

THE EFFECT OF RACE ON PERCEPTIONS OF FAT TALK AMONG COLLEGE  
WOMEN

A Thesis  
by  
CRYSTAL JENNETTE THORNHILL

Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2014  
Department of Psychology

THE EFFECT OF RACE ON PERCEPTIONS OF FAT TALK AMONG COLLEGE  
WOMEN

A Thesis  
by  
CRYSTAL JENNETTE THORNHILL  
May 2014

APPROVED BY:

---

Lisa A. Curtin  
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

---

Denise M. Martz  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

Doris G. Bazzini  
Member, Thesis Committee

---

James C. Dennison  
Chairperson, Department of Psychology

---

Edelma D. Huntley, Ph.D.  
Dean, Cratis Williams Graduate School

Copyright by Crystal Jennette Thornhill 2014  
All Rights Reserved

## **Abstract**

### **THE EFFECT OF RACE ON PERCEPTIONS OF FAT TALK AMONG COLLEGE WOMEN**

Crystal Jennette Thornhill  
B.A., University of Richmond  
M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Lisa Curtin

Fat talk is a normative style of communication where primarily girls and women say negative things about their bodies as a part of social conversation. The majority of fat talk research has employed Caucasian participants and racially unspecified targets in vignette-based studies, and there is a notable absence of how fat talk may differ as a function of race. In this study, Caucasian participants were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes describing a fat talk situation among female college students. The race of a primary target was manipulated and identified as Caucasian, African American or not specified using a between - subjects design. Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of fat talk as a normative response for the female target and the protagonist's likeability. The results supported the hypothesis that fat talk is perceived as more normative among a Caucasian than an African Americans target in a vignette. No differences were found between conditions on perceptions of likeability. The results suggest that previous vignette-based fat talk studies likely apply to perceptions of Caucasian female targets as when race was not specified, Caucasian college participants

assumed the target was Caucasian. Future studies should employ non-Caucasian participants to explore further differences in the way racially diverse women talk about their bodies and the potential relationship with racial differences in eating disorder symptoms.

*Keywords:* fat talk, body image, women, race

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Curtin, my thesis advisor, as well as the other members of my thesis committee. I appreciate all of your help and your patience with me during this process. I would also like to thank my Mom, Dad, Valerie, and my friends Dawn and MaryLynn for all of your help. I could not have gotten through this without all of your love and support.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to all the African American girls who may be struggling silently with eating concerns.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
List of Tables .....	x
Foreword.....	xi
Title Page .....	1
Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Method .....	14
Results.....	19
Discussion.....	22
References.....	31
Appendix A.....	38
Appendix B.....	39
Appendix C.....	41
Appendix D.....	42
Appendix E.....	43
Appendix F.....	44
Appendix G.....	46

Appendix H.....	48
Vita.....	49

## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations on Perception of Fat Talk as Normative Items and Likeability .....	36
--	----

## **Foreword**

This thesis is written in accordance with the style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th Edition)* as required by the Department of Psychology at Appalachian State University.

The Effect of Race on Perceptions of Fat Talk Among College Women

Crystal Jennette Thornhill

Appalachian State University

### Abstract

Fat talk is a normative style of communication where primarily girls and women say negative things about their bodies as a part of social conversation. The majority of fat talk research has employed Caucasian participants and racially unspecified targets in vignette-based studies, and there is a notable absence of how fat talk may differ as a function of race. In this study, Caucasian participants were randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes describing a fat talk situation among female college students. The race of a primary target was manipulated and identified as Caucasian, African American, or not specified using a between-subjects design. Participants were asked to rate their perceptions of fat talk as a normative response for the female target and the protagonist's likeability. The results supported the hypothesis that fat talk is perceived as more normative among a Caucasian than an African Americans target in a vignette. No differences were found between conditions on perceptions of likeability. The results suggest that previous vignette-based fat talk studies likely apply to perceptions of Caucasian female targets as when race was not specified, Caucasian college participants assumed the target was Caucasian. Future studies should employ non-Caucasian participants to explore further differences in the way racially diverse women talk about their bodies and the potential relationship with racial differences in eating disorder symptoms.

*Keywords:* fat talk, body image, women, race

### The Effect of Race on Perceptions of Fat Talk among College Women

The term eating disorder (ED) refers to clinically significant disturbances in eating, body image, and body satisfaction (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2007). The three major types of EDs are Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge-eating disorder. Anorexia is characterized by severely restricted eating and an intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat despite being underweight. Bulimia involves regular consumption of an abnormally large amount of food, characterized by a lack of control over eating during binge episodes and compensatory behavior, usually self-induced vomiting or use of laxatives. Lastly, Binge-eating disorder involves recurrent episodes of binge eating in the absence of compensatory behaviors (APA, 2013; NIMH, 2007).

Among women in the U.S., an estimated 0.5 to 3.7 percent suffer from Anorexia Nervosa, 1.1 to 4.2 percent suffer from Bulimia Nervosa, and 2 to 5 percent suffer from Binge-eating disorder in their lifetime (NIMH, 2007). Bushnell, Wells, Hornblow, Oakley-Browne, and Joyce (1990) found that the majority of women with EDs were between 18-24 years of age. Although less prevalent than some mental illnesses, EDs have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses (APA, 2013; Johnson, Tsoh, & Varnado, 1996; NIMH, 2007; Sullivan, 1995).

Kurth, Krahn, Nairn, and Drewnowski (1995) found that 91% of college women reported attempting to control their weight through dieting, with 22% dieting “often” or “always.” One-half of teenage girls and nearly one-third of teenage boys use unhealthy weight-control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting,

and taking laxatives (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005). Girls who diet frequently are 12 times more likely to binge eat than girls who do not diet (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005).

Eating disorders are clearly more common among women than men, with only 10 to 15 percent of people with Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa being men (Hudson, Hiripi, Pope, & Kessler, 2007). Prevalence rates differ as a function of race as well. Rates of Bulimia Nervosa are significantly lower among African American women than rates of the disorder among Caucasian women (Striegel-Moore et al., 2003), and many studies have found little or no prevalence of Anorexia Nervosa among African Americans in the U.S. (Crago, Shisslak, & Estes, 1996; Fernandes, Crow, Thuras, & Peterson, 2010; Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). Although most people with binge-eating disorder are obese, and African American women have higher rates of obesity and suffer from weight-related health problems more than Caucasian women (Hoek, 2006), Caucasian women have significantly higher rates of diagnosed binge-eating disorder compared to African American women (Cachelin, Rebeck, Veisel, & Striegel-Moore, 2001).

Many factors contribute to the development of an ED. For example, genetic factors and personality factors may increase risk for developing an ED (NIMH, 2007). A study of young adult female twins found that 55 to 60 percent of variance in disordered eating and depressive symptoms were accounted for by genetic factors (Slane, Burt, & Clump, 2011). Both perfectionism and impulsivity are associated with ED symptoms (Boone, Soenens, Braet, & Goossens, 2010; Waxman, 2009). Emotional abuse, physical neglect, and sexual abuse also serve as significant predictors of eating psychopathology,

supporting the hypothesis that environmental factors play a role in disordered eating (Kong & Bernstein, 2009).

Another important factor that increases an individual's risk for developing an ED is negative body image (Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Stormer & Thompson, 1996). A person with negative body image views his or her physical body in a negative way, and, more specifically, has low body satisfaction (Miller et al., 2000). Body image is a multifaceted concept that includes cognitive, affective, and perceptual experiences of one's body (Keizer et al., 2011). The cognitive and affective aspects of body image include attitudes (e.g., importance of body weight and shape) and emotional responses (e.g., negative emotional responses such as disgust) toward one's body (Ahrberg, Trojca, Nasrawi, & Vocks, 2011; Keizer et al., 2011). The perceptual aspects of body image have to do with a person's mental representation of his or her body (e.g., perceives body as larger than in reality). Behavioral components of negative body image involve patterns of body checking such as frequent weighing, touching or pinching to assess and measure certain body parts, as well as avoidance of fitted clothes and settings that emphasize physical appearance (Ahrberg et al., 2011). Low self-esteem or negative self-worth and obesity increase susceptibility to body image disturbance (Stormer & Thompson, 1996). Finally, the frequency with which a person compares him or herself to others; and societal factors, such as awareness of and internalization of societal attitudes about thinness and attractiveness, are significant predictors of body image disturbance (Reas, Whisenhunt, Netemeyer, & Williamson, 2002; Rosen, Srebnik, Saltzberg, & Wendt, 1991; Stormer & Thompson, 1996).

The media is one of the primary ways that women become aware of social attitudes about thinness and attractiveness. Aufreiter, Elzinga, and Gordon (2003) found that the average U.S. citizen was exposed to approximately 5,000 advertising messages a day in the year 2000, an increase from 3,000 messages a day in 1990. These messages were defined as any time a person was exposed to a product logo or advertisement during their day, including on cable channels, commercials, the internet, product placements in movies and TV shows, and advertising on cell phones (Aufreiter et al., 2003). Myers and Biocca (1992) found that approximately one-quarter of television advertisements involve a message about what is and is not physically attractive. Given this saturation of messages about body image in the media, it is not surprising that many women are concerned about their physical appearance.

The relationship between exposure to Western media and ED symptoms and EDs was studied by Becker, Burwell, Navara, and Gilman in 2003. They found that the incidence of eating disorders on the island of Fiji dramatically increased after the introduction of Western media among a sample of 129 women between the ages of 15 and 19. Prior to the introduction of Western media in 1995, between 0 and 3 percent of the women in the sample reported any type of ED symptom. Three years after the introduction of Western media, 74% of participants reported “feeling too fat,” 62% reported dieting in the last month, and self-reports of vomiting to decrease weight increased five-fold (Becker, Burwell, Navara, & Gilman, 2003). Knobloch-Westerwick and Crane (2012) found that prolonged exposure to the thin-media ideal resulted in an increase in dieting by female college-aged participants in order to improve their body

satisfaction. Similarly, Levine and Smolak (1998) found that 47 percent of a sample of nearly 200 girls in 5th-12th grade reported wanting to lose weight because of pictures they saw in magazines and that 69 percent of the girls reported that magazine pictures influenced their idea of the perfect body shape.

As mentioned earlier, negative body image is a potent predictor of EDs among women. Similar to differences in ED rates, there are racial differences in body image and satisfaction. Overall, African American women report greater body satisfaction than Caucasian women (Miller et al., 2000; Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). African American women also have more realistic perceptions of their weight compared to Caucasian women, as Caucasian women are likely to overestimate their weight (Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). Kronenfeld, Reba-Harrelson, Von Holle, Reyes, and Bulik (2010) asked over 4,000 women ages 25-45 in an online survey to select from a group of women's body silhouettes which one they looked most like (current) and which one they wished they looked like (ideal). The difference in the current versus ideal silhouettes was used as a measure of body dissatisfaction. African American women, on average, selected smaller silhouettes to represent their body than Caucasian women, and African American women chose larger ideal silhouettes than Caucasian women (Kronenfeld et al., 2010). In addition, Caucasian women had a larger discrepancy between the current and ideal silhouettes than African American women (Kronenfeld et al., 2010). Gluck and Geliebter (2002) found similar results in their nearly identical investigation of approximately 200 college females. Both of these studies suggest that African American women report greater body satisfaction than Caucasian women. In addition, Webb, Warren-Findlow,

Chou and Adams (2013) found that African Americans were resistant to the idea of identifying a singular ideal body type while Caucasian women preferred a curvy-thin or athletic body type. Racial differences in body image and body preference may partially explain the racial difference in diagnoses of EDs.

Although racial minorities and male individuals do indeed suffer from EDs, EDs are often perceived as only impacting Caucasian women (Gordon, Brattole, Wingate, & Joiner, 2006; Kempa & Thomas, 2000). Research suggests that the belief that EDs impact young, Caucasian, American woman can impact ED assessment, resulting in either misdiagnosis of minority clients or not assessing EDs among minority clients because of racially-related diagnostic assumptions (Kempa & Thomas, 2000). For example, Gordon et al. (2006) found that when clinicians were given vignettes describing clients with the same ED symptoms that only differed by race, clinicians were more likely to diagnose the Caucasian clients with an ED (44.4%) than a Hispanic client (40.5%) or an African American client (16.7%). A non-vignette based study (Waller et al., 2009) employed 648 patients who were assessed for referrals to ED specialists. They found that although all the patients had been selected to be a part of the study because of the experience of ED symptoms, the ethnic minority participants were significantly less likely to be referred for services than Caucasian participants (Waller et al., 2009). In addition, of the participants referred, the African American participants were more likely to meet full criteria for an ED after further assessment than the referred Caucasian participants (Waller et al., 2009). Thus, race-related assumption biases likely impact diagnosis of EDs by clinicians, who may ultimately impact the ability of minorities,

specifically African Americans, to receive treatment for ED when their symptoms warrant intervention.

One variable that relates to women's external reports of body satisfaction is engagement in a form of interpersonal discourse labeled fat talk. Fat talk is a dialogue among women involving the expressions of negative statements about their own bodies, typically to female friends of a similar age (Martz, Curtin, & Bazzini, 2012; Nichter, 2000). Fat talk usually focuses on body fat, weight, shape, or fitness level (Nichter, 2000). Fat talk has been described as a way to express body dissatisfaction in a social setting that is perceived as normative and acceptable, especially by women.

Fat talk was originally described by Nichter (2000) as a supportive dialogue among middle and high school aged girls, and was proposed to serve five functions based on a sample of girls who were interviewed. Fat talk may facilitate social validation when a person says something negative about her body and gets positive feedback from friends. For example, if a girl says to one of her friends "I feel fat today," the friend might respond, "You shouldn't feel fat, I'm the fat one! Look how big my thighs are!" Another potential purpose of fat talk is to communicate another concern indirectly. A girl may talk about her body in a negative way rather than directly expressing sadness or anger. The third function of fat talk is to acknowledge and apologize for engaging in weight-gaining behavior such as consuming high calorie foods (e.g., "this ice-cream will go right to my thighs"). The fourth proposed function of fat talk is to create a sense of group identification. For example, women may create a sense of connectedness around the idea of making fun of or mocking the appearance of another woman. The fifth function of fat

talk is to fit into a social group. For example, fat talk may be a form of conversational conformity, suggesting that some girls, even those who feel good about their body, may speak negatively about their bodies to match the behavior of others who engage in fat talk (Tucker, Martz, Curtin, & Bazzini, 2007).

Research suggests that fat talk is a normative dialogue that is common among teenage girls (Nichter, 2000), college women (Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, & LeaShomb, 2006), and adult women (Martz, Petroff, Curtin, & Bazzini, 2009). Martz et al. (2009) surveyed a sample of 4,014 age-representative adult men and women. Using very brief vignettes, they found that women were more likely to have heard fat talk and were more likely to feel pressure to engage in fat talk than men (Martz et al., 2009). Similarly, Britton et al. (2006) gave college student participants a vignette describing college women engaging in fat talk. Participants were asked how they thought the target female in the vignette would respond to the fat talk scenario (e.g., whether she would say something positive or negative about her body). Male and female participants believed that the female protagonist would most likely say something negative about her body, and that this response would make women like her more. Participants also anticipated that a positive comment about her body (in the described scenario) would result in men liking her more (Britton et al., 2006).

Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau, and Bazzini (2009) asked participants to read a vignette about a woman who either spoke positively or negatively about her body to a group of women who were talking about their bodies in either a negative or positive way. The participants were asked to rate how much they liked the woman in the vignette and

how much the group of women in the vignette would like her as well. Participants liked the woman in the vignette most when she spoke positively about her body but expected that others would like her more if she conformed to the way others talked about their bodies, whether that was in a positive or a negative way (Tompkins et al., 2009). These studies suggest that people may appreciate body-accepting comments; however, the studies also suggest that there is an expectation that engaging in negative body talk is socially accepted and is what people expect of most women when in a fat talk situation (Britton et al., 2006; Nichter, 2000; Tompkins et al., 2009).

Although there is very little research about frequency of fat talk in daily life, some research suggests that engagement in fat talk or exposure to fat talk may have a negative impact on teen and college women. For example, one study found that fat talk among college women related to lower self-reported empowerment, greater body shame, and ED symptoms (Clarke, Murnen, & Smolak, 2010). Ousley, Cordero, and White (2008) collected data from 272 female college students to assess the relationship between fat talk and body dissatisfaction and between fat talk and eating dysfunction. They found that frequency of fat talk positively related to body dissatisfaction and eating dysfunction, for both students with and without diagnosed EDs; however, participants with EDs reported higher levels of fat talk than those without diagnosed EDs. Gapinski, Brownell, and LaFrance (2003) examined the effect that fat talk had on mood and emotional state. In their study, women went into a dressing room and tried on two types of clothing, either a sweater or a bathing suit. Half of the participants were exposed to a confederate who made negative comments about her body in the next dressing room. Based on the results

of a pre-and post-test, it was found that the women trying on sweaters (thought to cause low body objectification) experienced an increase in negative emotions when exposed to the confederate's fat talk. On the other hand, the women trying on swimsuits (thought to cause high body objectification) experienced a decrease in negative emotions when exposed to the confederate's fat talk (Gapinski et al., 2003).

Although substantial research on fat talk has been published, there are still many unanswered questions. For example, the majority of the studies employ Caucasian subjects. In addition, the race of the protagonist in fat talk vignettes has never been explicitly described in a study (e.g., Britton et al., 2006; Martz et al., 2009; Tompkins et al., 2009). Nichter (2000), however, found that fat talk does vary by race. She interviewed 240 eighth and ninth grade girls over 3 years. Nichter's initial analyses, including a very small sample of African-American participants and other racial minorities, showed that African American girls did not engage in fat talk as frequently as the Caucasian students. Thus, she interviewed an additional 50 African American girls as a part of the study. Consistent with previous findings (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Kronenfeld et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2000), Nichter found that about 70% of the African American girls were satisfied with their body, and only 15% of the African American girls of normal weight expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies. On the other hand, of the approximately 168 Caucasian girls interviewed, 90% reported being dissatisfied with their bodies. The African American girls also reported receiving more positive feedback on their appearance than negative feedback and reported greater acceptance of their bodies than Caucasian girls (Nichter, 2000). Nichter's focus group interviews suggested

that African-American girls do not engage in fat talk. The following statement was used as an exemplar of a common report from African-American girls regarding fat talk, “I don’t hear that a lot. I hang out with black people, and they don’t care. We don’t worry if we’re fat because we’d all be drawn away from that” (Nichter, 2000, p. 167).

Although Nichter noted, using ethnographic methods, that African-American middle and high school girls reported not engaging in fat talk, race has not been specified or examined in experimental studies of fat talk among college students (Barwick, Bazzini, Martz, Rocheleau, & Curtin, 2012; Britton et al., 2006; Tompkins et al., 2009). Thus, the present study investigates how normative perceptions of fat talk differ as a function of the race of a protagonist in a fat talk vignette (Caucasian, African American, Unspecified). In addition, perceptions of likeability of the protagonist were explored.

### **Hypotheses**

**Norm to fat talk.** African American women report higher rates of body satisfaction than Caucasian women (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Kronenfeld et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2000), and Nichter (2000) found that African-American girls did not engage in high rates of fat talk compared to Caucasian girls. In addition, EDs that may be associated with fat talk (Ousley et al., 2008) are traditionally considered a Caucasian woman disorder and are not traditionally associated with African American women (Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). Thus, it is predicted that when female college students read vignettes depicting a fat talk situation, participants will assume that a protagonist engaging in fat talk is Caucasian when race is not otherwise specified. In addition, when the protagonist is described as African American, participants were predicted to perceive

a fat talk response as significantly less normative than when the protagonist is identified as Caucasian.

**Likeability.** There are opposing hypotheses in regards to the dependent variable of likeability of the protagonist as rated by the participants. Potentially, the female Caucasian participants may be inclined to rate the Caucasian protagonist as more likeable than the African American protagonist because of familiarity with and positive bias towards their own race (Meissner & Brigham, 2001). On the other hand, modern racism suggests that the Caucasian participants may rate the African American protagonist as more likeable than the Caucasian protagonist. According to the theory of modern racism, Caucasian individuals may evaluate African American individuals more favorably than Caucasians to avoid appearing prejudiced (Dutton, 1976). Finally, it is possible that protagonist likability will not vary as a function of the race of the female protagonist depicted in the fat talk vignette. Barwick et al. (2012) found that ratings of likability did not vary as a function of protagonist weight status when described in a fat talk situation. African American women typically weigh more than Caucasian women (Nelson, Gortmaker, Subramanian, Cheung, & Wechsler, 2007), suggesting that likeability may also not vary as a function of protagonist race. Thus, the present study explored, rather than predicted apriori, the relationship between protagonist race and ratings of likeability.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

One-hundred fifty-seven female Caucasian participants from the Appalachian State Psychology department participated in the study. All subjects were recruited

through the Psychology department subject pool. On average, the participants were 19.17 years of age ( $SD = 0.926$ ) and 94.3% ( $n = 148$ ) identified as heterosexual (the remaining participants identified as lesbian, bisexual or questioning their sexuality). Only 5 (3.2%) of the 157 participants identified as varsity athletes. Of the 157 participants, 78 (49.7%) identified as freshman, 42 (26.8%) as sophomores, 25 (15.9%) as juniors and 12 (7.6%) as seniors.

Participants also reported the race of their four closest friends. The majority identified their four closest friends as Caucasian (91% for first friend, 86% for second friend, 81.5% for third friend, and 82.8% for the fourth friend). A small group of participants reported their friends as being of a different race (i.e. African American, Hispanic, Multiracial, Asian, or Other; 8.9% for first friend, 14% for second friend, 18.5% for third friend, and 17.2% for their fourth friend). All participants were treated in accordance with APA ethical guidelines (2002). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board on October 12, 2012 (see Appendix A).

## **Materials**

**Vignette.** A modified version of the script used by Britton et al. (2006) and by Barwick and colleagues (2012) was utilized (see Appendix B) to depict a fat talk scenario. Specifically, the vignette was modified to use racially neutral names. The names used in the fat talk vignette were nearly equally popular for both African American and Caucasian children born in the city of New York in 2010 (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2010). The names were also reported as generally popular names for all people in North Carolina; however, in North Carolina, the

popularity of the names were not broken down by race (North Carolina Center for Health Statistics, 2010).

The fat talk script for the vignette used described a casual conversation between four undergraduate women whose conversation, while studying together, casually drifts into fat talk. Each of the vignettes contained a target female protagonist, Ava, who, like the other girls, engages in fat talk. Three versions of the vignette were used in the present study. In one condition ( $n = 55$ ), the protagonist (Ava) was described as an African-American female. In the second condition ( $n = 49$ ), the protagonist (Ava) was described as a Caucasian female protagonist, and in the third condition ( $n = 53$ ), the protagonist's race was not specified. For the conditions where the target protagonist's race was identified, the person's race was specified in the instructions prior to the beginning of the vignette (e.g., *Imagine this conversation involving Ava, who is African American, and three African American college women*). In the non-specified race condition, the race was not mentioned prior to the vignette, consistent with previous fat talk studies (Barwick et al., 2012; Britton et al., 2006).

**Norm to fat talk scale.** A four-item modified version of the norm to fat talk scale (Britton et al., 2006) used by Barwick et al. (2012) assessed how normative the participant perceived the protagonist's response depicted in the vignette (Appendix C). The participants responded to each question on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being "not at all surprising" and 7 being "extremely surprising." Items, 1, 2, 3, and 6 (*How surprising was it that she said that?; How typical/likely was Ava's response?; What is the likelihood that most women would have responded like Ava?; How likely would you be to make a*

*similar comment?*) were considered together as assessing normative perception of fat talk. Items 4 and 5 were considered separately as they assessed perceptions of the likelihood of an African American or Caucasian woman, respectively, responding the same way as the protagonist. Although the scale appears cohesive, Barwick and colleagues (2012) examined differences using the individual items as dependent variables in a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Items 1, 2, 3 and 6 of the norm to fat talk scale were handled in a similar manner in the present study given a relatively low level of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .61).

**Likeability scale.** This scale is a modified version of Rudman's (1998) Social Attraction Index and was used to assess the participants' perception of the likeability of the protagonist in the vignette (Barwick et al., 2012). The scale contains 8 questions (e.g., *How much would you like to get to know Ava better?* and *Was Ava likeable?*) that participants responded to using a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being "not at all," indicating a dislike for the protagonist, and 7 being "very much," indicating a liking for the protagonist. Participants' responses to each of the questions were averaged, and scores ranged between 1 and 7. This scale was utilized by Barwick and colleagues (2012) with an overall Cronbach alpha of .93, and resulted in a similar Cronbach alpha of .90 in the present sample suggesting a high level of internal consistency (see Appendix D).

**Manipulation Check.** Two manipulation check items assessed participants' attention to the content of the script and the race of the protagonist in the script. One of the questions asked, "*How did Ava present her body satisfaction?*" and participants could respond with "She felt good about her body," "She felt bad about her body," or "She did

not talk about her body.” The other manipulation check question asked, “*What race was Ava?*” Participants were asked to choose one of three responses: “African American,” “Caucasian,” or “It was not specified.” If the participant did not correctly identify the race of the protagonist, her data was not used in the normative perception and likeability the analyses (see Appendix E).

**Demographics.** The demographics questionnaire assessed gender, age, athletic affiliation, sexual orientation, weight, height, and academic year in school (see Appendix F).

### **Procedure**

Psychology students at the university entered the Psychology subject pool by registering on software called SONA. The Psychology subject pool consisted of students enrolled in introductory and intermediate Psychology classes who elected to enter the Psychology subject pool to earn an Experiential Learning Credit (ELC) for the course. Students who did not want to be a part of the Psychology subject pool were able to complete a writing assignment as an alternative in order to fulfill the ELC course requirement. After registering, students elected to sign up for any number of experiments listed in SONA. Those who selected the female only “Person Perception” study received further information via email on how to enroll in the present online study.

The female students who registered to participate in the study gained access to a link to the Qualtrics site where the study was located. Potential participants reviewed the informed consent form (see Appendix G). Those who granted informed consent first completed a demographic information questionnaire. The participants were then

randomly assigned to read one of three vignettes (with either a Caucasian protagonist, an African American protagonist, or a racially un-specified protagonist). Next, participants completed the likeability scale (the modified Social Attraction Index) and the Norm to Fat Talk Scale. Following completion of these questionnaires, they were asked to complete the manipulation check questions. At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to type in their SONA system ID number (which they were asked to remember) so that they could be given credit for participating in the study. Once the participants were granted credit, their participation in the study was complete.

## Results

### Manipulation Check

To assess the success of the manipulation of race in the vignettes, a Chi-Square analysis was utilized to test the percentage of participants who correctly identified the race of the protagonist depicted in the vignette condition to which they were assigned. Although the majority of participants correctly identified the race of the vignette protagonist (80%), 20% of participants did not correctly recall the protagonist's race,  $\chi^2(4, N = 157) = 171.34, p < .001$ . Of participants assigned to the unspecified condition, 86.8% ( $n = 46$ ) identified the protagonist as Unspecified and 13.2% ( $n = 7$ ) of participants incorrectly identified the protagonist as Caucasian. Of those assigned to the African American condition ( $n = 55$ ), 83.6% ( $n = 46$ ) of participants correctly identified the protagonist as African American, and 16.4% ( $n = 9$ ) identified the protagonist incorrectly as Unspecified. Finally, of participants assigned to the Caucasian condition, 69.4% ( $n = 34$ ) of participants identified the protagonist as Caucasian, and 30.6% ( $n =$

15) identified the protagonist incorrectly as Unspecified. All participants who identified the race of the protagonist incorrectly were excluded from further analyses.

The potential impact of participant Body Mass Index (BMI) is often controlled for in the vignette-based fat talk literature (e.g., Martz et al., 2009; Barwick et al., 2012). Thus, the BMI of the participants who identified the protagonist correctly was calculated using the formula:  $\text{weight (lb)} / [\text{height (in)}]^2 \times 703$ . A one-way ANOVA using race of the protagonist as the independent variable and BMI as the dependent variable was conducted and revealed no significant differences in participant BMI as a function of condition  $F(2, 123) = .590, p = .556, \eta_p^2 = .010$ . This suggests that random assignment to condition was successful, and BMI was not considered in further analyses.

### **Normative perceptions of fat talk**

Consistent with the hypothesis, the participants were more likely to assume that the protagonist portrayed as engaging in fat talk when race was unspecified ( $n = 46$ ) was Caucasian ( $n = 45; 97.8\%$ ) rather than African American ( $n = 1; 2.2\%$ ).

To test the hypothesis that participants would perceive fat talk as more normative when the protagonist was identified as Caucasian, a MANOVA using four of the Norm-to-Fat-Talk items (items 1, 2, 3 and 6) as dependent variables and the protagonist race (African American, Caucasian, Unspecified) as the independent variable was conducted (including only participants who correctly identified the condition in the manipulation check). The MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for protagonist race, Wilks'  $\lambda = .813, F(8, 240) = 3.278, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .099$ .

Given the significance of the overall test, univariate follow-up tests were

conducted. Participants perceived Ava's response as significantly more likely when she was identified as Caucasian than when she was identified as African American or when her race was not specified,  $F(2, 123) = 10.075, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .141$ . There was also a significant univariate main effect between conditions for the question about how likely it was that other women would respond the same way as the protagonist,  $F(2, 121) = 4.944, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .074$ . Participants were more likely to believe that other women would respond with fat talk when the protagonist was Caucasian as opposed to African American, with no differences noted between the identified race conditions and the unspecified race condition. There was no significant univariate main effect between conditions for the question regarding how surprising the protagonist's comments were in the vignette,  $F(2, 121) = .363, p = .696, \eta_p^2 = .006$ , or for the question regarding how likely it was that the participant would make a similar comment to the protagonist,  $F(2, 121) = .724, p = .487, \eta_p^2 = .012$ .

Tests were also done on the questions, "*What is the likelihood that most Caucasian women would have responded like Ava?*" and "*What is the likelihood that most African American women would respond the same as Ava?*" of the Norm-to-fat-talk items individually using a paired samples t-test. Participants indicated that that it was significantly more likely that Caucasian women ( $M = 5.73, SD = 1.15$ ) would have responded like Ava than African American women ( $M = 4.44, SD = 1.34$ ),  $t(125) = 8.88, p < .001$ .

**Exploratory analyses: Likeability**

To explore the relationship between participants' ratings on the Likability Scale and protagonist race, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) using the Likeability Scale as the dependent variable and the protagonist race (African American, Caucasian, Unspecified) as the independent variable was conducted. There was no significant main effect between ratings on the Likeability Scale as a function of the protagonist's race,  $F(2, 123) = .863, p = .424, \eta_p^2 = .014$ . As shown in Table 1, the overall mean, as well as the mean of each condition indicate that participants had "moderate positive feelings" about the protagonist. The average response indicated that the majority of participant's scores (60.2%) fell within the "have moderate positive feeling" score on the Likert scale (4.00-4.99).

**Discussion**

Many studies have looked at the way women engaging in fat talk are perceived by other women and by men, but this study was the first to look at how perceptions of fat talk varied based on the race of the woman portrayed as engaging in the behavior. Race of a female protagonist who was portrayed as engaging in fat talk was manipulated in a vignette-based study using Caucasian female participants. Consistent with the hypotheses, all but one participant who read about a racially nonspecified protagonist assumed that she was Caucasian, and participants reliably perceived fat talk as more normative for the Caucasian protagonist compared to participants who read about an African American or racially unspecified woman engaging in fat talk. In addition,

overall ratings of the likeability of the protagonist were rather positive and did not differ as a function of race.

Overall, the present results suggest that fat talk is perceived as more normative and more likely among Caucasian college women than among African American college women. The Caucasian participants indicated that most Caucasian women would respond in a similar way to the characters in the vignette and perceived fat talk as typical when Ava was identified as Caucasian. The study also showed that participants did not find engaging in fat talk surprising regardless of the protagonist's race. The data from the present study support previous findings regarding fat talk being perceived as normative for Caucasian college women by Caucasian college women. Both this study and the Britton et al. study (2006) suggest that although women identify fat talk as expected, they also believe they are personally less likely to engage in fat talk relative to other college women.

Although race has rarely been investigated in the context of fat talk, this finding is consistent with Nichter's (2000) initial qualitative description of fat talk. Nichter (2000) found that there were differences in the way that African American girls talked about their bodies in comparison to Caucasian girls. The research showed that African-American middle school-aged girls did not engage in fat talk frequently and did not view it as normative or socially acceptable among girls of their own race. In the present study, participants identified the majority of their closest friends as being Caucasian. In spite of this, the Caucasian participants appeared aware of reliable difference in perceptions of fat talk in regards to race. Participants were more likely to associate fat talk with a

Caucasian protagonist than an African American protagonist despite their potential lack of exposure to African American women and how they talk about their bodies.

Nichter (2000) not only coined the term “fat talk” but also noted connections between fat talk and poor body image. Previous research suggests that African-American women have more realistic perceptions of their bodies and have higher general self-esteem and body satisfaction than Caucasian women (Miller et al., 2000; Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). A study done in 2000 by Demarest and Allen supports the idea that the norms of acceptable body shape and weight may vary between African American and Caucasian women. They found that African American women, in comparison to Caucasian women, had more accurate perceptions of the female body type to which men would be attracted. Also, the body types that African American women identified as being more socially acceptable using figure drawings were bulkier or heavier and more closely matched the body type they identified as their own, than those selected by Caucasian women (Demarest & Allen, 2000).

Webb et al., (2013) found that Caucasian women preferred a thin-curved athletic body type consistently while African American women rejected a single body type, suggesting that Caucasian women have normative ideals about body expectations for Caucasian women; however, Webb et al. also showed that the Caucasian participants identified African Americans as being more satisfied with their bodies and having a larger ideal body size. As a result of African- American women being seen as having higher body satisfaction, Caucasian women may see fat talk dialogue as less likely among African-American women.

The consistently higher rate of overall self-acceptance may decrease the likelihood of African American women engaging in fat talk as a way of communicating with their peers (Nichter, 2000). This indicates that there may be a different norm for talking about weight and self-esteem among African American women that may be connected to the increase in overall body satisfaction. Research using African American participants to learn more about their perceptions of and use of fat talk is yet to be done.

One of the reasons peer communication may differ by race involves differences in communication style. Research shows that African American women have a dominant communication style and are generally viewed as more aggressive and confident in the way they articulate their points relative to Caucasian women (Adams, 1980). This more confident communication style may make African American women more direct and confident in the way that they talk about themselves than Caucasian women who have been found to communicate in a relatively more passive way (Adams, 1980). This general difference in communication style between African American and Caucasian women may have an impact on the way women talk about their bodies and their likelihood of participating in fat talk.

Clearly, the participants who were assigned to the racially unspecified category assumed that the protagonist was Caucasian the majority of the time. This finding suggests that Caucasian participants in previous vignette-based fat talk explorations (e.g., Britton et al., 2006; Tompkins et al., 2009) likely assumed the depicted protagonist was Caucasian even though race was not specified. Thus, it is likely that vignette-based

research regarding fat talk to date likely applies only to perceptions of Caucasian women (Britton et al., 2006, Tompkins et al., 2009).

On the other hand, the protagonist's race did not have any impact on participant's ratings of her overall likeability. In addition, the means for the likeability of the protagonist were consistently high across all the conditions regardless of the race of the protagonist. This result is inconsistent with both the modern racism theory (McConahay, 1986), which would predict that the Caucasian participants would like the African American participants more, and the theory that participants would favor their own race due to similarity (Meissner & Brigham, 2001). It is possible that the use of a between-subjects design limited direct comparison between the two races for the participants. If participants were asked to choose whether they liked a Caucasian or African American protagonist more, the results may have favored one of the race theories. The present findings, however, are consistent with previous research that found protagonists portrayed as engaging in fat talk are typically perceived as likeable (Barwick et al., 2012; Britton et al., 2006). Similarly, Barwick et al. (2012) found that likeability remained consistent even when the weight of the protagonist was manipulated. This may imply that although fat talk appears to be associated more frequently as normative for Caucasian women, perceptions of likeability by Caucasian college women does not appear to vary between Caucasian and African American peer protagonists. It is unclear if the likeability ratings would remain consistent if the participants were African American.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although the present study adds to the existing literature on fat talk, it has many limitations. Major limitations of this study and other fat talk studies (Barwick et al., 2012; Britton et al., 2006; Tompkins et al., 2009) are the employment of Caucasian females as participants and the lack of African American or other ethnic minority participants. The present study purposely employed only Caucasian and female participants to allow for an independent test of protagonist race on perceptions of the likelihood of fat talk responses. Another limitation of the study is that it is vignette based, which may limit the external validity of the findings. Future research should compare the perceptions of fat talk and body image between African American participants and Caucasian participants. It is unclear how valid the current fat talk measures would be with a more racially diverse group of participants. It is likely that African-American participants may respond to the vignettes differently than Caucasian women since the research indicates that they engage in more positive self-talk about their bodies (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Kronenfeld et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2000). There is very little known outside of the Nichter's (2000) ethnographic interviews about how African-American women talk to each other about their bodies and very little is known about what is normative. Nichter's interviews indicated that African-American middle school girls may talk to each other in more supportive and positive ways about their bodies than Caucasian girls.

Another major limitation of the study was the loss of participants assigned to the Caucasian condition. Approximately one-third of participants assigned to the Caucasian

condition failed to identify the protagonist accurately as Caucasian resulting in greater loss of participants from this condition compared to the other two conditions. The meaning of this pattern is unclear. This finding could indicate that participants did not automatically assume the protagonist was Caucasian even when she was explicitly identified as such; however, when the analysis was run both with and without the participants who failed to correctly recall the race of the protagonist, the same patterns of findings were found. Thus, it appears that regardless of the greater loss of participants from those assigned to read about a Caucasian protagonist, the participants reliably associated fat talk as more normative for a Caucasian protagonist compared to an African-American protagonist. It is likely that participants did not attend closely to the manipulation of race in the vignettes, but why this would be more so for those reading about a Caucasian protagonist remains puzzling. Future research could include pictures of the fictitious protagonists to increase the saliency of race or other individual differences. This may be challenging because it may be difficult to identify photos that will be perceived by all the participants as same race and other variables, such as attractiveness, would need to be controlled.

Doing a more naturalistic study to develop a better understanding about how other races of women may communicate about their bodies could be beneficial to add to the body of research currently available about fat talk. Nichter (2000) mentions that the African-American girls in her study appeared to be more focused on being comfortable with themselves and looking up to people who are also comfortable with their bodies. Nichter also reports qualitative interviews with African-American girls about how they

discouraged their friends from saying negative things about themselves and do not seem to feel as much pressure as the Caucasian girls to be a certain size or look a certain way. This information came mostly from qualitative interviews. Research designed to gain an understanding of how African-American women talk about their bodies to each other may be useful because of their higher rates of overall body-esteem relative to Caucasian women (Gluck & Geliebter, 2002; Kronenfeld et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2000). Gaining a better understanding of the way African-American women discuss their bodies may help researchers compare differences in the way the two racial groups communicate and the relationship with body esteem. It may also be important to understand the way African-American women discuss their bodies to understand better the impact that not engaging in fat talk can have on body image. Developing a better understanding of what makes certain populations resistant to fat talk and allows them to maintain a positive body image may be useful in informing research about prevention and treatment of poor body image.

There may also be implications regarding therapist's assessment of eating concerns among racially diverse clients. Due to the indication that fat talk is viewed as typical among Caucasian women, it is possible that some symptoms or comments about body image may be overlooked because they may be seen as normative. Also, because of the difference in the way that African American and Caucasian clients may talk about their bodies, therapists may not detect ED symptoms as readily when working with non-Caucasian clients. This may reinforce the discrepancies in certain eating disorder diagnoses among African Americans in comparison to Caucasians (Striegel-Moore et al., 2003). Caucasian or African American clients also may be hesitant to talk to therapists

about their eating concerns due to perceptions of normative expectations around socially acceptable ways to talk about the body. Teaching therapists about fat talk and the connections it can have with assessment of ED symptoms could enhance treatment and increase awareness of the way people communicate about their bodies.

Overall, the present study suggests that Caucasian women are more likely to associate fat talk with Caucasian women than African American women when the race of the protagonist is not specified. More work needs to be done in order to understand the way all women communicate about their bodies. In conclusion, although fat talk has been identified as a common way to communicate among women, there are some racial differences that need to be explored further in order for the discrepancies in the perception of fat talk and race to be fully addressed.

### References

- Adams, K. A. (1980). Who Has the Final Word? Sex, Race, and Dominance Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38(1), 1-8.
- Ahrberg, M., Trojca, D., Nasrawi, N. & Vocks, S. (2011), Body image disturbance in binge eating disorder: A Review. *European Eating Disorders Review*, 19, 375-381. doi:10.1002/erv.1100.
- Aufreiter, N., Elzinga, D. & Gordon, J. (2003) Better branding. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, 4, 29-39.
- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed. ). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Barwick, A., Bazzini, D., Martz, D., Rocheleau, C., & Curtin, L. (2012). Testing the norm to fat talk for women of varying size: What's weight got to do with it? *Body Image*, 9(1), 176-179. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2011.08.003.
- Becker, A., Burwell, R., Navara, K. & Gilman, S. (2003). Binge eating and binge eating disorder in a small-scale, indigenous society: the view from Fiji. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 34, 423–431.
- Boone, L., Soenens, B., Braet, C., & Goossens, L. (2010). An empirical typology of perfectionism in early-to-mid adolescents and its relation with eating disorder symptoms. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 48(7), 686-691. doi:10.1016/j.brat.2010.03.022.
- Britton, L. E., Martz, D. M., Bazzini, D. G., Curtin, L. A., & LeaShomb, A. (2006). Fat talk and self-presentation of body image: Is there a social norm for women to self-degrade? *Body Image*, 3, 247-254. doi:10.1916/j.bodyim.2006.05.006.
- Bushnell, J. A., Wells, J. E., Hornblow, A. R., Oakley-Browne, M. A., Joyce, P. (1990). Prevalence of three bulimia syndromes in the general population. *Psychological Medicine*, 20, 671-680.
- Cachelin, F., Rebeck, R., Veisel, C., & Striegel-Moore, R. (2001). Barriers to treatment for eating disorders among ethnically diverse women. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 30(3), 269-278.
- Clarke, P. M., Murnen, S. K., & Smolak, L. (2010). Development and psychometric evaluation of a quantitative measure of “fat talk”. *Body Image*, 7, 1-7. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.09.006.

- Crago, M., Shisslak, C. M., & Estes, L. S. (1996). Eating disturbances among American minority groups: A review. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 19*, 239-248.
- Demarest, J., & Allen, R. (2000). Body Image: Gender, Ethnic, and Age Differences. *Journal Of Social Psychology, 140*(4), 465-472.
- Dutton, D. G., (1976). Tokenism, reverse discrimination, and egalitarianism in interracial behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 32*, 93-108.
- Fernandes, N. H., Crow, S. J., Thuras, P., & Peterson, C. B. (2010). Characteristics of Black treatment seekers for eating disorders. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 43*(3), 282-285.
- Gapinski, K. D., Brownell, K. D., & LaFrance, M. (2003). Body objectification and “Fat Talk”: Effects on emotion, motivation, and cognitive performance. *Sex Roles, 48*, 377-388. doi:0360-0025/03/0500-0377/0.
- Gluck, M. E., & Geliebter, A. (2002). Racial/ethnic differences in body image and eating behaviors. *Eating Behaviors, 3*(2), 143-151. doi:10.1016/S1471-0153(01)00052-6.
- Gordon, K. H., Brattole, M. M., Wingate, L. R., & Joiner, T. R. (2006). The Impact of client race on clinician detection of eating disorders. *Behavior Therapy, 37*(4), 319-325.
- Hoek, H. (2006). Incidence, prevalence and mortality of anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 19*(4), 389-394. doi:10.1097/01.yco.0000228759.95237.78.
- Hudson, J. I., Hiripi, E., Pope, H., & Kessler, R. C. (2007). The prevalence and correlates of eating disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication. *Biological Psychiatry, 61*(3), 348-358. doi:10.1016/j.biopsych.2006.03.040.
- Johnson, W. G., Tsoh, J. Y., & Varnado, P. J. (1996). Eating disorders: Efficacy of pharmacological and psychological interventions. *Clinical Psychology Review, 16*(6), 457-478. doi:10.1016/0272-7358(96)00030-X.
- Keizer, A., Smeets, M., Dijkerman, H., van den Hout, M., Klugkist, I., van Elburg, A., & Postma, A. (2011). Tactile body image disturbance in anorexia nervosa. *Psychiatry Research, 190*(1), 115-120.

- Kempa, M. L., & Thomas, A. (2000). Culturally sensitive assessment and treatment of eating disorders. *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention*, 8(1), 17-30. doi:10.1080/10640260008251209.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S., & Crane, J. (2012). A losing battle: Effects of prolonged exposure to thin-ideal images on dieting and body Satisfaction. *Communication Research*, 39(1), 79-102. doi:10.1177/0093650211400596.
- Kong, S., & Bernstein, K. (2009). Childhood trauma as a predictor of eating psychopathology and its mediating variables in patients with eating disorders. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 18(13), 1897-1907. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2702.2008.02740.x.
- Kronenfeld, L. W., Reba-Harrelson, L., Von Holle, A., Reyes, M., & Bulik, C. M. (2010). Ethnic and racial differences in body size perception and satisfaction. *Body Image*, 7(2), 131-136. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.11.002.
- Kurth, C., Krahn D., Nairn, K., & Drownowski, A. (1995). The severity of dieting and bingeing behaviors in college women: Interview validation of survey data. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 29(3), 211-225.
- Levine, M., & Smolak, L. (1998). The mass media and disordered eating: Implications for primary prevention. In G. Van Noordenbos & W. Vanderecycken (Eds.), *The prevention of eating disorders*, 23-56. London: Athlone.
- Martz, D., Curtin, L., & Bazzini, D. (2012). Fat talk and body image. *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*. Academic Press.
- Martz, D. M., Petroff, A. B., Curtin, L., & Bazzini, D. G. (2009). Gender differences in fat talk among American adults: Results from the psychology of size survey. *Sex Roles*, 61, 34-41. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9587-7.
- McConahay, J. B. (1986). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the Modern Racism Scale. In J. F. Dovidio, S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Prejudice, discrimination, and racism* (pp. 91-125). San Diego, CA US: Academic Press.
- Meissner, C. A., & Brigham, J. C. (2001). Thirty years of investigating the own-race bias in memory for faces: A meta-analytic review. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 7(1), 3-35. doi:10.1037/1076-8971.7.1.3.
- Miller, K. J., Gleaves, D. H., Hirsch, T. G., Green, B. A., Snow, A. C. & Corbett, C. C. (2000), Comparisons of body image dimensions by race/ethnicity and gender in a university population. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 27, 310–316. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-108X(200004)27:3<310::AID-EAT8>3.0.CO;2-Q.

- Myers, & Biocca (1992). The elastic body image: The effect of television advertising and programming on body image distortions in young women. *Journal of Communication, 42*, 108-133.
- National Institute of Mental Health (2007). Eating disorders. Retrieved from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>.
- Nelson, T. F., Gortmaker, S. L., Subramanian, S. V., Cheung, L., & Wechsler, H. (2007). Disparities in overweight and obesity among US college students. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 31*(4), 363-373.
- Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2005). *I'm, like, SO Fat!: Helping your teen make healthy choices about eating and exercise in a weight obsessed world*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (2010). *Most popular baby names in New York City: 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vs/vs-baby-names.shtml>.
- Nichter, M. (2000). *Fat talk: What girls and their parents say about dieting*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (2010). *Ten most popular baby names in North Carolina for 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/schs/vitalstats/2010/names.html>.
- Ousley, L., Cordero, E. D., & White, S. (2008). Fat talk among college students: How undergraduate communicate regarding food and body weight, shape and appearance. *Eating Disorders, 16*, 73-84. doi:10.1080/10640260701773546.
- Reas, D. L., Whisenhunt, B. L., Netemeyer, R. and Williamson, D. A. (2002), Development of the body checking questionnaire: A self-report measure of body checking behaviors. *International Journal of Eating Disorder, 31*: 324-333. doi:10.1002/eat.10012.
- Rosen, J., Srebnik, D., Saltzberg, E., & Wendt, S. (1991). Development of a body image avoidance questionnaire. *Psychological Assessment, 3*, 32-37.
- Rudman, L. A. (1998). Self-promotion as a risk factor for women: The costs and benefits of counterstereotypical impression management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(3), 629-645. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.3.629.

- Shroff, H., & Thompson, J. (2006). Peer Influences, Body-image Dissatisfaction, Eating Dysfunction and Self-esteem in Adolescent Girls. *Journal of Health Psychology, 11*(4), 533-551. doi:10.1177/1359105306065015.
- Slane, J. D., Burt, S., & Clump, K. L. (2011). Genetic and environmental influences on disordered eating and depressive symptoms. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 44*(7), 605-611. doi:10.1002/eat.20867.
- Stormer, S. M., & Thompson, J. (1996). Explanations of body image disturbance: A test of maturational status, negative verbal commentary, social comparison, and sociocultural hypotheses. *International Journal Of Eating Disorders, 19*(2), 193-202. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-108X(199603)19:2<193::AID-EAT10>3.0.CO;2-W.
- Striegel-Moore, R. H., Dohm, F. A., Kraemer, H. C., Taylor, C., Daniels, S., Crawford, P. B., & Schreiber, G. B. (2003). Eating Disorders in White and Black Women. *The American Journal Of Psychiatry, 160*(7), 1326-1331. doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.160.7.1326.
- Sullivan, P. F. (1995). Mortality in anorexia nervosa. *The American Journal Of Psychiatry, 152*(7), 1073-1074.
- Tompkins, K. B., Martz, D. M., Rocheleau, C. A., & Bazzini, D. G. (2009). Social likeability, conformity, and body talk: Does fat talk have a normative rival in female body image conversations? *Body Image, 6*, 292-298. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.07.005.
- Tucker, K. L., Martz, D. M., Curtin, L. A., & Bazzini, D. G. (2007). Examining 'fat talk' experimentally in a female dyad: How are women influenced by another woman's body presentation style? *Body Image, 4*(2), 157-164. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2006.12.005.
- Waller, G., Schmidt, U., Treasure, J., Emmanuelle, F., Alenya, J., Crockett, J., & Murray, K. (2009). Ethnic origins of patients attending specialist eating disorders services in a multiethnic urban catchment area in the United Kingdom. *International Journal Of Eating Disorders, 42*(5), 459-463. doi:10.1002/eat.v42:510.1002/eat.20631.
- Waxman, S. E. (2009). A systematic review of impulsivity in eating disorders. *European Eating Disorders Review, 17*(6), 408-425. doi:10.1002/erv.952.
- Webb, J. B., Warren-Findlow, J., Chou, Y., & Adams, L. (2013). Do you see what I see?: An exploration of inter-ethnic ideal body size comparisons among college women. *Body Image, 10*(3), 369-379. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2013.03.005.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations on Perception of Fat Talk as Normative Items and Likeability*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
How surprising was it that she said that?					
Unspecified	2.91	1.226			
African American	2.85	1.366			
Caucasian	2.65	1.686			
Total	2.82	1.405	.363	.696	.006
How typical/likely was Ava's response?					
Unspecified	5.13	1.002			
African American	5.30	1.152			
Caucasian	6.15	.958			
Total	5.47	1.122	10.075	.000	.141
What is the likelihood that most women would have responded like Ava?					
Unspecified	5.74	1.063			
African American	5.61	1.358			
Caucasian	6.38	.888			
Total	5.87	1.175	4.944	.009	.074
How likely would you be to make a similar comment?					
Unspecified	4.61	1.483			
African American	4.98	1.498			

Caucasian	4.85	1.500			
Total	4.81	1.490	.724	.487	.012

## Likeability Scale

Unspecified	4.3342	.72603			
African American	4.4918	.84097			
Caucasian	4.5662	.89888			
Total	4.4544	.81664	.863	.424	.014

---

## Appendix A

## Appalachian State University's Institutional Review Board Permission

**To:** Crystal Thornhill

CAMPUS MAIL

**From:** Dr. Stan Aeschleman, Institutional Review Board Chairperson

**Date:** 10/12/2012

**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**Study #:** 13-0065

**Study Title:** The Effect of Race on Perceptions of Fat Talk among Women

**Submission Type:** Initial

**Expedited Category:** (7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.

**Approval Date:** 10/12/2012

**Expiration Date of Approval:** 10/11/2013

This submission has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

**Investigator's Responsibilities:**

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to request renewal of approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval.

Any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately to the IRB. You are required to obtain IRB approval for changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards. Best wishes with your research!

CC:

Lisa Gizzard, Psychology

## Appendix B

## Fat Talk Script

**1. Unspecified Condition Instructions:** Imagine this conversation involving Ava and three college women.

**2. African American Condition Instructions:** Imagine this conversation involving Ava, who is African American, and three African American college women.

**3. Caucasian Condition Instructions:** Imagine this conversation involving Ava, who is Caucasian, and three Caucasian college women.

Olivia: Okay, so I think I understand osmosis.

Ava: Yeah, I think so too, but my problem is with mitosis, do you guys understand it?

Chloe: I guess so, it's basically a matter of memorizing all the stages.

Stephanie: Yeah, there's a diagram in the book somewhere (flipping through pages). Ummm...let's see...ummm, yeah page 165. There's a diagram.

Ava: Oh, thanks. Y'all, I have got to do well on this test. Does anyone know what Dr. Brown's tests are like?

Chloe: I've heard they're pretty hard. My New Year's resolution was to get all A's and B's this semester, but this test might ruin my plan.

Madison: I made a resolution, too, to go on a diet. If I could just wean myself off of those lattes at Crossroads, maybe I'd actually start losing weight. I swear they must each have like 1000 calories in them.

Olivia: Yep, those and the banana-nut muffins there, my God those things are good. I'm trying to lose weight too, and that's never going to happen if I don't stop eating those things.

Chloe: I bet I've gained like 15 pounds since school started, I've been feeling really fat lately.

Madison: My main problem is right in my thighs. I can't seem to get rid of this extra stuff here.

Olivia: Yeah, I've got that too, and some extra stuff around my waist.

Chloe: Those Freshman 15 are no joke!

Ava: Yeah, I'm pretty unhappy with my weight also, I really should go on a diet. I don't think I look good.

## Appendix C

## Norm to Fat Talk Assessment

Please answer the following questions regarding the script by circling the answer.

1) Think about Ava's reply to the conversation. How surprising was it that she said that?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all surprising			neither surprising nor unsurprising			extremely surprising

2) How typical/likely was Ava's response?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely			neutral			extremely likely

3) What is the likelihood that most women would have responded like Ava?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely			neutral			extremely likely

4) What is the likelihood that most Caucasian women would respond the same way as Ava?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely			neutral			extremely likely

5) What is the likelihood that most African American women would respond the same way as Ava?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all likely			neutral			extremely likely

6) Think about Ava's reply to the conversation. How likely would you be to make a similar comment?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely unlikely			neither likely nor unlikely			extremely likely

## Appendix D

## Social Attraction Index

Think back to the script you just read. Please rate the following questions from 1 to 7 based on what you can gather about Ava from the script. Answer 1 if you don't think the question is at all true, and 7 if you agree with the question a great deal.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all true		mostly not true		mostly true		very true

1) I would like to get to know Ava better. \_\_\_\_\_

2) I would choose Ava as a friend. \_\_\_\_\_

3) I think Ava is likeable. \_\_\_\_\_

4) I think Ava is popular. \_\_\_\_\_

5) I am interested in meeting Ava. \_\_\_\_\_

6) I would want to be seen with Ava. \_\_\_\_\_

7) Most men would like Ava. \_\_\_\_\_

8) Most women would like Ava. \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E  
Manipulation Check

- 1) How does Ava feel about her body?
- a) She felt good about her body
  - b) She felt bad about her body
  - c) She did not talk about her body.

- 2) What race was Ava in the vignette?
- a) African American
  - b) Caucasian
  - c) It was not specified

ONLY ANSWER QUESTION #3 if you choose “c” for QUESTION #2

- 3) If Ava’s race was not specified, what would you assume Ava’s race to be?
- a) African American
  - b) Caucasian
  - c) Hispanic



Weight: \_\_\_\_\_ Pounds

What dress size of clothing do you usually wear? (*Select one*)

0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32

And what dress size would you ideally like to be? (*Select one*)

0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32

## Appendix G

**APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY****Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: Person Perception Study

Investigator(s): Crystal Thornhill and Lisa Curtin, Ph.D.

**I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

To assess perceptions of social interactions among women.

**II. Procedures**

The study will last approximately 30 minutes. You will first be asked for some basic demographic information (e. g., age) for data purposes. You must be a female between the ages of 18 and 22 to participate. You will then be asked to read a script depicting a conversation among several women, and then complete a set of questionnaires.

**III. Risk**

Your participation involves no predictable risks. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time in the study, you may choose not to answer any question or may withdraw from the study at no cost and can have the record of participation destroyed. You can contact the campus counseling and psychological services center at 262-3180 if you experience personal distress when reflecting upon your responses to the questionnaires.

**IV. Benefits**

The results of this study may provide insight into the social interactions among women. There are no predicted benefits to you personally.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The results of your participation will be confidential. This consent form will be confidential and will be kept separate from the SONA records. Your responses to the questionnaires will not be linked in any way to your name.

**VI. Compensation**

You will receive 30 minutes of research participation credit (1 Experiential Learning Credit).

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any point without penalty. However, if you choose to withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will not receive extra credit.

***VIII. Approval of Research***

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University.

TBA \_\_\_\_\_  
IRB Approval Date

TBA \_\_\_\_\_  
Approval Expiration Date

***X. Participant's Permission***

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent. I verify that I am a female at least 18 years of age and not older than 22 years of age.

By proceeding with the activities described above, I acknowledge that I have read and agreed to the descriptions and terms outlined in this consent form, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

**Crystal Thornhill** (804) 399-2247 / [thornhillcj@appstate.edu](mailto:thornhillcj@appstate.edu)  
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

**Lisa Curtin, Ph.D.** (828) 262-2729 / [curtinla@appstate.edu](mailto:curtinla@appstate.edu)  
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail

**IRB Administrator** (828) 262-2130 / [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)  
Research and Sponsored Programs Telephone/e-mail  
Appalachian State University  
Boone, NC 28608

Please type in your ASU email address as confirmation that you consent to participate in the study:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

## Recruitment

**Recruitment****For Psychology Subject Pool Participants: (using SONA System)**

Experiment Title: Person Perception Study

Descriptor: In this study, you will answer some questions about yourself and your perceptions of others after reading a story about a group of people talking. You must be a female between the ages of 18-22 to participate.

Experiment Duration: 30 minutes

**Recruitment****For Psychology Subject Pool Participants: (using Email)**

You have been sent this email based on your indicated interest in participating in the Person Perception study for Experiential Learning Credit for your psychology course. Please click the link below to be directed to the study on the Qualtrics site. Thank you for your participation!

### **Vita**

Crystal Jennette Thornhill was born in Richmond, Virginia, to Barbara and Cleo Thornhill. She graduated from Meadowbrook High School in Chesterfield, Virginia, in June 2007. The following autumn, she entered the University of Richmond to major in Psychology, with a double minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Medical Humanities. In May 2011, she was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree. In the fall of 2011, she began study toward a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Health Psychology. The M.A. was awarded in May 2014. In August 2014, Ms. Thornhill will commence work toward her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at Purdue University.

Ms. Thornhill is a member of the American Psychological Association and remains active in the University of Richmond community as a regular staff member for social justice retreats for the university students. She currently resides in Boone, North Carolina, and will be moving to Lafayette, Indiana, in the fall.