions did not differ significantly on any of the background variables (e.g., BMI, body-esteem, and age). Nonetheless, caution should be exercised when generalizing from convenience samples that are not necessarily representative of the population.

Directions for Future Research

In light of the potential limitations of the present study and the need for additional insight into the topic of fat talk, further research is necessary. One fruitful avenue of study may be a more in-depth investigation of individual dependent variables. For example, future research could explore not only how annoyed participants are with a target, but could also assess the level of frustration, contempt, or envy directed toward the target. Additionally, the present study could be expanded greatly by including a free-response section in the follow-up questions. By allowing

participants to express their genuine feelings about the situation and their specific attitudes toward the target, a free-response section would be a valuable supplement to the current research; it would provide a better understanding of how women are personally influenced by the conversations of their female peers.

Although the present study focused on the reactions and perceptions of women who observe fat talk, future research should explore these same variables in women who actually engage in, rather than observe, fat talk. Specifically, it would be interesting to determine what kind of feedback a woman actually desires from her audience and whether such desires vary according to a woman's weight status. In order to conduct this study, participants could be presented with either a fat-talk or self-acceptance scenario, similar to that used in the present study. However, participants could be asked to imagine that they are trying on the dress (who engages in either fat talk or self-acceptance) and to then indicate the type of feedback they would like to receive, how they would react if given specific types of feedback, and how they would view their audience according to the feedback received. For example, women who engage in fat talk may react negatively if the audience fails to provide positive feedback or actually agrees with the women's self-critical remarks.

The current study could also be expanded by including a more diverse participant sample. For instance, as men are often exposed to fat talk and recognize it as a social norm (Britton et al., 2006), it would be helpful to understand how their perceptions and reactions to this behavior differ from those of women. Based on the fact that men are less prone to bodily insecurities than are women (Furnham, Badmin, & Sneade, 2002) and view self-acceptance more favorably than fat talk, it seems likely that men would view fat talk in a more negative light and would experience more frustration in a fat-talk situation. In light of the notion that African American

women are less susceptible to body dissatisfaction than are Caucasian women (Logio, 2003), it would be valuable to replicate the present study with an African American participant sample and to compare the results to the current findings.

A final avenue for future research would be an alteration of current methodology in order to create more realistic manipulations of the independent variables. For example, a next step might be to mirror Craig et al.'s (2007) experiment, in which female participants were exposed to photographs of hypothetical audiences. Future studies could manipulate the weight of the target woman in a photograph that is presented along with a scenario. A photograph might make the target's relative weight status more salient and might generate more accurate responses from participants. Further research could also utilize a real-life confederate to serve as the target woman. Similar to Gapinski et al. (2003), such a study could have participants try on clothes in a dressing room while listening to a confederate engage in either fat talk or self-acceptance. The confederate, who is either heavier or thinner than participants, could meet the participant face-to-face before both women enter their dressing rooms.

Conclusion

Overall, the present study contributes to a long line of research on body image, self-presentation, and weight-stereotypes in addition to shedding light on the emerging topic of fat talk. Fat talk, a characteristic female behavior, can occur at any stage of a woman's life and likely stems from society's fixation on physical perfection. Although such self-degradation may be the norm, it seems to be more appropriate, acceptable, and polite when done by relatively heavier women. All women, whether heavy or thin, should be aware that their fat talk does not go overlooked, but has important effects on the emotions and perceptions of their female friends. The next time they venture into the dressing room, are offered a piece of cake, or try on last

year's swimsuit, women should be aware of the far-reaching effects of their fat talk. If so, women might help to combat the poor body image that pervades American society.

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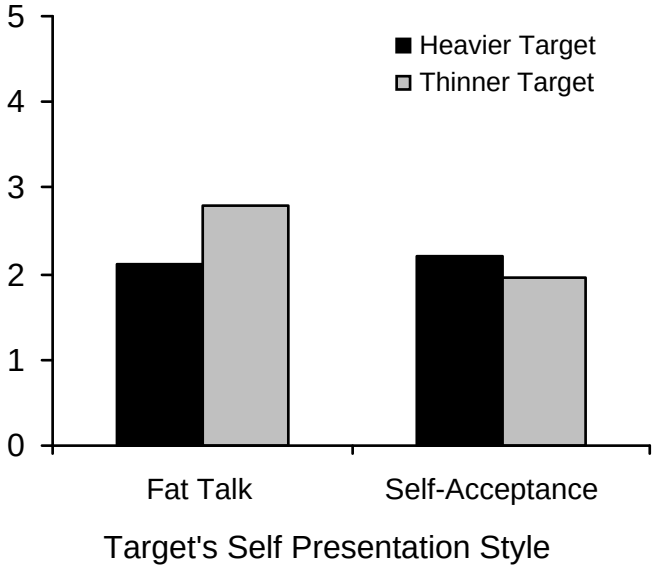
Figure Captions

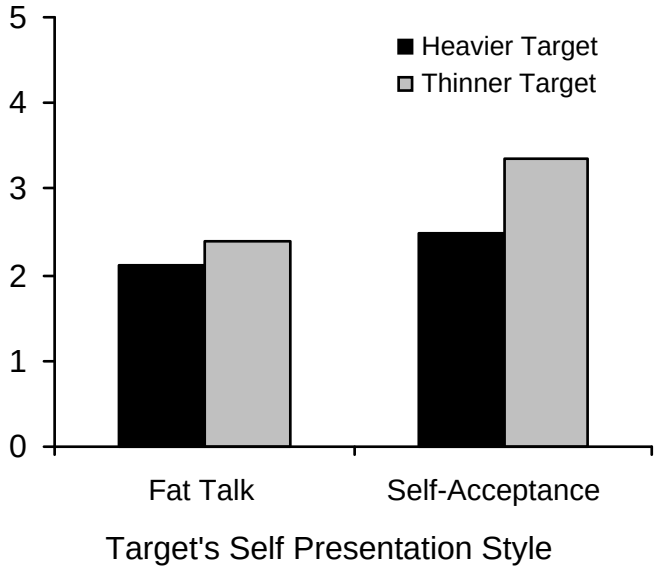
Figure 1. Participants' level of annoyance as a function of the target's self-presentation style and relative weight.

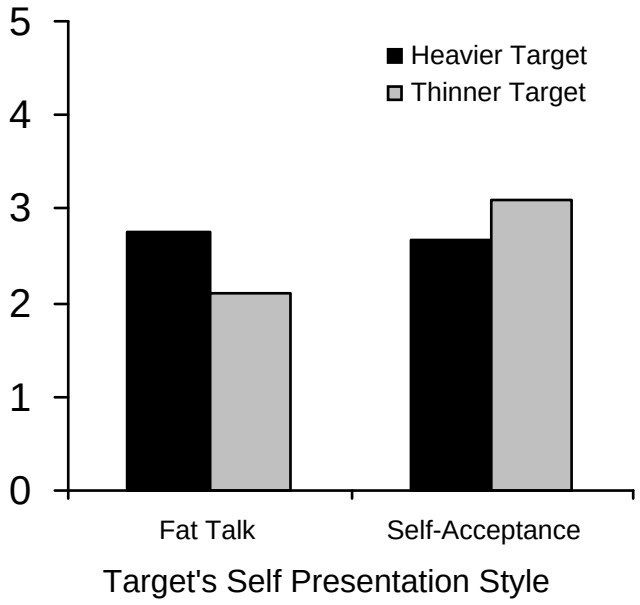
Figure 2. Participants' level of enjoyment as a function of the target's self-presentation style and relative weight.

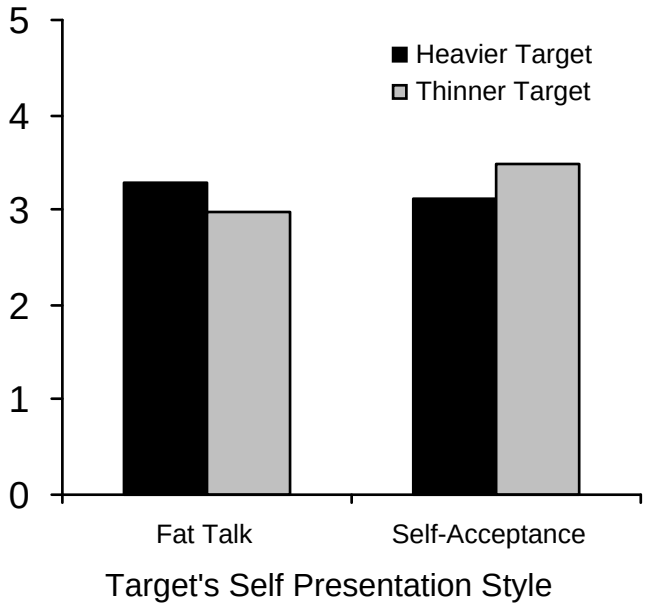
Figure 3. Perceptions of target's modesty as a function of the target's self-presentation style and relative weight.

Figure 4. Perceptions of target's femininity as a function of the target's self-presentation style and relative weight.


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Heavier Target
Thinner Target
Fat Talk
Self-Acceptance
Target's Self Presentation Style


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Heavier Target
Thinner Target
Fat Talk
Self-Acceptance
Target's Self Presentation Style


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Heavier Target
Thinner Target
Fat Talk
Self-Acceptance
Target's Self Presentation Style


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