FAT TALK AMONG CAUCASIAN AND

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

By

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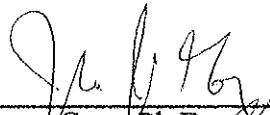of American University

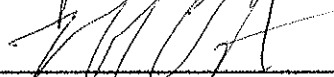in Partial Fulfillment of

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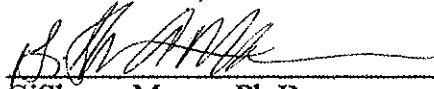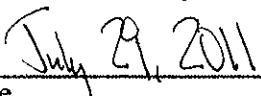
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ABSTRACT

Differences in fat talk were examined among Caucasian and African American women attending college. Among African American women, the influence of acculturation on women's fat talk engagement was also evaluated. As predicted, there were significant ethnic differences in fat talk with African American women being less likely to engage in fat talk. Total acculturation was found to have no influence on a woman's likelihood of engaging in fat talk. Alternative types of talk are discussed which may serve as substitutes for fat talk among African Americans. Limitations and possible future studies are also presented.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fat Talk

Pressure to be thin does not only come from societal messages in the media, but is also communicated in interpersonal relationships through conversations with family, peers, and even strangers (Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008). A type of conversation known as "fat talk" was first identified and described by Nichter and Vuckovic (1994) as conversations with peers, family, and friends about weight, dieting, exercise, and beauty. Fat talk is a specific type of body talk. It can be positive or negative as long as it involves commenting on appearance, dieting, and/or losing weight (Ousley et al., 2008). Fat talk can be viewed as an, "extension of female conversational tendencies to disclose personal information, to agree with and validate each other, and to communicate personal modesty while acknowledging cultural imperatives that appearance is important for females" (Martz, Petroff, & Curtin, 2009, p. 35).

Adolescent girls report hearing fat talk several times a day which indicates that it is a relatively frequent part of their communication with one another (Nichter, 2000). Ousley et al. (2008) identified several broad topics that are associated with fat talk including self-comparison to ideal eating and exercise habits, fear of becoming overweight, assessing the appearance of others, meal replacements and muscle-building strategies, and evaluating how one's eating and exercise habits compare to others. The

most common fat talk topic is the appearance of others. Fat talk involves certain rules of propriety that are not explicitly stated, but nevertheless are widely acknowledged and accepted. Often girls engage in fat talk to receive positive feedback about their appearance from their peers. A girl might say "I'm so fat" expecting her friends to say "No, you're not" (Nichter, 2000).

Fat talk results from a convergence of many different factors. An individual's reason for engaging in fat talk may vary depending on the context of the situation. The most obvious reason that women engage in fat talk is because they really do feel that they are overweight. It is very likely that women who do feel badly about their bodies will choose to express these concerns through fat talk. These women may be particularly vulnerable to using fat talk as an indirect means of receiving compliments in order to feel better about their bodies. However, due to the ritual of fat talk and the perceived pressure that many girls feel to engage in it, fat talk may not always reflect how a girl really feels about her body (Clarke et al., 2010; Nichter, 2000).

Nichter notes another possible explanation for fat talk being women's desire to bond with other women based on shared body image concerns. Fat talk serves as a means by which women can demonstrate their sameness and experience group solidarity. By indicating their flaws, women show that they do not believe they are better than and therefore different from their peers (Nichter, 2000). Women feel better knowing that others also have these concerns. Some women may form friendships in part based on shared body image concerns.

When examining high school sophomores, Paxton, Schutz, Wertheim, and Muir (1999) found that individuals within the same group of friends had similar levels of body

image concerns, dietary restraint, and weight loss behaviors except binge-eating behaviors. In their study, a girl's own use of extreme weight-loss behaviors in early adolescence could be prospectively predicted by the mean of her friends' use of these behaviors. This research indicates that many friendships do involve shared body image concerns. Women may have formed friendships based on these concerns or one girl's body image concerns and behaviors could have lead to greater body surveillance and concern among her friends.

Women with high levels of body image concerns and weight loss behaviors talked frequently with their friends about losing weight, frequently compared their bodies to others, reported being teased about their weight and shape by their friends, and believed their friends were very concerned with dieting and weight loss. All of these behaviors could be construed as engaging in fat talk (Paxton et al., 1999). It is possible that through the "social contagion" of body image disturbances women were more likely to engage in fat talk after hearing their friends engage in it because they came to adopt similar beliefs and attitudes about their own bodies like what Crandall (1988) suggests in relation to binge eating.

The need for group affiliation and the positive effects of fat talk (e.g. validating one's thinness and feeling closer to other women due to shared body image concerns) may be particularly meaningful during adolescence and early adulthood when girls are striving to establish their identity in relation to others. This notion is supported by research which indicates that age is slightly negatively related to a woman's perceived pressure to engage in negative body talk (Martz et al., 2009). A study by McKinley (2006) found that over ten years body esteem increased while body shame and body

surveillance decreased among female undergraduates ranging from 17 to 22 years old. These students' mothers ranging from 38 to 58 years old maintained the same level of body esteem. With age, women developed more committed relationships and careers which may have became more important parts of their identity than their appearance. Therefore, greater emphasis on appearance and greater pressure to engage in fat talk may explain why it is primarily a phenomenon among women during adolescence and early adulthood.

Another explanation for why fat talk occurs is that women may engage in it because they feel the need to draw attention to their body size before others do. Self-objectification theory argues that individuals feel they should be the first critics of their appearances. This theory posits that the objectification of women's bodies in society leads women to objectify their own bodies which results in body shame (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). For example, when a girl is changing in the locker room she may feel particularly vulnerable due to being exposed and engage in fat talk in order to point out her flaws before others do.

Fat talk can also be used to describe one's emotional state. Nichter (2000) describes various uses for the phrase "I'm so fat" as noted in interviews with middle-school aged girls. The phrase is used to convey internal feelings of distress, feeling out of control, and that a girl is having a bad day. Use of the phrase in this way indicates a broader association between feeling fat and negative emotionality.

Fat talk has also been found within college populations (Craig, Martz, & Bazzini, 2007; Ousley et al., 2008). In a study by Ousley et al. (2008), a sampling of male and female college students revealed that students with an eating disorder engaged in

significantly more fat talk compared to students without an eating disorder. Fat talk occurred among students with and without disordered eating habits. This indicates that fat talk is associated with and can reflect serious body image disturbances and eating pathology.

There are many negative consequences which are associated with fat talk. In a study by Stice, Maxfield, and Wells (2003), women felt more dissatisfied with their bodies after hearing a thin, attractive female confederate engage in fat talk by saying that she was fat and needed to lose weight compared to when the confederate discussed a neutral topic. Hearing fat talk resulted in increased body dissatisfaction from pretest to posttest but was not associated with any affective disturbances.

By engaging in the typical fat talk exchange girls are minimizing each other's body image concerns. In a study by Bosson, Pinel, and Thompson (2008) participants read either a validating article in which the author proposed that most women take body image concerns seriously or a minimizing article in which the author proposed that most women think body image concerns are unimportant. Participants then wrote an argument in support of the author's position or a counterargument to the author's position. Women who internalized the minimizing message by writing an argument for it had greater negative affective responses after being exposed to a body image threat compared to their pre-threat affect. They also had lower positive affect compared to women who read an article in which body image concerns were minimized and wrote an argument against this point and women who read both an article and wrote an argument validating body image concerns. This research revealed that minimizing women's body image concerns can have negative consequences. It may interfere with women's ability to cope with these

concerns. The authors also suggest that minimizing women's body image concerns may increase their vulnerability to body image disturbances in the future. Therefore, women's normal responses to fat talk may lead to negative outcomes.

Previously, each researcher measured fat talk in different ways by incorporating themes and elements of women's conversations in broadly defined areas. Clarke, Murnen, and Smolak (2010) developed and evaluated the first quantitative measure of fat talk. The measure consists of nine scenarios in which "Naomi" engages in fat talk with a female friend e.g. "Naomi is hanging out with a friend when she looks in the mirror and says, 'I really need to start working out again. Honestly, I am so flabby.'" Participants were asked to indicate how likely they would be to respond as "Naomi" did in the scenario reporting their answers on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to imagine that "Naomi" and her friends were an average weight for their age (Clarke et al., 2010, p. 7).

The fat talk scale was positively correlated with measures of body surveillance and body shame. Fat talk scores were also negatively correlated with body esteem and positively correlated with measures of passive acceptance of traditional gender roles and eating disordered attitudes. Self-silencing behavior and fear of negative evaluation were also positively correlated with fat talk. Scores on the fat talk scale were not significantly correlated with a participant's self-reported body mass index. This indicates that fat talk is probably used by women to acknowledge their awareness of society's ideal for women, their concern about not achieving this ideal, and to communicate real feelings about their bodies (Clarke et al., 2010).

Ethnic Differences in Fat Talk Among Caucasian
and African American Women

There are several reasons to suspect that fat talk would be less frequent among African American women. African American women typically report being heavier than Caucasian women (Henriques, Calhoun, & Cann, 1996). This is because they actually are heavier. In a study by Rand and Kuldau (1990), 46% of African American women were on average 25 pounds overweight. The rate of obesity among African American women is about 50% compared to 33% among Caucasian women (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010). One reason for this disparity is that African Americans are less likely to engage in physical exercise compared to Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic groups (Lee & Im, 2010).

Fat talk is typically endorsed by girls who are thin or of a normal weight. When girls are overweight, they often do not want to engage in fat talk because they do not want to draw extra attention to their appearance (Nichter, 2000). This suggests that since African American women are more likely to be overweight they will be less likely to engage in fat talk.

Caucasian and African American women also differ in their perceptions of being overweight. African American girls are less likely to see themselves as being overweight compared to Caucasian and Hispanic girls (MMWR, 1991). In a study by Rand and Kuldau (1990), Caucasian women between 18 and 24 considered themselves to not have a weight problem when they were thin and on average 10-14 pounds under the lower limit of the "ideal weight range." Alternatively, older African American women who felt they did not have a weight problem were on average 17-20 pounds overweight with the

average woman reporting to have no weight problem. These findings suggest that African American women view being heavier as more acceptable and common. Since African American women are less likely to see themselves as being overweight, it follows that they would be less likely to refer to themselves as fat. In opposition to Caucasian women's unrealistic body image ideals and concerns, it seems that African American women endorse more realistic ideals and concerns. A study by Petersons, Rojhani, and Steinhaus (2000) found that when African American women did express weight concerns these concerns were actually related to being overweight while this was not true for Caucasian women.

Interestingly, though African American women are more likely to be overweight, they are also more likely to report being satisfied with their bodies (Roberts, Cash, Feingold, & Johnson, 2006). In Nichter's Teen Lifestyle project, 70% of African American women reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their weight while almost 90% of Caucasian women reported some body image concerns (Nichter, 2000). In a study by Storze and Greene (1983), 83% of Caucasian adolescent girls wanted to lose weight although 63% of them were within the normal weight range for their height.

African American women are more satisfied with their bodies meaning that for many African American women although they are medically overweight they do not have a desire to lose weight and do not feel badly about not attaining the thin ideal. Studies also reveal that African American women report a heavier ideal body weight and fewer problematic eating behaviors compared to Caucasian women (Abrams, Allen, & Gray, 1993; Henriques et al., 1996). A study by Abrams et al. (1993) found that compared to Caucasian women African American women engaged in less severe restrictive dieting,

binging, and purging. A more recent study by Striegel-Moore et al. (2003) also found lower rates of eating disorders among African American women. For these reasons, some researchers have suggested that certain aspects of African American life serve as protective factors against a negative body image and more severe disturbances associated with it (Roberts et al., 2006). Greater body image satisfaction and a heavier ideal body weight may serve as protective factors against greater fat talk engagement when it is used as a means of exhibiting real body image concerns. Since African American females are relatively pleased with their bodies, they may be less likely to use derogatory fat talk statements like "I'm so fat."

Caucasian women appear to be more invested in the culture of thinness. In a study by Fisher, Schneider, Pegler, and Napolitano (1991), eighty percent of Caucasian high school students felt that their current weight was greater than the weight where they would be happiest. Research by Parker et al. (1995) demonstrates the differing importance of appearance and being thin among Caucasian and African American women. African American women had a less rigid notion of beauty compared to Caucasian women. When Caucasian women were asked to describe their "ideal girl," they described a girl who was 5'7 and weighed between 100 and 110 pounds. African American women, on the other hand, did not place as much emphasis on physical appearance instead emphasizing personality traits and style of dress. African American women incorporated more aspects of themselves into their standard of perfection while Caucasian women were more fixed on meeting a narrow range of an ideal weight. Caucasian women may be more likely to see the thin ideal as an attainable goal and feel negatively about their bodies when they fail to achieve it. Since African American

women have a broader interpretation of what is beautiful that does not revolve entirely around weight, one would expect that they would talk less about weight by not using fat talk as frequently as Caucasian women.

Nichter's focus group interviews revealed that there are two competing ideals which African American women can choose to aspire to achieve. When asked to describe their "ideal girl," African American girls commonly asked if the group leader was referring to the ideal for African American girls or for Caucasian girls. More than 60% of the girls reported that there was a difference between African American and Caucasian girls' ideals of beauty (Parker et al., 1995). This indicates not only that a difference in the ideals of these two groups occurred, but also that African American women were aware of this difference. During these interviews, African American women demonstrated greater self-esteem often shaping their ideal to fit the way they looked. They actively constructed their ideal image instead of passively accepting the ideal promoted by society.

Another interesting ethnic difference that Nichter noted was the element of communal support prevalent in the African American community in contrast to the competitive nature of many relationships among Caucasian women. African American girls received more positive than negative feedback about how they looked from their families and friends. They even reported receiving compliments from casual acquaintances in public places. African American girls stated that they often engaged in supportive comments towards each other while many Caucasian girls described themselves as being envious and competitive with girls that they deemed attractive (Nichter, 2000).

African American women seem to be at least partially protected from the thin ideal because they do not identify with the Caucasian models prominent in the media. A study by Duke (2000) indicated that African American and Caucasian girls respond differently to ideal images in the media. African American women saw the products as being unnecessary to be beautiful because their conception of beauty was not as greatly centered on physical attractiveness. African American girls focused more on the celebrities in the magazines while Caucasian girls focused more on the models. African American girls also evaluated themselves and others based on personality and character traits while Caucasian girls evaluated themselves and others based on appearance. African American girls viewed advertisements for cosmetics and grooming as being more geared towards Caucasian girls. Most of the women featured in the advertisements were Caucasian so African American girls may have been less able to identify with them and could have seen products as unsuitable for their skin tone and hair texture.

A study by Frisby (2004) supports this notion as African American women experienced more negative self-evaluations after being exposed to African American models compared to Caucasian models. Being exposed to and comparing themselves to other African American women who tend to be larger could cause African American women to have a larger ideal body size and increase their likelihood of seeing the thin ideal as unrealistic. Allan (1989) suggests that in his study African American women compared themselves to other African American women who were heavier instead of comparing themselves to the thin ideals prominent in the media. These studies indicate that a disparity exists in how African American and Caucasian girls interpret information from the media and in their internalization of the thin ideal. Caucasian women may have

been more susceptible to media images emphasizing the thin ideal. This could have stemmed from preexisting beliefs in the thin ideal or greater vulnerability to these images because the women depicted in them were from their same ethnic group.

One participant's explanation for this disparity was that African Americans were less likely to adopt the Caucasian standard of beauty because of their experience of being a racial minority. This individual suggested that the experience of being judged based on skin color makes African American women less likely to judge other women based on an ideal. Therefore, African Americans understand what it is like to be ostracized because of not meeting a standardized notion of what one should look like and are less likely to ostracize others for not meeting these standards (Frisby, 2004).

Other protective factors against a negative body image and greater fat talk engagement may include African American women having different factors which influence their body satisfaction, less pressure to be thin from family and friends, and awareness of different preferences among the men of their ethnic group. A study by Henriques et al. (1996), suggests that body satisfaction has different dynamics for African Americans and Caucasians. African American women were less susceptible to positive and negative social feedback compared to Caucasian women. Feedback consisted of percentile rankings in terms of their conversation skills, social skills, interpersonal skills, friendliness, and overall first impression. This feedback influenced Caucasian women's reported body satisfaction, but among African American women this feedback had no significant effect. This suggests that African American women have a more stable body image while Caucasian women's feelings about their bodies are more malleable.

In a study by Atlas, Smith, Hohlstein, McCarthy, and Kroll (2002), Caucasian women saw their lives as being improved more by being thin compared to African American women. This could explain why Caucasian women are more likely to increase their satisfaction with their bodies as a way of improving their self-esteem (Henriques et al., 1996). There may be a link between body satisfaction and self-esteem among Caucasian women such that their body satisfaction varies with their mood or situations that influence their self-esteem while this relationship does not exist or may not be as strong among African American women.

One possible self-esteem threat is hearing one's friend who is of a normal weight talk about how she is fat. This threat could then negatively influence a woman's body satisfaction. It seems that Caucasian women's self esteem is more strongly tied to their body image. This reflects the greater importance of the thin ideal among Caucasian women. Therefore, Caucasian women may be more likely to feel negatively about their bodies in the previous scenario and therefore engage in fat talk.

African American and Caucasian women may also differ in their tendency to engage in fat talk as a means of bonding. Solidarity is an important part of African American women's relationships with each other. A study by Hughes and Heuman (2006) found that this solidarity was expressed by dichotomizing intraracial (in-group) and interracial (out-group) friendships. African American vernacular, authentic communication, and being true to one's African American identity were also used to demonstrate solidarity. Caucasian women may feel less of a sense of solidarity with each other compared to African American women. The desire for group membership and sameness may be particularly important for Caucasian women. This may cause them to

engage in more fat talk in order to bond with each other over their shared body image concerns. Fat talk may serve as a "leveling device" to illustrate sameness and may be considered a prerequisite for group membership (Nichter, 1995). On the other hand, African American women may have less of a desire to use fat talk as a means of bonding because they may bond with other African American women based on other things like a shared culture.

Less body dissatisfaction among African American women may also be due to knowledge of the preferences of men in their ethnic group for larger women. Some research suggests that African American men prefer a heavier, healthier body size compared to Caucasian men (Thompson, Sargent, & Kemper, 1996). A study by Glasser, Robnett, and Feliciano (2009) found differences in the body size and shape preferences of African American and Caucasian men seeking women through internet dating. Caucasian men preferred women who were thin and toned while African American men preferred women who had thick or large bodies. In interviews with middle school girls, Nichter noted that many African American girls were aware that African American boys preferred women with more shapely figures (Nichter, 2000).

A study by Overstreet, Quinn, and Agocha (2010) revealed differences in body image preferences among Caucasian and African American women. While the majority of African American and Caucasian women preferred an hourglass shape, differences existed not based solely on one's overall weight but how that weight was distributed. African American women preferred a larger overall weight and buttocks while Caucasian women preferred a smaller buttocks and smaller weight. Therefore, women's ideal body

image preferences do seem to correspond with the preferences of the men within their same ethnic group.

However, some research suggests that this difference in preferences is lessening. In a study by Freedman, Carter, Sbrocco, and Gray (2007), both Caucasian and African American men held preferences for women of their own ethnic group to be underweight or a normal weight. Nevertheless, in this study African American men preferred a lower waist-to-hip ratio indicative of a more curvaceous figure. African American men's level of acculturation did not influence their preferences for the ideal body weight of African American women. Although research regarding racial differences in men's preferences for the body size and shape of women remains divided, it is possible that a woman's knowledge of her partner's preferences for a larger body size may be a protective factor against body dissatisfaction for many African American women.

Some researchers have argued that body image dissatisfaction research has focused too narrowly on thinness. Research by Overstreet et al. (2010) suggests that African American women also experience body dissatisfaction, although these feelings are often based on different factors than what is common among Caucasian women. In her study, African American women with smaller buttocks were more dissatisfied with their bodies than women with larger buttocks. Both ethnic groups were influenced by not meeting their ideal breast size and ideal weight. Although thinness is most heavily emphasized within our society and is the most prominent ideal, there are other areas of women's bodies which can be associated with an overall negative body image. A study by Forbes and Frederick (2008) found that Caucasian women reported less satisfaction

with their breast sizes which was associated with overall lower levels of satisfaction with their bodies compared to African American women.

Acculturation

The relationship between acculturation and body image concerns and acculturation and disordered eating among Caucasian and African American women is unclear. A study by Granberg, Simons, and Simons (2009) found an inverse relationship between weight and social self-image. Social self-image was measured using meaningful social characteristics that were linked to behavior and attitudes about smoking, alcohol use, diet, and exercise. In this study, the number of African Americans in a woman's neighborhood was associated with a reduced negative self-image related to being overweight. The authors state that, "Many African American women live in a social context that may reduce the influence of mainstream appearance standards on their self-evaluations" (Granberg et al., 2009, p. 272). Racial segregation, spending time with members of one's ethnic group, is an important aspect of acculturation (Landrine & Klonoff, 2000). By living within this context, African American women may be more exposed to cultural beliefs and ideals that promote a heavier ideal and greater acceptance of being overweight.

A study of Fijian women by Becker, Fay, Gilman, and Striegel-Moore (2007) found that a woman's level of acculturation influenced her body shape concern such that the more acculturated to the majority culture women became the more body image concerns they experienced. A study by Cini (2000) found a trend for more acculturated African American women to internalize Caucasian standards. It seems that African

Americans exist in a "double consciousness" where they can and often times must

navigate between two different worlds and sets of beliefs. Cini's findings indicate that

African American women who are more immersed in the dominant, Caucasian culture

are more likely to adopt the beliefs, practices, and traditions of that culture. Alternatively,

African American women who are more immersed in the African American culture

should be more likely to adopt the beliefs, practices, and traditions of that culture.

Therefore, a woman's beliefs about what is beautiful would likely be influenced by her

cultural ties. However, it should be noted that some studies have not found a significant

relationship between acculturation and eating disturbances (Aruguete, Nickleberry, &

Yates, 2004).

African American women who because of strong cultural ties adopt the African

American ideal of beauty should place less emphasis on being thin. This should be

associated with less time spent talking about one's weight and expressing guilt and

concern about not meeting the thin ideal. African American women who are raised with

the values and practices of their ethnic group are more likely to be more acculturated to

the African American culture and therefore should be less likely to engage in fat talk.

Perceived Pressure to Engage in Fat Talk

The social incentive to engage in fat talk is a strong motivator for many girls to

engage in it whether or not they actually believe they are overweight. Eliciting fat talk is

seen as one of the few ways that a girl can receive praise by criticizing herself and

subsequently having others validate her thinness. When fat talk is initiated by their peers,

girls frequently feel pressure to join in by making self-disparaging comments about their

own bodies. The pressure to join in fat talk may stem from internal pressure to behave in a similar manner as one's peers (Nichter, 2000). After reading vignettes of women engaging in fat talk, college women believed that most women would participate in fat talk by engaging in body disparagement (Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, & LeaShomb, 2006). Women believed other women would conform to the rules of fat talk by speaking negatively about their bodies when their friend did so. Speaking negatively about themselves was seen as the only reasonable response to a friend engaging in fat talk because women believed talking positively about themselves would be seen as bragging and could lead to social ostracism (Nichter, 2000).

Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau, and Bazzini (2009) explored this issue by investigating the relationship between a girl's conformity to fat talk and ratings of her social likeability. Subjects were shown a vignette of three girls interacting and were asked to assess the social likeability of a hypothetical target, "Jenny." "Jenny" either talked positively or negatively about her body. She described a New Year's resolution concerning her body. The content was similar in both conditions but "Jenny" spoke in greater detail in the negative condition. The two other girls then either spoke positively (e.g. "I've been feeling pretty good about my body") or negatively (e.g. "I've been feeling really fat lately") about their bodies. Subsequently, Jenny either conformed by speaking negatively about her body or made a self-accepting comment.

"Jenny" was perceived as more likeable when she spoke positively about her body if subjects rated her based on their own opinions. Conversely, subjects believed that the group would like Jenny more if she conformed by talking negatively about her body. This research indicates a discrepancy between girls' personal beliefs and opinions and their

beliefs about the values of their larger social groups. It is possible that many girls do not really like the culture of negative body talk that they live in, but engage in it because they feel they must do so in order to be liked. This research sheds light on how conformity influences women's fat talk engagement.

A study by Martz et al. (2009) revealed significant gender differences in the frequency in which individuals engaged in fat talk and the perceived pressure they felt to engage in it. Participants were asked to imagine a friend or coworker making either positive, negative, or self-accepting comments about his or her body. They were then asked to rate how likely they were to hear each form of body talk and how much pressure they would feel to make positive, negative, or self-accepting comments about themselves. Not surprisingly, women were more likely to hear fat talk compared to men. Women also reported experiencing more pressure to engage in fat talk. Girls who were obese felt more pressure to engage in fat talk, but did not actually engage in it at a higher frequency. This further supports the notion that girls feel they are not expected to speak too favorably about their bodies. In this study, information was not retrieved on any physical attributes of participants' friends to assess the influence that the audience may have on an individual's perceived pressure to engage in fat talk.

Variables Influencing Fat Talk

Tucker, Martz, Curtin, and Bazzini (2007) examined the influence of the target audience on participant's type of body talk. A female confederate made either self-aggrandizing, self-derogating, or self-accepting comments about her body. Results revealed that participants' body image reports mirrored the self-presentational style of the

confederate such that women had the poorest reported body image when the confederate self-derogated. Craig et al. (2007) examined the degree to which women would manage their impressions by modifying their self-reported body image based on the perceived audience type (male, female, public, or private). In this study, the audience had no significant effect on body esteem ratings. This experiment may have lacked the realistic qualities necessary to evoke pressure to engage in fat talk.

There are also certain contexts in which fat talk's effects may be more or less harmful. In a study by Gapinski, Brownwell, and LaFrance (2003), women were exposed to fat talk or control talk while either trying on sweaters or swimsuits. There was a marginally significant interaction such that fat talk was associated with more negative emotions than hearing control talk when women were wearing sweaters, but when women were wearing swimsuits fat talk was associated with less negative emotion than hearing control talk. Trying on a sweater could be associated with more negative emotion after hearing fat talk because women were not as prepared to judge their bodies in this context. When trying on swimsuits, women may expect to have to evaluate their bodies because they are more exposed and vulnerable. Also, hearing another woman express her concerns about her body may help women to feel that they are not the only ones with these concerns. Fat talk may serve as a bonding experience when women are in a particularly vulnerable state. The negative emotion of trying on a swimsuit could have been counteracted by the positive experience of feeling a bond with the confederate who engaged in fat talk. These findings also suggest that fat talk has situational contexts in which it is more socially expected.

Overview and Hypotheses

Fat talk has typically been evaluated among Caucasian women (Nichter, 2000; Clarke et al., 2010). In her ethnological study, Nichter (2000) did not find the presence of fat talk in the same frequency when interviewing African American middle school girls. Using data analysis of survey data which was a part of the same Teen Lifestyle Project using culturally relevant language and themes, Nichter found differences in body image satisfaction, among Caucasian and African American girls (Parker et al., 1995). However, these questions were not specifically targeted towards fat talk and also more broadly assessed differences in weight management, dieting, body image, smoking practices, and other behaviors among teens.

Subsequent research has failed to examine the presence of fat talk among African American populations and to explore factors which could possibly influence the frequency and nature of fat talk within this population. This study will be the first to assess ethnic differences in fat talk in an empirical study using a quantitative measure of fat talk. Instead of engaging in fat talk, African American women may be more likely to talk about other aspects of physical attractiveness like skin color, hair, or facial features as well as personality traits (Parker et al., 1995; Roberts et al., 2006).

The scope of this study involves negative self-directed fat talk. The first hypothesis was that African American women would be less likely to engage in fat talk compared to Caucasian women. This prediction was based on the potential protective factors present among many African American women against a negative body image such as greater body image satisfaction, less internalization of the thin ideal, and less emphasis on weight. Other factors such as the knowledge of men's preferences for a

larger body size, a higher rate of obesity, and greater ethnic identification are also believed to be associated with less fat talk engagement among African American women. The second hypothesis was that among African American women those who were more acculturated to the African American culture would be less likely to engage in fat talk. The acculturation subscales of racial segregation and preferences for things African American were predicted to be particularly relevant to women's fat talk engagement.

It was also predicted that African American women would be less dissatisfied with their bodies than Caucasian women. In addition, greater body image dissatisfaction, greater internalization of the thin ideal, weaker ties to one's ethnic group, and greater sociocultural pressure were predicted to influence a woman to engage in a higher frequency of fat talk regardless of her ethnicity. African American women attending Howard University were predicted to be more acculturated to the African American culture than African Americans at American University. Howard University students will have more cultural pride and be more in line with the African American ideal of beauty. They will be less likely to adopt the Western notion of beauty. Therefore, African American women at Howard University will be less likely to engage in fat talk compared to African Americans at American University.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Participants

Caucasian and African American students (N = 120) from American University,

Howard University, and the community in the greater Houston area were recruited for the

present study. Participants were recruited from American University through introductory

psychology courses, newsletter announcements, and fliers. Individuals were recruited

from Howard University through introductory psychology courses. Lastly, individuals

were recruited from the greater Houston area through word of mouth. All participants

were female. These women ranged in age from 18-25 years old. The mean age of

participants was 19.45 with a standard deviation of 1.68. Participants included in the

primary analysis comparing African American and Caucasian women identified

themselves as being either Caucasian or African American with both parents of their

same ethnic group. For analysis, only 102 participants were used (51 Caucasian and 51

African American). These participants were natives of the United States. The eighteen

remaining participants who indicated that they were of Afro-Caribbean descent, African

descent, or that one or more parents belonged to more than one ethnic group were

compiled into a separate category and were not used for hypothesis testing. International

students of European origin were also placed in a separate category. Individuals of other

ethnicities (e.g. Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern origin) were excluded for the

purposes of this study. Students at American University were able to choose between

having psychology course credit or entering in a lottery for a $100 prize. Students at

Howard University were entered into the same lottery for the cash prize.

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the start of the study.

Participants were asked to report demographic information including their age,

hometown, and the school that they attended. Participants then completed measures

including the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure scale, the revised Ideal-Body Stereotype

scale, the revised African American Acculturation scale, the Multidimensional Body

Self-Relations questionnaire, and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity measure. Next,

participants completed the Fat Talk scale and reported the frequency in which they heard

fat talk and other types of talk. Qualitative data was then obtained through written

responses to two questions. Participants were measured to determine their height in

inches and they stepped on a scale backwards to obtain their weight in pounds. These

measurements were used to calculate their body mass index. Participants were then

debriefed and chose the type of compensation they would prefer for their time.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

Individuals were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire in which they

reported their age, the institution they attended, the ethnic background of both of their

parents, their hometown, and an e-mail address which would be used to contact them if

they won the lottery prize. Upon completion of the measures, individuals' responses were coded as a safeguard to protect their privacy.

Fat Talk

The Fat Talk Scale is a 9 item scale that examines the frequency of fat talk (Clarke et al., 2010). Subjects were asked to indicate on a 5 point Likert scale how likely they would be to respond using fat talk in a given scenario as "Naomi," an imaginary girl, does. A principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation of sixteen potential items for the fat talk scale revealed three factors. Based on these factors, seven items were removed from the scale leaving the nine items which now comprise the scale. These nine items all loaded highly on the first factor. Sample items include "Naomi is eating lunch with her friends when she decides to get up from the table and get dessert. Before she leaves the table she makes a comment such as 'I am now officially a huge fatty!'" and "Naomi is sitting with her friend on a bench when she looks down at her thighs and exclaims that her thighs might as well take up the entire set." The scale has a good internal consistency and test-rest reliability, r =.90 and r =.82, p<.001 respectively.

The present study modified the original instructions that were given to participants. In the original study, participants were asked to imagine that Naomi and her friends were an average weight for their age. In the present study, participants were instructed to imagine that Naomi and her friends were 5'4 and weighed approximately 134 pounds. This corresponds with a body mass index of 23. This manipulation was done to reduce the variability in individuals' interpretations of what was a "normal" weight. Nevertheless, a discrepancy may still have occurred in how African American and

Caucasian women perceived this description. African American women may have perceived this weight and height to be reflective of a much smaller individual than Caucasian women (Gore, 1999). This could have been due to African Americans having a larger average weight compared to Caucasian women (Flegal et al., 2010).

Participants were also asked to report how likely they would be to hear each type of comment in their daily lives. Individuals of African American descent were asked to imagine that Naomi and her friends were African American while individuals of Caucasian descent were asked to imagine that Naomi and her friends were Caucasian. Therefore, when responding each participant imagined themselves responding in a group scenario among individuals of their same ethnic group.

Other Talk Questionnaire

Participants were also asked to report the likelihood of them hearing comments about hair, skin color, facial features, and personality traits within their daily lives. This information was used to assess whether African American women substituted other types of talk for fat talk.

Body Image

The Multidimensional Body Self-Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990) is a 69 item scale that examines individual's feelings about their physical attractiveness, physical health, and satisfaction with specific body parts. Individuals responded to items (e.g. "my body is sexually appealing," "I don't care what people think about my appearance," and "I am a physically healthy person") on a 5 point Likert scale. The scale consisted of 10 subscales including appearance evaluation (α =

.88) which dealt with satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's body, appearance

orientation (α = .85) which dealt with investment in one's appearance, body areas

satisfaction (α = .73) which dealt with satisfaction with specific parts of one's body, self-

classified weight (α = .89) which dealt with how a person labels their weight from very

underweight to very overweight, and overweight preoccupation (α = .76) which examined

an individual's fat anxiety, dieting, weight vigilance, and eating restraint.

Internalization of the Thin Ideal

The Ideal-Body Stereotype Scale, Revised (Stice & Agras, 1998) is a 10 item

scale that examines an individual's internalization of the thin ideal body image. Subjects

indicated their level of agreement with statements (e.g., "slender women are more

attractive") on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. The scale

has been found to have a good internal consistency (α = 0.91) and test-retest reliability (r

= 0.80).

Pressure From Family

The Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (Stice & Agras, 1998) examines the

amount of pressure individuals feel from family and friends to be thin. It is a 10 item

scale in which subjects indicated the frequency ranging from 1 = none to 5 = a lot in

which they had experienced several statements (e.g. "I've noticed a strong message from

my friends to have a thin body"). The internal consistency of this scale is α =.88. The

scale also has a good test-retest reliability, r =.93.

Level of Acculturation

The African American Acculturation Scale Revised (AAAS-R) which consists of 47 items was the only measure given only to African American participants (Landrine & Klonoff, 2000). There are eight subscales which assessed an individual across eight dimensions; religious beliefs and practices, preferences for things African American, interracial attitudes, family practices, health beliefs and practices, cultural superstitions, racial segregation, and family values. Sample questions include "I believe in the Holy Ghost" and "Most of my friends are black." The scale has a high internal consistency, r = .93. It also has a good split-half reliability, r = .79 (Landrine & Klonoff, 2000).

Ethnic Identity

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity measure, MEIM, (Phinney, 1992) is a 15 item scale which assesses ethnic identity. Ethnic identity items evaluated the individual's ethnic behaviors, ethnic affirmation and belonging, and ethnic identity achievement. Individuals responded to these items (ie. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group) based on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Items 13, 14, and 15 were reports of one's ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of one's father and mother. These items were not included in the ethnic identity score. The ethnic identity subscale has shown good reliability with African Americans and Caucasians, r = .86 and r = .87 respectively (Avery et al., 2007).

Qualitative Data

Participants were asked to provide written responses to the following questions: 1) Why do you think women engage in fat talk? 2) What is the most common source of positive comments that you hear women make about themselves?

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Demographics

The mean age for Caucasian participants was 19.42 with a standard deviation of 1.82. The mean age for African American participants was 19.53 with a standard deviation of 1.54. Fifty three percent of participants were students at American University and twenty one percent of participants were students at Howard University. As typical of the college population, participants came from various parts of the country. Most individuals originated from the Northeast followed by the South, Midwest, and West coast respectively.

Preliminary Correlations

Pearson correlations were performed to evaluate the relationships among the variables. The results for Caucasian and African American participants are presented in Table 1, see page 31. The results for Caucasian participants are presented in Table 2, see page 32. Findings among African American participants are presented in Table 3, see page 33. Fat talk scores among African Americans were not significantly correlated with total acculturation scores $r = .158$, $p > .05$. None of the subscales of the revised African American Acculturation scale were significantly correlated with fat talk engagement.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix of All Variables Among Caucasian and African American Women

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Fat talk	---										
2. Ethnic identity	-.192*	---									
3. Total acculturation	.158	.158	---								
4. Ideal stereotype	.306**	-.089	-.111	---							
5.Sociocultural pressure	.405***	-.138	.171	.197*	---						
6. Appearance evaluation	-.381***	.351**	-.057	-.260*	-.331**	---					
7. Body areas satisfaction	-.462***	.317**	-.152	-.325**	-.425***	.835***	---				
8. Overweight preoccupation	.527***	-.321**	.132	.147	.455***	-.524***	-.512***	---			
9. Self-classified weight	.354***	-.174	.194	.226*	.488***	-.364**	-.420***	.486***	---		
10. Body mass index	.151	.121	.265	-.216*	.358**	-.090	-.306*	.218	.716***	---	
11. Frequency of hearing fat talk	.629***	-.196*	.092	.246*	.407***	-.299**	-.363*	.301**	.133	.016	---

Note: *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$***$p< .001$

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of All Variables Among Caucasians

	L	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Fat talk	---									
2. Ethnic identity	.151	---								
3. Ideal stereotype	.437**	.047	---							
4. Sociocultural pressure	.524***	-.019	.205	---						
5. Appearance evaluation	-.359	.120	-.209	-.358	---					
6. Body areas satisfaction	-.450*	.366	-.257	-.432*	.874***	---				
7. Overweight preoccupation	.701***	-.236	.164	.400*	-.614***	-.725***	---			
8. Self-classified weight	.474*	-.282	.246	.246	-.344	-.426*	.530**	---		
9. Body mass index	.403*	.060	.109	.266	.022	-.072	.382	.729***	---	
10. Frequency of hearing fat talk	.623***	.113	.058	.606***	-.448*	-.514*	.528**	.215	.318	---

Note: *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of All Variables Among African American Women

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Fat talk	---										
2. Ethnic identity	-.009	---									
3. Total acculturation	.158	.158	---								
4. Ideal stereotype	-.089	.046	-.111	---							
5. Sociocultural pressure	.296*	-.201	.171	.067	---						
6. Appearance evaluation	-.168	.328*	-.057	.067	-.287	---					
7. Body areas satisfaction	-.327*	.241	-.152	-.014	-.491***	.649***	---				
8. Overweight preoccupation	.403**	-.316*	.132	.025	.428**	-.324*	-.265	---			
9. Self-classified weight	.288	.038	.194	.022	.661***	-.231	-.434**	.386*	---		
10. Body mass index	.229	-.118	.265	-.511**	.561**	-.398*	-.564**	.139	.811***	---	
11. Frequency of hearing fat talk	.575***	.054	.092	.097	.173	-.016	-.186	.141	.219	.198	---

Note: *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$***$p < .001$

One of the strongest relationships emerged between a woman's level of fat talk engagement and her reported frequency of hearing fat talk, r = .629, p <.001. Therefore, the more that a woman heard fat talk in her daily life the more likely she was to engage in it. Fat talk was also negatively correlated with the appearance evaluation subscale and the body areas satisfaction subscale and positively with the overweight preoccupation subscale and the self-classified weight subscale, r = -.381, p <.001; r = -.462, p <.001; r = .527, p <.001; r = .354, p=.001. Multi-group ethnic identification was negatively correlated with fat talk, r = -.192, p <.05. Fat talk was also significantly correlated with a woman's internationalization of the thin ideal, r = .306, p <.01. As expected, there was also a strong relationship between a woman's fat talk engagement and her reported pressure from family and friends to be thin, r = .405, p <.001. Body mass index was not correlated with fat talk engagement, r = .151, p >.05. This is consistent with previous findings indicating that fat talk may not be related to a woman actually being overweight (Nichter, 2000).

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis proposed that African American women would engage in less fat talk compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Preliminary data screening was conducted to verify that the assumptions for the t-test were adequately met. A Q-Q plot of the response variable, fat talk, indicated a normal distribution of the scores for both Caucasian and African American groups. One extreme outlier among African Americans and one extreme outlier among Caucasians were removed based on the results of box

plots. The means and standard deviations of fat talk scores for each group of participants

are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4

Fat Talk Means and Standard Deviations

Ethnic group	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Caucasian women	51	26.05	7.29
African American women	51	22.14	6.36
Other Black (African, Afro-Caribbean descent, mixed ancestry)	14	22.07	6.57
Other White (European natives)	4	23.00	9.49

The results revealed a significant effect of ethnicity on fat talk t (100) = 2.888, p

<.01. African American participants (M = 22.14) were significantly less likely to engage

in fat talk compared to Caucasian participants (M = 26.05). Results support the

hypothesis that African American women do not talk about their weight and shape in

terms of a fear of gaining weight and guilt about eating to the same extent that Caucasian

women do.

Separate t-test analysis for each fat talk scenario revealed that African American

and Caucasian women differed significantly in their fat talk engagement in scenarios one,

two, five, and nine. The two groups did not differ significantly in scenarios four, six,

seven, and eight. There was a marginal trend towards significance in scenario three

(p=.065). In all of the fat talk scenarios, the mean for Caucasian women was higher than

the mean for African American women. Means for Caucasian and African American

participants are presented by fat talk scenario in Table 5. Please refer to Appendix F for

descriptions of each fat talk scenario.

Table 5

Means for Caucasian and African American Women by Fat Talk Scenario

Fat talk scenario	Caucasian mean	Caucasian STDEV	African American mean	African American STDEV
Scenario 1	2.51	1.08	1.88	.91
Scenario 2	3.27	1.08	2.59	1.15
Scenario 3	2.80	1.20	2.37	1.13
Scenario 4	2.88	1.16	2.49	1.19
Scenario 5	3.11	1.18	2.55	1.12
Scenario 6	3.25	1.13	3.14	1.27
Scenario 7	2.24	1.09	1.96	1.02
Scenario 8	3.14	1.22	2.78	1.21
Scenario 9	2.84	1.14	2.37	1.09

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis proposed that the more acculturated an African American

woman was to the African American culture the less likely she would be to engage in fat

talk. In order to test the second hypothesis that an African American woman's level of

acculturation is a predictor of her level of fat talk engagement, a linear regression was performed. The analysis revealed that acculturation did not predict a woman's fat talk engagement (b= .027, t = 1.051, p > .05). Separate linear regressions were performed on the subscales of the acculturation scale to determine their influence on fat talk. None of the acculturation subscales significantly predicted fat talk engagement. Racial segregation was the closest subscale to approach significance (b = .144, t = 1.183, p = .243). As predicted, African American women at Howard University were significantly more acculturated than African American women at American University, t(36) = -2.728, p = .01. Contrary to the hypothesis, African American women at Howard University did not significantly differ in fat talk engagement from African American women at American University, t(36) = -1.266, p >.05.

Supplementary Analyses

The frequency in which individuals heard fat talk was a highly significant predictor of fat talk (b = .627, t = 8.046, p < .001). This accounted for approximately 40% of the variance in fat talk scores. Overweight preoccupation was also a significant predictor of fat talk accounting for 28% of the variance in fat talk scores (b = 4.00, t = 5.691, p < .001). Other subscales of the MBSRQ including body areas satisfaction and appearance evaluation were found to be significant predictors of fat talk engagement, (b = -4.502, t = -4.774, p < .001; b = -3.228, t = -3.662, p < .001 respectively). These findings accounted for approximately 21% and 15% of the variance in fat talk scores respectively. The results also indicated that ethnic identity was a significant predictor of fat talk, (b = -2.351, t = -2.000, p <.05). However, it only accounted for about 4% of the variance in fat

talk scores. Regression analyses also revealed that one's internalization of the thin ideal stereotype and perceived sociocultural pressure from family and friends to be thin were significant predictors of fat talk (b = 3.425, t = 3.261, p <.01; b = 4.274, t = 4.584, p <.001). Interestingly, participant's self-classified weight was a significant predictor of fat talk (b = 4.403, t = 3.359, p = .001) although their actual body mass index was not (b = .271, t = 1.304, p > .05).

African American women were significantly more satisfied with their overall appearance and with most specific body parts compared to Caucasian women, t(41.417) = -5.533, p <.001, t(76) = -3.620, p = .001 respectively. African American women were also significantly heavier than Caucasian women, t(46.780) = -3.207, p <.01. Lastly, African American women identified with their ethnic group significantly more than Caucasian women, t(81.618) = -7.003, p <.001. The means and standard deviations of these supplemental variables are presented for both Caucasian and African American participants in Table 6.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Supplemental Variables

Variables	Caucasian mean	Caucasian STDEV	African American mean	African American STDEV
Ethnic identity	2.68	.54	3.30	.32
Ideal stereotype	3.67	.44	3.27	.54
Sociocultural pressure	2.33	.56	2.15	.69

Variables	Caucasian mean	Caucasian STDEV	African American mean	African American STDEV
Appearance evaluation	3.15	.88	4.07	.53
Body areas satisfaction	3.23	.66	3.77	.61
Overweight preoccupation	2.83	.99	2.33	.74
Self-classified weight	3.35	.57	3.17	.45
Body mass index	22.80	2.67	26.00	5.09
Frequency of hearing fat talk	32.00	5.21	26.05	5.72

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine what factors would best explain fat talk. Acculturation, ethnic identity, internalization of the thin ideal stereotype, sociocultural pressure from family and friends to be thin, frequency of hearing fat talk, appearance evaluation, body areas satisfaction, and overweight preoccupation were entered as predictors of fat talk. A multiple regression revealed that only the frequency of hearing fat talk ($b = .408$, $p < .01$) and overweight preoccupation ($b = 2.705$, $p < .05$) were significant predictors of fat talk. Together they accounted for about 33% of the variance in fat talk scores. It should be noted that overweight preoccupation was significantly correlated with hearing fat talk.

Substitutes for Fat Talk

It was theorized that African American women may be engaging in conversations about other topics instead of fat talk. Therefore, the emphasis in African American

conversations may not be on weight but on other aspects of themselves. To assess whether there were differences in conversations about other self-relevant stimuli, African American and Caucasian women were asked to report the likelihood of them hearing conversations about various topics including women's hair, skin color, facial features, and personality traits. The means and standard deviations for these other types of talk are presented below in Table 7.

Table 7

Supplemental Conversations Means and Standard Deviations

	Caucasian mean	Caucasian STDEV	African American mean	African American STDEV
Hair	3.65	.86	4.24	.66
Skin color	2.22	.92	2.94	1.12
Facial features	2.59	.94	2.69	.92
Personality traits	2.49	.90	2.41	.84

A t-test revealed that African American women reported hearing significantly more conversations about hair and skin color compared to Caucasian women, $t(88.169) = -3.830$, $p <.001$; $t(100) = -3.568$, $p =.001$ respectively. There was no difference in the frequency at which African American and Caucasian women reported hearing comments about facial features and personality traits, $t(98) = -.568$, $p >.05$; $t(93) = .450$, $p >.05$ respectively.

Qualitative Data

Participants were asked to provide an explanation as to why women engage in fat talk. Thirty-nine percent of responders attributed fat talk to a woman's insecurities stemming from real feelings about her appearance. Twenty-six percent of women cited a woman's desire for compliments and reassurance that she is not fat. Next, twenty-five percent cited the media and society as a whole for promoting the thin ideal. Lastly, seven percent of women said that they thought women use fat talk as a means of bonding with other women.

There were some differences between Caucasian and African American women in terms of their explanations for fat talk. The two groups differed in their judgments of the media's role in fat talk. Thirty three percent of African Americans blamed the media and society as a whole for fat talk while only 18% of Caucasian women did so. Most Caucasian women (39%) believed women used fat talk to receive compliments, to get others opinions about how they look, and to have others tell them they are not fat. Only 16% of African American participants cited these as reasons for fat talk. On the other hand, almost half (43%) of African American respondents cited insecurities because of real feelings of being overweight. It should be noted that a substantial number of Caucasian women (35%) also attributed fat talk to insecurities and real feelings about one's weight. Lastly, 12% of Caucasian women reported that fat talk was used for bonding/shared camaraderie compared to 2% of African Americans or one African American person.

Participants were also asked to report the most common source of positive comments that they heard women make about themselves. Most positive comments

(20%) stemmed from one's intelligence, abilities, and skills. Sixteen percent of participants reported hearing women make positive comments about their outfit or style of dress. Other comments referenced one's hair (13%) and personality traits (11%). It should be noted that a substantial portion of participants (14%) did not answer the question or stated that they very rarely heard women speak positively about themselves. Most participants failed to answer the question because they could not think of an answer.

Twenty-five percent of Caucasian women reported hearing positive comments about their intelligence while only 14% of African American women heard these types of comments. Comments about one's hair (18%) and one's curves (16%) including one's butt, hips, and thighs were the most prevalent sources of positive comments among African American women. Comments about one's butt, hips, and thighs were not found among any Caucasian participants. Other aspects of oneself including personality traits and looking good on a particular day were present at similar rates for both groups.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to determine if there were ethnic differences in fat talk among Caucasian and African American women using a quantitative measure of fat talk. Fat talk was described as normative conversations about weight and shape. Fat talk was first observed and described during focus-group interviews with eighth-grade girls (Nichter, 2000). Subsequent studies have not empirically evaluated ethnic differences in fat talk among African American and Caucasian women as well as factors which could influence fat talk engagement among African American women. The present study serves to evaluate whether these differences occur and to gain a better understanding of the role of factors like acculturation which may influence fat talk engagement among African American women.

Furthermore, the present study examines whether differences in other forms of self-relevant conversation topics exist among African American and Caucasian women. By examining the themes within women's normative conversations about themselves, insight into what aspects of women's internal and external identity are most emphasized within each ethnic group could be gained. Lastly, other supplementary variables were evaluated including the internalization of the thin ideal, sociocultural pressure from family and friends to be thin, body mass index, aspects of one's body image (e.g.

overweight preoccupation, appearance evaluation, classification of one's weight, and satisfaction with specific areas of one's body) to explore their relationship with fat talk.

The first hypothesis was that African American women would engage in a lower frequency of fat talk compared to Caucasian women. Fat talk has been assumed to be a Caucasian phenomenon based on popular opinion and Nichter's findings during interviews with African American middle-school girls. Fat talk was first observed among white, middle class girls. In these interviews, African American girls said that they did not hear or engage in much fat talk (Nichter, 2000). Subsequent studies have examined fat talk among college age populations (Britton et al., 2006; Ousley & Cordero, 2008).

As predicted, African American women engaged in significantly less fat talk compared to their Caucasian counterparts. It seems that African American women do not emphasize weight in their conversations as much as Caucasian women do. Among African American women, conversations about being fat were the least common of all conversation topics while among Caucasian women fat talk was the second most common conversation topic. This suggests that some aspects of the African American culture may serve as protective factors against a negative body image and frequently engaging in fat talk. In particular, a more inclusive and less unrealistic body image ideal, having a strong attachment to one's ethnic group, greater body image satisfaction and feelings of attractiveness, satisfaction with specific body parts, less fat anxiety and dieting, and being less exposed to fat talk may protect African American women from developing the same level of body image concerns and engaging in as much fat talk as their Caucasian counterparts. The results of the present study are in line with differences

observed during Nichter's interviews with middle school Caucasian and African American girls.

African American women also reported hearing less fat talk among their friends compared to Caucasian women. A significant positive correlation existed among a woman's level of fat talk engagement and the frequency in which she reported hearing fat talk comments in her daily life. These findings were consistent with other studies which illustrated that many women feel pressure to engage in fat talk (Nichter, 2000; Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau, & Bazzini, 2009). Women who hear fat talk on a regular basis and experience this as a more common aspect of their female relationships may feel more pressure to engage in these conversations and subsequently conform by engaging in more fat talk. In a study by Martz et al. (2009), a positive correlation was found among women's reported likelihood of hearing negative body talk and pressure to participate in negative body talk.

The second hypothesis was that the more acculturated an African American woman is to the African American culture the less likely she will be to engage in fat talk. None of the subscales of the acculturation scale were significantly correlated with fat talk. Many of the subscales such as religious beliefs and practices, interracial attitudes, and cultural superstitions would not be expected to be directly related to fat talk as individual subscales. The racial segregation subscale was the closest subscale to approach significance. It is likely that a larger sample size was needed in order for significant findings to be revealed.

It is surprising that the subscale of preferences for things African American was not related to fat talk. This subscale measured preferences for African American music,

magazines, and people. Although preferences for African American people and magazines could be associated with greater alignment and exposure to a broader ideal of beauty, these factors were not associated with fat talk. A study by Aruguete et al. (2004) also failed to establish a relationship between acculturation and body image among Caucasian and African American women. They proposed that although ethnic differences in body image satisfaction and eating disturbances occur, acculturation may not adequately explain these differences. Other aspects of acculturation or ethnic identification may better explain these differences.

As expected, greater body image dissatisfaction, greater internalization of the thin ideal, weaker ties to one's ethnic group, and greater sociocultural pressure predicted a higher frequency of fat talk engagement regardless of a woman's ethnicity. African American and Caucasian women were more satisfied with their bodies and felt more attractive compared to Caucasian women. These findings were consistent with previous findings in which African American women reported greater body image satisfaction and a heavier ideal body weight (Henriques et al., 1996; Nichter, 2000). It appears that since African American women feel better about their appearances, they are less likely to express body image concerns through fat talk. A more fluid and inclusive body image ideal allows more African American women to feel positively about their bodies. There is currently a lot of debate on whether body image differences are increasing or decreasing among these groups. A meta-analysis by Roberts et al. (2006) found that differences in weight related concerns were diminishing while differences in body image satisfaction were actually widening.

There was an inverse relationship between a woman's sense of belonging to her ethnic group and her likelihood of engaging in fat talk. It is important to note that among African Americans and among Caucasians separately there was not a relationship between ethnic identification and fat talk. The relationship only emerged when both groups were considered together. This suggests that the relationship between ethnic identity and fat talk may be weak or that a larger sample was necessary to produce a relationship within each ethnic group. This finding supports theories that fat talk serves as a form of bonding. Therefore, women who were less able to identify with other women based on shared ethnicity were more likely to try to identify with other women by bonding over shared body image concerns through fat talk. As expected, Caucasian women reported a weaker ethnic identity than African American women. Since some Caucasian women do not feel a strong sense of sameness and unity with other members of their ethnic group, they may be more susceptible to engaging in fat talk to in order to bond with and feel closer to other women.

One surprising result was the differing relationship that emerged between fat talk and ethnic identity and fat talk and acculturation. Fat talk was found to have a relationship with ethnicity when both Caucasian and African American participants were considered, but was not related to acculturation. Women's ethnic identification was also not correlated with their total acculturation scores. Among the acculturation subscales, ethnic identity was only significantly correlated with a woman's preferences for things African American.

The relationship between ethnic identity and acculturation is complicated. Very little research has been done regarding differences between the two constructs. Many

individuals use the terms interchangeably. When comparisons are made, one difference that emerges is that traditionally acculturation scales deal with the extent to which a person aligns him or herself with the customs, traditions, and values of the dominant culture while ethnic identity usually refers to one's immersion and feelings of belonging within one's own ethnic group. In the present study, it is even more difficult to separate these constructs because the measure of acculturation focuses on one's acculturation to the African American culture not the dominant culture.

A study by Andrea Smith (2006) examined the relationship between ethnicity and acculturation. A factor analysis of various measures of ethnic identity and acculturation including the MEIM and AAAS-R which were used in the present study revealed eight factors. Factors belonging to ethnic identity included ethnic belonging, ethnic pride, and public regard. The other five factors that reflected aspects of acculturation were traditional behaviors and beliefs, in-group preference, out-group comfort, in-group rejection, and assimilation ideology. These results suggest that ethnic identity and acculturation are separate, multi-dimensional constructs. Nevertheless, the factors are often related and may differ based on what the researcher emphasizes in his or her definition of these constructs. Smith describes acculturation as an aspect of identity. Another study indicated that the more acculturated to the dominant Caucasian culture an individual was the lower his or her level of African American ethnic identity (Hamm & Coleman, 2001 in Smith, 2006).

Another surprising finding was that African American women who attended a predominately Caucasian institution (American University) were less likely to engage in fat talk than individuals attending a predominately African American institution (Howard

University). It was hypothesized that African Americans at Howard University would engage in less fat talk compared to students at American University. This was because African American women at Howard University were believed to be more acculturated. As expected, women at Howard University were significantly more acculturated to the African American culture than African American women attending American University. African American women at the predominately Caucasian institution engaged in the least amount of fat talk with regard to all other groups. It is unclear why this pattern emerged. However, since there was no relationship between fat talk and acculturation, it is not surprising that there was no difference in fat talk based on one's institution.

Another aim of the present study was to identify which aspects of themselves were emphasized by women within each ethnic group. African American women reported hearing more conversations about hair and skin color compared to Caucasian women. There was no difference in comments about personality traits and facial features between the two groups. Given the history and significance of skin color differences within this country, it is not surprising that this topic would continue to be emphasized within the African American community. Along with skin color, hair texture has been emphasized as women proclaim to have "good hair" meaning that it is similar to European hair. It is somewhat surprising that no difference emerged regarding discussions of facial features. These variables were examined to evaluate if they serve as substitutes for fat talk among African American women.

Fat talk was the second most common type of talk among Caucasian women. Among African Americans, conversations about being fat were the least prevalent of all of the types of conversations evaluated in this study. This difference in what was

emphasized in conversations illustrates the differing importance of weight among the two ethnic groups. Both groups reported hearing conversations about hair most frequently though African American women reported hearing significantly more conversations about this topic. It does appear that instead of talking about weight African American women are emphasizing other aspects of themselves particularly their hair.

African American and Caucasian women emphasize different aspects of themselves in their ideals. In a study by Parker et al. (1995), Caucasian women emphasized weight reporting that their ideal girl was 5'7 and weighed about 100 to 110 pounds. Alternatively, African American women endorsed a broader ideal placing less emphasis on weight and more emphasis on style of dress and personality traits like being smart, friendly, and having a good sense of humor. In the present study, African American women experienced less internalization of the thin ideal. These findings are consistent with previous findings that distinct differences occur in the body image preferences and ideals of African American and Caucasian women.

Participants were asked to provide an explanation as to why women engage in fat talk. Overall, the most common cause of fat talk was reported to be real insecurities. Most Caucasian participants believed that women engage in fat talk in order to receive compliments. They believed women engage in fat talk because they want to feel better about themselves by receiving compliments in a roundabout manner and desire to get others opinions about how they look. Most African American women cited real insecurities as the reason for fat talk.

Caucasian and African American women also differed in the amount of blame that they attributed to the media for fat talk. African American women were almost two times

more likely to blame the media for fat talk. This difference may result from African American women being more willing to challenge the images presented in the media and being more aware of the unrealistic nature of the thin ideal. More Caucasian women also believed that other women used fat talk as a means of bonding in order to feel that they were not the only ones with body image concerns. These findings indicate that when fat talk is present Caucasian and African American women may engage in it for different reasons.

Participants were also asked to report what they hear other women talk about in a positive manner in reference to themselves. Most Caucasian women reported hearing other women make positive comments about their intelligence and having a nice outfit while most African American women heard comments about women's hair, butt, hips, and thighs. Comments about one's butt, hips, and thighs were not found among any Caucasian participants. Curvaceousness as a source of pride among African American women supports findings that in the African American community body image ideals and feelings about one's body are not centered solely on one's weight as is prevalent among Caucasian women, but also on one's shape (Frisby, 2004).

The present study has many important implications. The results of this research help define the population in which fat talk occurs. The study contributes to the knowledge of factors which influence the prevalence of fat talk. This study includes a comprehensive examination of factors relevant to fat talk. Furthermore, this study serves to extend the use of the newly developed fat talk scale and is the first to use it within a minority population. The results of this study provide empirical support for ethnic

differences in fat talk among Caucasian and African American women using a quantitative measure assessing women's fat talk engagement.

This research sheds light on similarities and differences in how the two ethnic groups communicate and bond with each other. The present study identifies which variables (body size, hair texture, skin color, facial features, and personality traits) are most likely to be emphasized as topics of conversation within each ethnic group. These factors could act as a substitute for fat talk. By examining what topics were emphasized in women's conversations about themselves, the study sheds light on what is valued within each ethnic group as well as sources of pride within each group. There is little research on women's positive self-evaluations. This research provides insight into how women see themselves holistically.

Research indicates that one of the purposes of fat talk is for women to acknowledge the culture imperative to be thin (Martz et al., 2009). Fat talk can serve to perpetuate the thin ideal and body image concerns. Although engaging in fat talk is not always a sign of body image concerns, the present findings suggest that there are many women for whom fat talk serves as a means of expressing one's dissatisfaction with one's body.

Previous studies and Nichter's interviews have noted that fat talk is not necessarily indicative of being overweight (Clarke, 2010; Nichter, 2000). In the present study, fat talk was not related to a woman's body mass index but was related to her feelings of unattractiveness, body image dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction with particular areas of her body. Furthermore, the most common reason for fat talk for participants as a whole was reported to be insecurities stemming from real feelings about

one's bodies. The findings of the present study indicate that a woman's actual body size may not be as relevant to fat talk engagement as how she feels about or perceives her weight.

There are several limitations to the present study. All of the participants included in this study were college students. Although participants originated from various parts of the country, the overwhelming majority of students were students at American University and Howard University. Furthermore, most Caucasians participants were students at American University while among African American participants less than half were students at American University. Most participants at both universities were introductory psychology students who participated for course credit. Although many studies have found evidence of fat talk among the college student population, it is possible that this age range is somewhat arbitrary and not reflective of the true age range in which fat occurs. For these reasons, participants may not be representative of the general population of women between the ages of 18 and 25. Though the African American students at these respective universities may differ on many dimensions, they still may not be representative of all African American women within this age group. Lastly, certain aspects of college life including greater exposure to peer pressure and increased social interactions may cause this group to not be reflective of the larger population in terms of fat talk engagement.

Another limitation of this study is that differences in fat talk could result from differences in how African American and Caucasian women talk about their bodies. Therefore, the lower frequency of fat talk observed in African American women may be due to differences in African American women's ability to relate to the scenarios. African

American women may report being less likely to engage in the nine fat talk scenarios because the language reflected a way in which African American women would not speak about their bodies. It is possible that African American women talk about being fat or overweight in ways that are not represented in the scenarios of the fat talk scale. Lastly, there was substantial data missing for the Multidimensional Body Self-Relations questionnaire and measurements of body mass index due to error and technical difficulties.

It is also possible that fat talk may only be an aspect of a larger phenomenon in which individuals speak negatively and critically about themselves. Due to the importance of weight within this society specifically for women, being critical of one's weight may be the most obvious way in which a woman could evaluate herself and self-derogate. Men may also engage in this phenomenon but be more focused on criticizing other aspects of themselves such as their lack of muscularity, occupation, job performance, and athletic ability.

Future studies could evaluate the frequency of fat talk among other ethnic groups as well as variables which may influence the likelihood of a woman's fat talk engagement within these groups. Studies may also evaluate factors associated with the type of audience in which fat talk occurs. Studies have indicated that women are more likely to engage in fat talk after hearing a thin woman engaging in it (Stice, Maxfield, & Wells, 2003). To date, studies have not varied the weight of the target audience to determine if this impacts a woman's fat talk engagement. Real-world studies have used thin models who were perceived as achieving the thin ideal. In reality, fat talk may be a more

complex social phenomenon in which factors of the participant and the target can influence one's fat talk engagement.

Some research suggests that individuals who are overweight may be less likely to engage in fat talk because they do not want to draw attention to their weight (Martz et al., 2009). It is unclear whether individuals who are overweight would feel more comfortable engaging in fat talk around other overweight individuals. However, fat talk could serve as a source of bonding among overweight individuals. If the target is also overweight, overweight individuals may not fear being judged and may be more willing to express weight related concerns through fat talk. Individuals of a normal weight may be reluctant to engage in fat talk with an overweight target out of fear that the overweight person would feel they are also being judged as fat. Nevertheless, research has failed to examine how the interaction of the weight of both the participant and target of fat talk may influence a woman's likelihood of engaging in it. Research could also evaluate what factors may better explain ethnic differences in fat talk engagement between African American and Caucasian women.

The present study adds to the body of literature illustrating ethnic differences adding the element of social conversations about weight. African American women focus on other aspects of themselves and do not emphasize weight in their conversations as much as Caucasian women. Findings also suggest that the two groups engage in fat talk for different reasons. Sources of pride within each community are also useful in understanding the differing ideals that are prevalent within the two ethnic groups.

APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Background information

Age:

Institution attending:

What ethnic background do you consider both of your parents?

Hometown:

E-mail address:

Id # (given by experimenter):

APPENDIX B

PERCEIVED SOCIOCULTURAL PRESSURE

(Stice & Agras, 1998)

Please circle the response that best captures your own experience:

	none		some		a lot
1. I've felt pressure from my friends to lose weight……………………….…..1	2	3	4	5
2. I've noticed a strong message from my friends to have a thin body……………………..1	2	3	4	5
3. I've felt pressure from my family to lose weight . . . .…………………………...1	2	3	4	5
4. I've noticed a strong message from my family to have a thin body. . …………………..1	2	3	4	5
5. I've felt pressure from people I've dated to lose weight. . . . . ………....1	2	3	4	5
6. I've noticed a strong message from people I've dated to have a thin body. ……………………1	2	3	4	5
7. I've felt pressure from the media (e.g., TV, magazines) to lose weight ………1	2	3	4	5
8. I've noticed a strong message from the media to have a thin body. . . . . ……………...1	2	3	4	5
9. Family members tease me about my weight or body shape . …………..................... 1	2	3	4	5
10. Kids at school tease me about my weight or body shape. . . . . ………………………...1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

IDEAL-BODY STEREOTYPE SCALE, REVISED

(Stice & Agras, 1998)

How much do you agree with these statements:

	strongly disagree	neutral	agree	strongly disagree	agree
1. Slender women are more attractive.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Women who are in shape are more attractive. . . . . . . …………………1		2	3	4	5
3. Tall women are more attractive . . . …..1		2	3	4	5
4. Women with toned (lean) bodies are more attractive. ………………………1		2	3	4	5
5. Shapely women are more attractive . . . 1	2	3	4	5	
6. Women with long legs are more attractive. . . . . .…………..1		2	3	4	5

APPENDIX D

AFRICAN AMERICAN ACCULTURATION SCALE, REVISED

(Landrine & Klonoff, 2000)

Beliefs and Attitudes Survey

Below are some beliefs and attitudes about religion, families, racism, Black people, White people, and health. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with these beliefs and attitudes by circling a number. There are no right or wrong answers, we simply want to know your views and your beliefs.

	Totally Disagree Not True at All			Sort of True Sort of Agree		I Strongly Agree Absolutely True	
	↓			↓			↓
01. I believe in the Holy Ghost.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
02. I like gospel music.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
03. I believe in heaven and hell.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
04. The church is the heart of the Black community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
05. I have seen people "get the spirit" or speak in tongues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
06. I am currently a member of a Black church.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
07. When I was young, I was a member of a Black church. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
08. Prayer can cure disease.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
09. What goes around, comes around.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I used to sing in the church choir.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Most of the music I listen to is by Black artists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I like Black music more than White music.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I listen to Black radio stations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I try to watch all the Black shows on TV.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. The person I admire the most is Black.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I feel more comfortable around Blacks than around Whites.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. When I pass a Black person (a stranger) on the street,							
I always say hello or nod at them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Most of my friends are Black.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I read (or used to read) *Essence* or *Ebony* magazine.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

20. I don't trust most White people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. IQ tests were set up purposefully to discriminate against Black people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Most Whites are afraid of Blacks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Deep in their hearts, most White people are racists.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Whites don't understand Blacks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Most tests (like the SATs and tests to get a job) are set up to make sure that Blacks don't get high scores on them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. Some members of my family hate or distrust White people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. When I was young, I shared a bed at night with my sister, brother, or some other relative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. When I was young, my parent(s) sent me to stay with a relative (aunt, uncle, grandmother) for a few days or weeks, and then I went back home again.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. When I was young, my cousin, aunt, grandmother, or other relative lived with me and my family for awhile.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. When I was young, I took a bath with my sister, brother, or some other relative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. Some people in my family use Epsom salts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. Illnesses can be classified as natural types and unnatural types.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. Some old Black women/ladies know how to cure diseases.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. Some older Black women know a lot about pregnancy and childbirth.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. I was taught that you shouldn't take a bath and then go outside.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. I avoid splitting a pole.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. When the palm of your hand itches, you'll receive some money.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. There's some truth to many old superstitions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. I eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Eve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. I grew up in a mostly Black neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. I went to (or go to) a mostly Black high school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. I went to a mostly Black elementary school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. I currently live in a mostly Black neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44. It's better to try to move your whole family ahead in this world than it is to be out for only yourself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

45. Old people are wise.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46. I often lend money or give other types of support to members of my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47. A child should not be allowed to call a grown woman by her first name, "Alice." The child should be taught to call her "Miss Alice."	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE

Phinney,1992

Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure
In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or <u>ethnic groups</u> that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree   (3) Agree   (2) Disagree   (1) Strongly disagree

 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as
        its history, traditions, and customs.
 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members
        of my own ethnic group.
 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked
        to other people about my ethnic group.
 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food,
        music, or customs.
11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13- My ethnicity is
        (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others

(2) Black or African American
(3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
(4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
(5) American Indian/Native American
(6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
(7) Other (write in): _____

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)
15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

APPENDIX F

FAT TALK SCALE

<u>Clarke, Murnen, & Smolak, 2010</u>

Behavior in Social Situations

Please read each situation below and indicate how you would respond. For the scenarios below, assume that "Naomi" and the other people in the scenarios are individuals of your same ethnic background. Imagine that Naomi and her friends are 5'4 and weigh approximately 134 pounds.

<u>Situation One:</u>
Naomi is having a bad day. She just doesn't feel herself and she is kind of down. While walking to class one of her friends says that she looks nice today. She replies, "No, I'm having a fat day."
When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

<u>Situation Two:</u>
Naomi and her friends are all getting ready for a party or a dance when one of Naomi's friends clutches her stomach and says that she looks fat. Her other friend says that she hates her thighs. Naomi responds with something that she hates about her own body.
When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear these types of comments in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Three:

Naomi is eating lunch with her friends when she decides to gets up from the table and get dessert. Before she leaves the table she makes a comment such as, "I am now officially a huge fatty!"

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Four:

As Naomi was walking to class with a friend, her friend began to remorse about the 'chocolate binge' that she just went on. Naomi responds by telling her that she has nothing on her since Naomi had just ate a bunch of chips, a hotdog, and an ice cream. Her friend then matches Naomi by telling her what she ate for breakfast.

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear these types of comments in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Five:

Naomi is shopping for clothes with her friend Gabby. Naomi is trying on an article of clothing when she calls Gabby into her changing room and asks, "Do these pants (shirt, bathing suit etc.) make me look fat? Can you see my love handles?"

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Six:

Naomi is hanging out with a friend when she looks in the mirror and says, "I really need to start working out again. Honestly, I am so flabby."

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Seven:

Naomi is sitting with her friend on a bench when she looks down at her thighs and exclaims that her thighs might as well take up the entire seat.

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Eight:

Naomi is out to dinner or at a movie with a friend. They decide that they will split a dessert/popcorn/candy. Naomi buys the treat and they both begin eating. As they are eating they both remark about the transgression that they are committing. They joke about how the treat is going to make them so fat but it is just so good to eat.

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Situation Nine:

Naomi really feels as though she looks fat in some article of clothing. She is feeling really insecure and so she turns to her friend Gabby and says that she looks fat in whatever she is wearing. Gabby responds by saying that she was about to comment on how great she looks, how she is so thin, and how lucky she is to have her body. Gabby then draws attention to one of her flaws.

When you are in a situation similar to Naomi's how often do you respond in a manner that is similar to Naomi?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear this type of comment in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear comments about a woman's hair (e.g. I'm having a bad hair day or I need to do something to my hair) in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is it that you would hear comments about a woman's skin color (e.g. I wish my skin was lighter/darker/more tan etc.) in your everyday life?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

How likely is that you would hear comments about a woman's facial features (e.g. I hate my nose/lips/chin etc.) in your everyday life?

Never   *Seldom Sometimes*   *Often*   *Always*
1   2   3   4   5

How likely is it that you would hear comments about a woman's personality traits (e.g. I wish I was more outgoing etc.)?

Never   *Seldom Sometimes*   *Often*   *Always*
1   2   3   4   5

Why do you think women engage in fat talk?
Answer: _____

What is the most common source of positive comments that you hear women make about themselves?
Answer: _____

APPENDIX G

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL BODY SELF-RELATIONS

QUESTIONNAIRE

THE MBSRQ

<u>*INSTRUCTIONS--PLEASE READ CAREFULLY*</u>

The following pages contain a series of statements about how people might think, feel, or behave. You are asked to indicate <u>the extent to which each statement pertains to you personally.</u>

Your answers to the items in the questionnaire are anonymous, so please do not write your name on any of the materials. In order to complete the questionnaire, read each statement carefully and decide how much it pertains to you personally. Using a scale like the one below, indicate your answer by entering it to the left of the number of the statement.

EXAMPLE:

_____   I am usually in a good mood.

In the blank space, enter a **1** if you <u>**definitely disagree**</u> with the statement;

enter a **2** if you <u>**mostly disagree**</u>;

enter a **3** if you <u>**neither agree nor disagree**</u>;

enter a **4** if you <u>**mostly agree**</u>;

or enter a **5** if you <u>**definitely agree**</u> with the statement.

There are no right or wrong answers. Just give the answer that is most accurate for you. Remember, your responses are confidential, so please be <u>completely honest</u> and answer all items.

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1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Disagree	**Mostly Disagree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Mostly Agree**	**Definitely Agree**

_____ 1. Before going out in public, I always notice how I look.

_____ 2. I am careful to buy clothes that will make me look my best.

_____ 3. I would pass most physical-fitness tests.

_____ 4. It is important that I have superior physical strength.

_____ 5. My body is sexually appealing.

_____ 6. I am not involved in a regular exercise program.

_____ 7. I am in control of my health.

_____ 8. I know a lot about things that affect my physical health.

_____ 9. I have deliberately developed a healthy lifestyle.

_____ 10. I constantly worry about being or becoming fat.

_____ 11. I like my looks just the way they are.

_____ 12. I check my appearance in a mirror whenever I can.

_____ 13. Before going out, I usually spend a lot of time getting ready.

_____ 14. My physical endurance is good.

_____ 15. Participating in sports is unimportant to me.

_____ 16. I do not actively do things to keep physically fit.

_____ 17. My health is a matter of unexpected ups and downs.

_____ 18. Good health is one of the most important things in my life.

_____ 19. I don't do anything that I know might threaten my health.

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Mostly Agree	Definitely Agree

_____ 20. I am very conscious of even small changes in my weight.

_____ 21. Most people would consider me good-looking.

_____ 22. It is important that I always look good.

_____ 23. I use very few grooming products.

_____ 24. I easily learn physical skills.

_____ 25. Being physically fit is not a strong priority in my life.

_____ 26. I do things to increase my physical strength.

_____ 27. I am seldom physically ill.

_____ 28. I take my health for granted.

_____ 29. I often read books and magazines that pertain to health.

_____ 30. I like the way I look without my clothes on.

_____ 31. I am self-conscious if my grooming isn't right.

_____ 32. I usually wear whatever is handy without caring how it looks.

_____ 33. I do poorly in physical sports or games.

_____ 34. I seldom think about my athletic skills.

_____ 35. I work to improve my physical stamina.

_____ 36. From day to day, I never know how my body will feel.

_____ 37. If I am sick, I don't pay much attention to my symptoms.

_____ 38. I make no special effort to eat a balanced and nutritious diet.

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Disagree	**Mostly Disagree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Mostly Agree**	**Definitely Agree**

_____ 39. I like the way my clothes fit me.

_____ 40. I don't care what people think about my appearance.

_____ 41. I take special care with my hair grooming.

_____ 42. I dislike my physique.

_____ 43. I don't care to improve my abilities in physical activities.

_____ 44. I try to be physically active.

_____ 45. I often feel vulnerable to sickness.

_____ 46. I pay close attention to my body for any signs of illness.

_____ 47. If I'm coming down with a cold or flu, I just ignore it and go on as usual.

_____ 48. I am physically unattractive.

_____ 49. I never think about my appearance.

_____ 50. I am always trying to improve my physical appearance.

_____ 51. I am very well coordinated.

_____ 52. I know a lot about physical fitness.

_____ 53. I play a sport regularly throughout the year.

_____ 54. I am a physically healthy person.

_____ 55. I am very aware of small changes in my physical health.

_____ 56. At the first sign of illness, I seek medical advice.

_____ 57. I am on a weight-loss diet.

For the remainder of the items use the response scale given with the item, and enter your answer in the space beside the item.

_____ 58. I have tried to lose weight by fasting or going on crash diets.

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very Often

_____ 59. I think I am:

1. Very Underweight
2. Somewhat Underweight
3. Normal Weight
4. Somewhat Overweight
5. Very Overweight

_____ 60. From looking at me, most other people would think I am:

1. Very Underweight
2. Somewhat Underweight
3. Normal Weight
4. Somewhat Overweight
5. Very Overweight

61-69. Use this 1 to 5 scale to indicate <u>how dissatisfied or satisfied you are</u>
with each of the following areas or aspects of your body:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Dissatisfied	**Mostly Dissatisfied**	**Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied**	**Mostly Satisfied**	**Very Satisfied**

_____   61. Face (facial features, complexion)

_____   62. Hair (color, thickness, texture)

_____   63. Lower torso (buttocks, hips, thighs, legs)

_____   64. Mid torso (waist, stomach)

_____   65. Upper torso (chest or breasts, shoulders, arms)

_____   66. Muscle tone

_____   67. Weight

_____   68. Height

_____   69. Overall appearance

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