



The relationships between fat talk, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness: Perceived stress as a moderator

Cortney S. Warren*, Samuel Holland, Hilary Billings, Alexa Parker

Department of Psychology, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 455030, Las Vegas, NV 89154-5030, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 May 2011

Received in revised form 21 March 2012

Accepted 21 March 2012

Keywords:

Fat talk

Perceived stress

Body dissatisfaction

Drive for thinness

Female college students

ABSTRACT

Although body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness are commonplace in college-aged women, their relationships with fat talk and stress are understudied. This study examined (a) whether fat talk predicts body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness and (b) whether stress moderates these relationships. Results from self-report questionnaires completed by 121 female college students revealed that fat talk and perceived stress were significantly positively correlated with body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. Although fat talk was a significant independent predictor of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness, stress moderated these relationships such that they were stronger at lower stress levels. Although contrary to predictions, these results are logical when means are considered. Results suggest that fat talk positively predicts body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness in students with relatively lower stress levels, but does not for students under high stress because mean levels of these constructs are all already high.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Research suggests that fat talk is commonplace among college-aged women living in Western cultural contexts, such as the United States, Australia, and Western Europe (Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008; Payne, Martz, Tompkins, Petroff, & Farrow, 2011; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). Frequently defined as negative interpersonal communication about one's physical appearance, eating, and exercise behaviors (Nichter, 2000; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011), *fat talk* frequently manifests as self-disparaging comments about one's current or future weight (e.g., "I'm so fat"; "I am going to get fat"), eating behavior (e.g., "I shouldn't be eating this"), or body shape (e.g., "My hips look so big in this dress") during social interactions (Clarke, Murnen, & Smolak, 2010; Ousley et al., 2008). For example, in a recent study examining fat talk in female college students, 93% reported engaging in fat talk with their friends (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). Similarly, using two experimental studies to assess whether college students perceive verbal body degradation as normative during social interactions, both male and female participants reported that women in social situations overhearing fat talk would be more likely to engage in negative body commentary than positive or neutral body talk (Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, & LeaShomb, 2006). This effect appears to be true independent of one's actual body size: a recent study found that college

students perceive engagement in fat talk as more typical and less surprising than positive body talk whether a woman is of average weight or overweight (Barwick, Bazzini, Martz, Rocheleau, & Curtin, 2012).

Fat talk is of interest to researchers and clinicians because it is viewed as a reflection of internalization of Western cultural values and ideals of appearance, which are implicated in the development of body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and disordered eating behavior (Bailey & Ricciardelli, 2010; Gapinski, Brownell, & LaFrance, 2003; Stice, Maxfield, & Wells, 2003; Swami et al., 2010). In Western cultures, physical appearance is a central determinant of female value and the ideal of beauty is thin, young, fit, and attractive to men (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999). Theoretically, increased personal acceptance of Western cultural values of appearance (i.e., thin-ideal internalization) predicts body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness because attaining the ideal appearance is believed to assure security, intimacy, success, and general life satisfaction (Berg, Frazier, & Sherr, 2009; Stice et al., 2003; Thompson, van den Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004). As such, social commentary about one's appearance in the form of fat talk is a reflection of the thin-body ideals and appearance-related values promoted in Western culture.

Fat Talk, Body Dissatisfaction, and Drive for Thinness

To date, a growing body of research examining the relationships between fat talk and eating pathology using experimental and correlational methods generally suggests that it is associated

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 702 895 0109; fax: +1 702 895 0195.
E-mail address: cortney.warren@unlv.edu (C.S. Warren).

with increased body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and other eating pathology (Britton et al., 2006; Gapinski et al., 2003; Ousley et al., 2008; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011; Stice et al., 2003). In a study examining the frequency of conversations involving fat talk in a sample of undergraduate men and women, for example, Ousley and colleagues (2008) found that participants diagnosed with an eating disorder engaged in fat talk more often than those not diagnosed with an eating disorder (Ousley et al., 2008). Similarly, Salk and Engeln-Maddox (2011) found positive correlations between body dissatisfaction and fat talk in a sample of female college students. Using an experimental paradigm in which 120 female college students were exposed to an ultra-thin confederate either complaining about how fat she felt or discussing a neutral topic, results indicated that exposure to fat talk reflecting social pressure to be thin resulted in increased body dissatisfaction (Stice et al., 2003).

However, other research suggests that the relationship between fat talk and eating pathology is highly complex and often affected by additional factors such as social context, motivation for discussion, and the valence of commentary (Craig, Martz, & Bazzini, 2007; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011; Stice et al., 2003; Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau, & Bazzini, 2009; Tucker, Martz, Curtin, & Bazzini, 2007). For example, fat talk can be motivated by a desire to promote group affiliation among women (Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994); to gain reassurance and encouragement from peers (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011); and to serve as a mode of social comparison (Bailey & Ricciardelli, 2010; Nichter, 2000; Tompkins et al., 2009). In an experimental study using female dyads in which participants interacted with a confederate who spoke in self-deprecating, self-accepting, or self-aggrandizing ways, results revealed that participants' body dissatisfaction varied according to the confederate's style (Tucker et al., 2007). Specifically, participants in the self-deprecating condition reported the most body dissatisfaction whereas participants in the self-aggrandizing condition reported the least body dissatisfaction. Given the many circumstances that can influence the relationship between fat talk and eating pathology (e.g., context, motivation, desired response), these relationships are likely complex and moderated by various additional factors (Bailey & Ricciardelli, 2010).

Stress as a Moderator of the Relationship between Fat Talk and Eating Pathology

As defined by McGrath (1976, p. 20), *stress* is a perceived "imbalance between demand and response capability under conditions where failure to meet demand has important (perceived) consequences." Prolonged stress is associated with impairments in physical and mental health (Bogdan & Pizzagalli, 2006; McGrath, 1976; Michaud, Mathenson, Kelly, & Anisman, 2008; Risch et al., 2009; Walburn, Vedhara, Hankins, Rixon, & Weinman, 2009) and a large body of research suggests a positive relationship between stress and eating pathology (Ball & Lee, 2000, 2002; Bennett & Cooper, 1999; Beukes, Walker, & Esterhuysen, 2010; Inniss, Steiger, & Bruce, 2011; Laessle & Schulz, 2009; Loth, van den Berg, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2008; Martz, Handley, & Eisler, 1995; Murray, Byrne, & Rieger, 2011; Sims et al., 2008; Sulkowski, Dempsey, & Dempsey, 2011). For example, existing research suggests that perceived stress is positively correlated with haphazard meal planning, emotional eating, and binge eating in women (Loth et al., 2008; Mussap, 2007; Sims et al., 2008).

Although not studied to date, perceived stress may moderate the relationships between fat talk, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness in female college students. Research suggests that stress related to academic success, developing a social life (e.g., making friends, being popular), maintaining financial stability, and adhering to gender role norms is often associated with eating pathology (Berg et al., 2009; Guo, Wang, Johnson, & Diaz, 2011;

Hamaideh, 2011; Martz et al., 1995; Mussap, 2007). Theoretically, when faced with such stress, fat talk may enhance dissatisfaction with one's appearance and desire to lose weight/be thin because of decreased coping resources to manage negative reactions to such material (Beukes et al., 2010). For example, in a study examining the influence of stress on eating pathology in female college students, Ruggiero and colleagues (2008) found that participants reported significantly more concern over mistakes, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and perceived stress on the day of an exam than on a non-exam day. Furthermore, perceived stress and measures of eating pathology were significantly positively correlated on the day of an exam but not on a non-exam day (Ruggiero et al., 2008). The authors concluded that perceived stress is associated with increased body dissatisfaction in female college students during a stressful situation but less so during non-stressful situations. Similarly, in a study examining stress, mood, coping, and eating behavior in a sample of female college students, women who engaged in binge eating reported more stress and negative mood than those who did not binge eat (Wolff, Crosby, Roberts, & Wittrock, 2000). Furthermore, although the binge group reported a similar number of stressful events on binge days as compared to non-binge days, the impact of those events was much greater on binge days than on non-binge days.

Current Study

To date, limited research has explored the relationships between fat talk, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and perceived stress in female college students. Given the high prevalence of eating pathology (Berg et al., 2009) and fat talk (Ousley et al., 2008; Payne et al., 2011; Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011) in this population, understanding these relationships is critical. Furthermore, because perceived stress is predictive of eating pathology in women (Loth et al., 2008; Mussap, 2007; Sims et al., 2008) and college students are faced with many stressors, such as managing food intake independently (often for the first time) and academic pressure (Guo et al., 2011), understanding the contribution of perceived stress to body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness in a social context that likely involves fat talk (i.e., college settings) is warranted. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to replicate extant findings that fat talk predicts body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness and extend this research by examining whether stress moderates these links. In these analyses, we controlled for the demographic variables of body mass index (BMI; kg/m²) and age because these variables are often associated with body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness (Barwick et al., 2012; McKinley, 2006). We predicted that fat talk would be positively correlated with and predictive of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. However, we theorized that stress would moderate these relationships such that they would be stronger for women with higher levels of perceived stress than for women with lower stress levels.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A total of 121 female students attending a large university in the Southwestern United States voluntarily participated in this study. Participants were enrolled in an introductory psychology course and received class credit in exchange for study participation. Participants were told that this was a study examining health-related behavior and social interaction. After signing an informed consent document, participants completed study measures in paper-and-pencil format. Participants were instructed not to write their names anywhere on the study documents as their

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات