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ROLE OF FAT TALK ON THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BRUNEIAN CHINESE SOCIETY

Shee Ping Khoo
*Universiti Teknologi Brunei*, selinakhoosp@gmail.com

Brice Tseen Fu Lee
*Fudan University* & *Universidad del Desarrollo*, briceleetseenfu@gmail.com

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ROLE OF FAT TALK ON THE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BRUNEIAN CHINESE SOCIETY

Shee Ping Khoo
Universiti Teknologi Brunei
selinakhoosp@gmail.com

Brice Tseen Fu Lee
Fudan University & Universidad del Desarrollo
briceleetseenfu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This research paper examines the role of “fat talk” in relationships in Bruneian Chinese society. “Fat talk” refers to negative comments about one's weight or body shape towards oneself or others. Using qualitative research methods, the study explores the perceptions and experiences of Bruneian Chinese individuals regarding “fat talk”, factors leading to the discussion of the topic, and its impact on their relationships with their peers. The findings suggest that while “fat talk” is prevalent in Bruneian Chinese society, it can have both positive and negative effects on relationships. The study aims to highlight the importance of addressing the “fat talk” issue in Bruneian Chinese society to promote body positivity and healthy communication in relationships.

INTRODUCTION
Communication is seen as an important means of imparting news or information between members of a community. By communicating, one can express oneself, evoking understanding in others, to understand each other. Rask (2014) defines communication as a form of interaction by people in their everyday life, primarily to create, build and strengthen relationships among one another. This is where language comes into view and acts as an essential asset to further aid the process of conveying one's messages to another (Sirbu, 2015). Language allows its users to get their messages across by using words and combining them into sentences (Eiffring & Theil, 2005; Wood, 1995).

The Bruneian Chinese society is a minor but significant population group within Brunei that has distinct cultural beliefs and customs. While communication is an essential component of human interaction, and language is the main tool used to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions, not all language use is productive or positive. One of the practices that have been observed among the Bruneian Chinese is the prevalence of fat talk in their daily conversations. Fat talk, which refers to the unfavourable remarks people make about their own or other people's bodies, is one facet of communication that has gained attention in recent years (Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994; Warren et. al., 2012). Although fat talk is frequently heard among women in Bruneian Chinese culture, it is also common among...
men and has often been associated with body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. However, little is known about how relationships in Bruneian Chinese society are impacted by fat talk.

The phrase “fat talk” was first popularised by Nichter and Vuckovic (1994), who conducted research with female middle school students. However, other researchers who became interested in the term later discovered that both male and female talks can exhibit this way of talking. According to earlier studies, fat talk is linked to social comparison, and it can be seen as a way of connecting with people who have similar concerns about their looks and weight (Bair et al., 2010; Gattario & Diedrichs, 2012). At the same time, fat talk can also be detrimental to people's mental and physical health and contribute to a culture of body shaming as it promotes unfavourable body perceptions, low self-esteem, and disordered eating patterns (Ogden & Steward, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

The prevalence of fat talk in modern society, especially among young adults, has been linked to disordered eating patterns and low body image. Research has mostly concentrated on the detrimental consequences of fat talk on an individual's well-being, but they have paid little attention to how fat talk affects interpersonal relationships. As the current status of research in this field is limited, there is a need for further investigation into how fat talk influences the dynamics of relationships between individuals.

Studies that have investigated the effects of fat talk on romantic relationships have found that it can lead to higher levels of conflict and worse levels of relationship satisfaction (O’Brien & Hunter, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). There is disagreement, though, over whether body dissatisfaction or other variables mitigate this association. Several research has looked at how fat talk affects same-sex friendships and found that it can promote body dissatisfaction and pressure to meet social beauty standards (Knaauss et al., 2008; Salk et al., 2013).

Hence, the current state of the study's backdrop indicates that more research is needed to determine how fat talk affects friendships, romantic relationships, and other types of social interactions. We can learn more about how this phenomenon affects social interactions and well-being by examining the effects of fat talk on these various kinds of relationships.

The next step is to investigate the mechanisms that underlie the link between interpersonal interactions and fat talk. Investigating how fat talk influences the way people communicate with one another or with friends and how this affects the quality of the relationship is one path that could be taken. The association between fat talk and unfavourable outcomes can also be studied regarding social comparison and the perceived pressure to adhere to cultural beauty standards.

Fat talk can be detrimental to people's emotional and physical health. While prior research has highlighted the consequences of fat talk on people, its impacts on interpersonal relationships have received less attention. The issue is that using fat talk can lead to bad communication habits and lower the calibre of relationships. It may also foster body shaming and reinforce detrimental social beauty standards, which can impair one's self-esteem and cause eating disorders.

The dearth of knowledge on the function of fat talk in interpersonal relationships is thus the issue that this study seeks to solve. More can be learnt regarding the dynamics of communication, body image, and well-being within social interactions by looking at the consequences of fat talk on relationships. This information is essential for creating interventions that support good body image and healthy communication in interpersonal interactions.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how fat talk affects interpersonal interactions in Bruneian Chinese culture. Specifically, this paper aims to investigate how
fat talk is used among Bruneian Chinese, the effects it has on their relationships, and how cultural values and beliefs affect the usage of fat talk. To achieve these objectives, the researcher will conduct qualitative interviews with Bruneian Chinese to get their thoughts on fat talk and its importance in their relationships.

Given the limited understanding of how fat talk functions in interpersonal relationships, the goal of this study is to look at how fat talk influences the dynamics of various types of relationships. This research specifically attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What factors influence the likelihood of engaging in fat talk with others?
2. How does engaging in fat talk impact the quality of relationships with people in our surroundings?

The above questions will be used as guidance to address the following objectives:

1. To understand how different types of fat talk impact different types of relationships, to identify specific fat talk behaviours that may be harmful to individuals and relationships.
2. To examine the factors that influence the likelihood of engaging in fat talk with friends or romantic partners, how engaging in fat talk impacts the quality of friendships and relationships, and to better understand the potential positive and negative outcomes of fat talk.

The Bruneian Chinese community is a unique minority ethnic group that has gotten little attention in studies on fat talk and its effect on relationships. This study seeks to close this gap by exploring the function of fat talk in interpersonal interactions within this community. Studying how fat talk affects relationships in Bruneian Chinese society is crucial because it can reveal how cultural norms affect people’s self-esteem, perceptions of their bodies, and social interactions. For several reasons, it is crucial to comprehend how fat talk affects the social dynamics of this society.

Firstly, maintaining a particular body shape and appearance is highly valued in Bruneian Chinese culture. As a result, there might be certain demands and standards about body image that are different from those of other cultural groups. Looking at the role of fat talk within this cultural framework could help to better understand how cultural influences influence body image and eating patterns.

Secondly, the Chinese population in Brunei has a collectivistic culture where the opinions and expectations of others are highly valued. This may increase the pressure on people to meet societal standards of beauty and may intensify the harmful effects of fat talk on eating habits and body image. To create a healthy body image and lessen the negative impacts of fat talk in collectivistic societies, it can be helpful to examine the role of fat talk within this cultural context.

This study is significant because it will assist us to understand better how cultural traditions affect people's perceptions of their bodies and their self-worth, as well as how fat talk affects relationships within a particular cultural group.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory are two theories that can provide a further understanding of the social and cultural factors that shape the practice of fat talk among Bruneian Chinese individuals. They offer insights into how group identities and social categories shape individual behaviour and attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a theoretical framework for understanding how group membership shapes individual behaviour and attitudes. Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), SIT proposes that individuals derive their self-concept not
only from their personal characteristics and achievements but also from their membership in social groups. According to SIT, group membership provides individuals with a sense of social identity, which can influence their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in both positive and negative ways. In the context of fat talk in Bruneian Chinese society, SIT can help explain how group membership and social identity shape attitudes and behaviours related to weight and body image.

Research has demonstrated the relevance of SIT to the study of body image and weight-related behaviours. For example, studies have shown that social identity factors, such as perceived similarity to others in a group, can influence body image and weight-related attitudes and behaviours (Cruwys et al., 2014; Diedrichs et al., 2017). In the context of Bruneian Chinese society, SIT may be particularly relevant, as collectivism and the importance of social relationships are highly valued cultural norms in this population (Wong, 2017). Therefore, individuals may be especially attuned to the opinions and attitudes of others in their social networks, including those related to weight and body image.

Additionally, research has shown that the social identity of a group can influence the degree to which individuals engage in fat talk (Rodriguez Castro & Hammer, 2019). In particular, individuals may engage in fat talk as a way of seeking social acceptance and confirming their membership in a particular group (Vartanian et al., 2014). Therefore, SIT can help to explain why individuals in Bruneian Chinese society may engage in fat talk as a way of seeking validation and social acceptance from others in their social networks.

Social Identity Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how group membership and social identity can shape attitudes and behaviours related to weight and body image, including the practice of fat talk. In the context of the Bruneian Chinese society, SIT can help to explain why individuals may engage in fat talk as a way of seeking validation and social acceptance from others in their social networks.

Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) is a social psychology theory that explains how individuals categorise themselves and others based on social identity, and how this process influences behaviour and attitudes (Turner et al., 1987). According to SCT, individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups based on similarities in social identities, such as gender, race, religion, and nationality. These categories form the basis of a person's self-concept and influence their attitudes and behaviour towards other individuals and groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The concept of social identity is essential to SCT, as it provides a framework for understanding how individuals perceive themselves and their relationship with others in the social world.

SCT has particular relevance to the study of fat talk in Bruneian Chinese society, as social identity is a critical factor in shaping the practice of fat talk. The Bruneian Chinese community is a close-knit group with strong cultural traditions that shape social norms and expectations (Ismail, 2018). These cultural norms and expectations are likely to influence how individuals in this community perceive and talk about body weight and shape, particularly in relation to social identity categories such as gender, age, and social status. By applying SCT to the study of fat talk, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the role of social identity in shaping attitudes and behaviour towards body weight and shape in this community.

Research on SCT has shown that social identity can influence a wide range of behaviors and attitudes, including prejudice, stereotyping, and intergroup conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of fat talk, SCT has been used to explain how social identity influences the expression and perception of fat talk. For example, research has shown that individuals are more likely to engage in fat talk with members of their social
group than with individuals outside their group (Pila et al., 2013). This finding is consistent with SCT's emphasis on the importance of social identity in shaping behaviour and attitudes towards others in the social world.

Self-Categorisation Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of social identity in shaping attitudes and behaviour towards body weight and shape in the Bruneian Chinese society. By applying SCT to the study of fat talk, it is possible to gain insights into how social identity categories such as gender, age, and social status influence the expression and perception of fat talk in this community. Understanding the role of social identity in shaping fat talk can help to identify effective interventions that can promote healthier body image and reduce the negative impact of fat talk on individuals' self-esteem and well-being in this society.

Another complementary theory that provides valuable insights into the role of fat talk in the relationships in Bruneian Chinese society is the Objectification Theory. Objectification Theory helps to explain how fat talk can serve to reinforce the idea of how individuals, particularly women, are often objectified and treated as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Objectification Theory, proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), posits that individuals are often treated as objects to be evaluated based on their physical appearance, particularly women who are subjected to the male gaze. According to the theory, objectification happens when individuals prioritise, and judge bodies based on their outward appearance rather than their uniqueness and humanity. Objectification contributes to the development of body shame, which can lead to negative psychological and physical outcomes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008). In Bruneian Chinese society, where physical appearance plays a crucial role in social interactions, fat talk has become a common phenomenon among women. These conversations are often used as a means of bonding and social comparison, but they may also contribute to the objectification of women's bodies. Fat talk can reinforce unhelpful attitudes and ideas about body size, which can have negative effects like disordered eating, body dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem.

According to Objectification Theory, the objectification of women's bodies can lead to self-objectification, which occurs when individuals view themselves as objects to be evaluated based on their physical appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In the context of fat talk, women may engage in self-objectification by focusing on their perceived flaws and comparing themselves to others. Women are frequently judged based on how they look, which causes humiliation and pressure to live up to unattainable beauty standards. Physical attractiveness has benefits; people who are visually appealing are typically portrayed as intellectual, more desirable as romantic partners, or even thought to earn more money than their less attractive competitors (Gapinski et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 1995). As a result, women may use fat talk to conform to societal expectations or to get approval from others. This can lead to body shame and negative self-evaluations, which can have detrimental effects on mental and physical health (Moradi & Huang, 2008).

Moreover, the Objectification Theory suggests that the objectification of women's bodies can contribute to the internalisation of societal beauty standards, which can lead to a focus on physical appearance and an obsession with weight and body size (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This internalisation of beauty standards can perpetuate fat talk, as individuals strive to meet societal expectations and engage in social comparison with others. In the Bruneian Chinese society, where beauty standards are heavily influenced by Western media, this internalisation of beauty standards may be particularly prevalent (Chua & Yeoh, 2010).
A study by Grabe et al. (2008) discovered that women who reported higher objectification also used more fat talk. The authors contend that objectification may cause cultural beauty standards to be internalised, which can manifest as critical and unfavourable self-talk. In a similar manner, Gapinski et al. (2003) and Moradi and Huang (2008) discovered that women who reported higher levels of objectification also had lower self-esteem, which was linked to higher levels of fat talk.

Objectification Theory provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the role of fat talk in the relationships in the Bruneian Chinese society. Fat talk may contribute to the objectification of women's bodies, which can lead to self-objectification and the internalisation of societal beauty standards. This may have negative consequences for mental and physical health, particularly for women who are more likely to experience objectification based on their physical appearance. Using the Objectification Theory as a theoretical framework could help to gain a better understanding of the complex interplay between fat talk, body image, and social relationships in Bruneian Chinese society.

In order to provide clarity and a common understanding of the concepts discussed in this study, it is important to define key terms. The following bullet points outline the definitions of key terms used in this research:

- ‘Fat talk’: Refers to verbal communication used to express dissatisfaction with one's body or physical appearance. It often reinforces cultural ideals of thinness and contributes to body dissatisfaction (Rodgers et al., 2015).
- ‘Body dissatisfaction’: Defined as a negative attitude or feeling toward one's body or physical appearance (Menzel et al., 2010).
- ‘Social comparison’: The process of evaluating oneself by comparing one's attitudes, behaviours, and abilities to those of others (Festinger, 1954).
- ‘Generational differences’: Refers to variations in attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviours, and communication styles that arise between different cohorts or generations within a society. These differences can emerge due to unique historical events, cultural shifts, technological advancements, and social influences experienced by each generation (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).
- ‘Body image’: Refers to the mental representation and perception one has of their own body, which may or may not correspond to their actual physical appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).
- ‘Bruneian Chinese community’: Refers to people of Chinese ancestry who live in Brunei Darussalam. The cultural norms and practices specific to this community may influence the frequency and nature of fat talk in interpersonal interactions.

This paper discusses the prevalence of fat talk among the Bruneian Chinese society and its impacts on interpersonal relationships. While communication and language play a vital role in expressing thoughts and emotions, the use of fat talk can be detrimental to emotional and physical health, foster body shaming, and reinforce detrimental social beauty standards. The study aims to investigate how fat talk is used among Bruneian Chinese and its effects on their relationships. The researcher plans to conduct qualitative interviews with Bruneian Chinese to achieve her research objectives.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Fat talk is a prevalent phenomenon in today's society, where people engage in negative self-talk about their body weight and shape (Arroyo et al., 2014). Although fat talk is commonly associated with women, Arroyo et al. (2014) noted that it is also prevalent among men, who engage in negative self-talk about their masculinity and weight. Furthermore, it was found that not only is fat talk linked to negative body image, eating disorders, and other mental health issues, it also affects the quality of romantic
relationships. While the negative effects of fat talk have been extensively researched in Western cultures, less is known about its role in other cultural contexts, such as Bruneian Chinese society. This chapter will discuss past research surrounding fat talk, review the existing literature on fat talk, factors influencing the prevalence of fat talk as well as its impact on relationships.

Previous studies have examined various factors that influence the likelihood of engaging in fat talk. Fat talk is often motivated by social comparison, as individuals compare their own bodies to those of others and evaluate their own attractiveness and self-worth based on these comparisons. Previous research has shown that upward social comparisons, where individuals compare themselves to others who are perceived as more attractive or thinner, can lead to negative body image and self-esteem, which in turn can increase the likelihood of engaging in fat talk (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001). Additionally, individuals who engage in fat talk may use it to seek reassurance and validation from others, particularly those who are perceived as more attractive or thinner (Thompson et al., 1999).

Peer influence and social norms can also play a significant role in the likelihood of engaging in fat talk. Research has shown that individuals who perceive their friends or peers as engaging in fat talk are more likely to do so themselves (Voelker et al., 2015). This is likely due to the social pressure to conform to group norms and the desire to fit in with one's social group. Additionally, body dissatisfaction and concerns about weight and shape have been found to be associated with higher levels of fat talk. In a study of college students, Parks et al. (2019) found that body dissatisfaction mediated the relationship between media exposure and fat talk, suggesting that exposure to media images of idealised bodies can contribute to body dissatisfaction and, in turn, to the use of fat talk as a coping strategy. In another research by Perloff (2014), results showed that the increase in idealised images on social media contributed to increased social comparison and the inclination to engage in fat talk.

Other than that, generational differences could be a reason for the occurrence of fat talk within social relationships. A group of researchers (Tan et al., 2018) investigated the prevalence of fat talk among various age groups in Bruneian Chinese community. The researchers discovered that the likelihood of engaging in fat talk was significantly influenced by generational differences. Compared to previous generations, younger people have an inclination for fat talk more often. Similar to this, Smith & Jones (2018) carried out a cross-sectional study to look at the fat talk tendencies of various age groups. According to their research, younger people from the millennial generation were more likely to engage in fat talk than those from other generations, including baby boomers and members of Generation X. These results imply that younger people's continued use of fat talk may be influenced by generational factors such as shifting social standards and media and popular culture influences. Tan et al. (2018) also emphasised the importance of taking generational disparities into account when analysing the variables impacting fat talk in certain cultural contexts, such as Bruneian Chinese society.

Some individuals may engage in fat talk simply because it is a mindless and easy topic to talk about, particularly in social situations where there may be little else to discuss. Research has shown that individuals who are bored or anxious may engage in fat talk as a way to fill conversational gaps or alleviate social tension (Salk et al., 2014). Participants reported that fat talk was a 'low-risk' topic of conversation that was unlikely to cause conflict or offend others. The authors suggest that the normalisation of fat talk may contribute to its perpetuation as a common conversational topic, even if it is not directly related to personal weight concerns (Salk et al., 2014). This goes to show that fat talk may serve a social function as a topic of conversation that is seen as relatively safe.
and non-controversial.

Fat talk refers to the act of making negative comments about one's own body or weight, or commenting negatively on the appearance of others in order to bond or gain acceptance from others (Polivy & Herman, 2004). Fat talk is pervasive in our society and can occur in various contexts, including with friends, family, and romantic partners. While fat talk may be intended to foster social bonds, it can have negative effects on relationships.

Research has shown that engaging in the fat talk can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem (Greenleaf & McGreer, 2006; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008). Moreover, when individuals engage in fat talk with their romantic partners, it can lead to negative relationship outcomes such as decreased relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). This is because fat talk can communicate negative messages about one's own body or weight, which can be internalised by the partner and may lead to negative evaluations of the individual's appearance.

These findings are consistent with Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory, which suggest that individuals are motivated to maintain positive social identities and categorise themselves and others based on shared characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Fat talk can serve as a way for individuals to bond with others who share their social identity or categorise themselves based on their weight or body size. However, when fat talk communicates negative messages about one's own body or weight, it can lead to decreased self-esteem and negative evaluations of the individual's appearance, which can in turn impact relationship outcomes.

Furthermore, fat talk can also perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigmatisation of individuals based on their weight or body size (Bessenoff, 2006; Cikaja & Lindgren, 2012). This can lead to further discrimination and marginalisation of individuals who do not fit societal norms for body size and shape. Thus, while fat talk may seem harmless and may be intended to bond with others, it can have serious negative consequences for individuals and society as a whole.

These negative stereotypes and stigmatisation are consistent with Objectification Theory, which suggests that individuals can be treated as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance, leading to negative consequences for mental and physical health (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Fat talk perpetuates the idea that bodies, particularly women's bodies, are constantly under scrutiny and evaluation, which can contribute to objectification and dehumanisation of individuals. This can in turn impact relationship outcomes and contribute to negative evaluations of the individual's appearance.

Researchers have defined fat talk as a term used to describe communication between individuals, often related to disparaging comments regarding themselves or others in relation to one’s body shape, weight, and eating dysregulation (Nichter & Vuckovic, 1994; Warren et al., 2012). Most of the research on fat talk in relationships has been conducted in Western contexts, so it is important to investigate how cultural context influences the prevalence and effects of fat talk in various types of relationships. Additionally, research on the term ‘fat talk’ has mainly been done on college-aged students, which restricts the applicability of findings to other populations. In addition, it is necessary to investigate the prevalence and effects of fat talk on males because most of the study on the topic has focused on women. With that, this study was done completely having Southeast Asian, particularly the Bruneian community, as its main participants.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology section of this paper presents the research design, population and sampling, data collection and procedure, and data analysis techniques used in a qualitative study. The study will adhere to ethical principles, which include gaining informed consent, protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality, and minimising risks to them. The research results will be discussed in a manner that safeguards the participants' anonymity.

The research design of this study used a qualitative approach to explore the role of fat talk in relationships among members of the Bruneian Chinese society. To gather data, the study used two methods: focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Focus group discussions were conducted with small groups of 2 participants to encourage discussion and allow for the exploration of shared experiences and perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives in their own words, which is particularly important when exploring topics such as fat talk.

The participants in this study were the researcher's acquaintances, who were selected through convenience sampling. The researcher selected participants who were willing to share their experiences and perspectives on fat talk and relationships in the Bruneian Chinese society. The study recruited a total of 10 participants, 6 for the focus group discussions and 4 for the semi-structured interviews. While the use of acquaintances as participants may limit the generalisability of the findings, it was deemed appropriate for this exploratory study, as it allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of fat talk within the researcher's social network.

The study employed a flexible and iterative approach to data collection and analysis, allowing for the refinement of research questions and data collection methods as the study progressed. An interview questionnaire (see Appendix A: Questionnaire) was developed based on the research questions and objectives, with Section A being more on a general basis while Section B were in-depth questions to understand the participants’ perspectives on the topic. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants, and the interviews were audio-recorded with their consent.

To ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, several measures were taken. The researcher conducted a pilot study to refine the research questions and data collection methods. Due to time constraint, the pilot study was conducted online and both participants (Participant 1 and 2) were initially told that another recording might occur if the initial questionnaire is to be tweaked in any way. However, after transcribing and thorough analysis of the transcription, the researcher decided to use the pilot study recording as part of the results section. No further re-recording session was conducted with the participants as the questionnaire was kept the same. At the same time, the researcher thinks that if she were to conduct the interview again with Participants 1 and 2, answers might differ or not be as authentic as the initial interview.

Before the start of each interview sessions, the participants were given an introduction, followed by a brief explanation of fat talk to ensure their understanding of the interview topic. Participants are encouraged to raise concerns anytime during the interview if they have any questions to address, to which the researcher will tend to.

A Request Form for Project/Visit for Post Graduate Student was submitted to acquire official authorisation letter. This form facilitated the issuance of a letter that informed potential interview participants about the legitimacy and purpose of the study. By following the established procedures, the university ensured transparency and credibility in communicating the intentions of the research to the prospective participants.
Additionally, as part of the process for data collection, ethical considerations were addressed by the university. In accordance with the established protocols, the researcher was required to complete a Research Ethics Clearance Form to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of Centre for Communication, Teaching and Learning (CCTL), along with required documents. After receiving approval, a softcopy of the form is submitted to The Graduate Studies & Research (GSR) Office by email, with request to acknowledge the sent email. This form ensured that the study adhered to ethical guidelines and protected the rights and welfare of the participants. The form provided detailed information regarding the nature of the research, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation.

The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accurate preservation of participants’ responses and interactions. Subsequently, these audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, capturing the nuances and subtleties of the participants' language. The analysis of the data was conducted with a focus on identifying key themes and patterns that emerged from the transcripts. This thematic analysis approach allowed for a comprehensive organisation and interpretation of the data. By employing this analytical framework, a more profound understanding of the research question was sought. The examination of the data through the lens of thematic analysis aimed to delve beyond surface-level observations and uncover deeper insights. This process facilitated the exploration of the complexity and nuance inherent in the phenomenon, enabling a richer and more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

This chapter presents the approach employed to examine the role of fat talk in relationships within the Bruneian Chinese society. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilising focused group discussions and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Convenience sampling was used to select 10 participants, including 6 for focus group discussions and 4 for interviews, from the researcher's acquaintances. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and participant privacy, were upheld throughout the study. Data collection involved face-to-face interviews, which were audio-recorded with consent. Thematic analysis was applied to transcribed recordings, aiming to identify key themes and patterns in participants' responses. The analysis process sought a deeper understanding of the research question, unravelling nuanced insights about fat talk in relationships. These methodological choices ensured a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under investigation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section will focus on the factors that influence the likelihood of engaging in fat talk and its impact on the relationships. Understanding the factors that contribute to the likelihood of engaging in fat talk can help identify potential interventions to reduce its prevalence. Additionally, the impact of fat talk on the quality of relationships is a significant area of study, as this type of negative self-talk can damage not only one's own self-esteem but also the dynamics of personal relationships. A more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon and its potential impact on individuals and their relationships by examining these aspects of fat talk.

Understanding the factors that influence the likelihood of fat talk is crucial for comprehending its prevalence and impact on relationships within Bruneian Chinese society. This sub-section explores key factors that contribute to the occurrence of fat talk in interpersonal interactions. The following provides an overview of the factors to be discussed: social comparison, generational differences and cultural norms, and the role of fat talk as a mindless topic of conversation.

One factor that was found to have played a significant role in the likelihood of
engaging in fat talk is social comparison. Some situations were brought up where participants would initiate such conversations, such as when they see people passing by or when scrolling through pictures together. This suggests that social comparison serves as a trigger for discussing body image, as individuals may feel compelled to comment or compare others based on what they see. Furthermore, while participants do not feel the want to compare themselves to others, they expressed that there were times they compared themselves to a time when they were skinniest unconsciously when looking back at old photos.

Participant 1: Only like, if we see people passing by and we’ll talk about body image. Or like pictures. If we scroll through pictures together, see together, only then we will engage in this kind of conversation. Like, my parents sometimes if they met someone, they will discuss over the dining table “Oh that kid got chubbier”. I usually listen, I will not join in but if me and my friends, it’s either through photos or see people pass by.

Excerpt 1
Excerpt 1 shows that Participant 1 mentioned that she engaged in fat talk when she sees people passing by or when looking at photos, indicating that social comparison may be a factor that triggers the conversation.

However, it is interesting to note that the participant also mentioned that if the conversation is initiated by her parents, she will not take part at all, but she will if a friend strikes up the conversation topic. This same excerpt could also indicate an instance of generational differences as Participant 1 also indirectly mentioned that the thought of judging a friend’s body has never crossed her mind. This is probably because Participant 1 will only judge someone whom she is not a fan of, which her friends usually felt the same for or understand how she feels towards that person. On the other hand, her parents would just talk about anyone they have seen, comparing them to the past version of the last time they met that person, but also bearing no ill intention.

Participant 6: [There’s a lot of competition lah.]
Participant 5: Yeah, that’s number one. And also second thing is, I think… there’s a lot of… competition that elderly, well generally people like to compare you with someone else and then… they would also compare you to your past previous um… years how you look like and things like that. So for example if you go to like, Chinese New Year, you gain a bit of weight then the year after that your auntie would be like “Did something happen to you? I noticed you gained weight recently, things like that”.

Excerpt 2
In Excerpt 2, there were mentions of elderly individuals reflecting on the social comparison aspect of fat talk, where, similar to the previous excerpt (Excerpt 1), these elders would compare the younger generations to their past selves in terms of their appearance. As a result, usually, the younger generation would tend to feel intimidated by these ‘constructive comments’ and make changes in order to fit into society’s beauty standards. This instance relates to the previously mentioned theories; Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory as it can explain how individuals may engage in fat talk as a way to fit in and gain acceptance within their social groups, which in this case includes the comparison made by the relatives (in this instance, the ‘auntie’). The participant's statement suggests that the comparison and comments about weight gain during Chinese New Year may be a way for the auntie to categorise the individual based
on appearance.

Participant 2: I will start talking about myself if I look back at old photos, when I was at my skinniest. Then I will look at the me now, my stomach and think “I’m fat now”. Yeah that’s it – when I look back at old photos.

Participant 1: Yeah it won’t be out of the blue one. Mostly through photos.

Excerpt 3

In Excerpt 3, Participant 2 mentioned that she would start talking about her own body when looking back at old photos when she was at their skinniest. By comparing her current physical appearance to her past self, she perceived a discrepancy and labelled herself as “fat”. This example highlights how individuals engage in fat talk as a result of comparing their present selves to a previous idealised version, demonstrating the influence of social comparison on body dissatisfaction and subsequent conversations about it. This observation aligns with the findings from previous studies on fat talk and its impact on body image, and factors influencing the likelihood of engaging in fat talk. Specifically, it relates to Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorisation Theory, and Objectification Theory.

Researcher: Mm, in what circumstances would you engage in fat talk with your friends or romantic partner?

Participant 3: Mm, what circumstances... When, mm... (laughs) I think, mm... When they start labelling people, ‘cause uh... when, like, in the past right, as when we were in secondary, we would like to compare who’s prettier, who is chubbier, mm. And then from there, I think I learnt when we start saying people, I will say that... they are not fat but it’s their body structure. So that’s when the conversation rolls in.

Excerpt 4

From excerpt 4 above, it seems that Participant 3 is suggesting that cultural and societal factors, such as stereotypes and beauty standards, play a role in shaping attitudes towards body weight. The participant describes that fat talk may occur when individuals start labelling people based on their body shape or size and comparing themselves and others to determine who is prettier or chubbier. This is consistent with previous research that has found social comparison to be a factor that influences the likelihood of engaging in fat talk (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001).

One prevalent factor that led to the discussion of fat talk, especially in family settings, is due to generational differences and cultural norms. Being brought up in an Asian household, it is a norm to have the topic circled around the dining table without much thought being put into it, disregarding the negative effects it may have on individuals.

Participant 1: I feel like, it’s because of generation. Like, you said, it started off from family. Like, growing up, all the uncles aunties, they’re the ones who judge your body size. Different generation la. Like the generation now, I don’t think we

Participant 2: Maybe because they have nothing else to say right? I think they’re fat too but they still have the courtesy to say you’re fat, just because they’re elders.

Participant 1: That’s why I said, maybe it’s generation. Maybe they don’t mean any harm, they’re just saying it. Other than generation, it could be because of jealousy also.

Researcher: Do you think it could be like a cultural thing?

Participant 2: I think it’s more like mindset, mindset through each generation.
Excerpt 5
Participant 1 suggests that fat talk may be influenced by generational differences and socio-cultural norms in Excerpt 5 as it seems to suggest that the older generations have certain beauty standards ingrained into their mindset, which they tried to impose on the younger generations by constantly making comments regarding their bodies ever since they were young. This, in turn, influenced the way the younger generation thinks about themselves or even the way they behave in order to conform to the norms of this social group. This finding is consistent with the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory. The participants also mention the influence of family members and peers in engaging in fat talk, which aligns with previous research that has found that peer influence and social norms play a significant role in the likelihood of engaging in fat talk (Voelker et al., 2015).

Excerpt 6
Excerpt 6 further supports Participant 1’s suggestion that fat talk may be an influence of generational differences in Excerpt 4, where Participant 3 also brought up the fact that fat talk is a topic that has seemingly always been a norm for discussion among the older generation (in this example, her father), which aligns with research on peer influence and social norms (Voelker et al., 2015). Regardless, the fact that Participant 4 tries to discourage him from further engaging in the talk seems to suggest a shift in mindset between the different generations and this proves that there is indeed a generational difference between both parties.

Excerpt 7
Excerpt 7 reflects the influence of social norms and the perception of fat talk as a norm within the community. As per discussed by Participant 3 in Excerpt 5, Participant 4 describes how fat talk has become normalised and treated as a regular part of the conversation, where it is perceived as harmless because it is verbal and not physically hurtful. This relates to the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory, as the participant mentions the community's acceptance and normalisation of fat talk, which, might serve as a way to bond with others who share similar body size or weight-related
concerns. At the same time, it could lead to a negative perception of certain body images that society is more accepting of, which could lead to higher pressure to conform to these beauty standards.

Participant 5: Yeah. So… for me, how I think is… it, okay I’m gonna give you an answer, in my opinion from a general sense and from what I think about, Chinese Asian ah… society. So in, for me, there’s a lot of… talk going around f-fat… and things like that. It’s… I think it’s because of… people… are very… well I wouldn’t say mm… like, a lot of people are very insecure about their… body image. And how… they… want people to see them as… or like, a certain body goal that they have. So that’s… that’s why there is a lot of conversation and like, you said there’s always like a perfect image that people want to have. That’s, that’s why there are a lot of talk that is around… that, how our body is, should look like, how we want to look like… how it is normally like. But, if I were to think from… the question that you said in terms of how like, how Bruneian society… in terms of like Chinese is… I think number one is, is because… as an Asian, as a Chinese, like… generally, at least from my point of view, we, we would always want people to see the best side of us. So, we would always wanna look the best… to… let other people know.

Excerpt 8
Excerpt 8 serves as further support to the previous two excerpts (Excerpts 6 and 7), where Participant 5 said that there is a lot of talk and conversation about body image and fat, indicating that fat talk is prevalent in the Chinese Asian society. This aligns with the findings of previous studies that highlight the pervasive nature of fat talk in society. He also mentioned how people have a desire to be seen in a certain way or achieve a specific body goal. The desire to look a certain way and the pressure to maintain a perfect image can contribute to individuals engaging in fat talk as a means to meet societal expectations. Furthermore, the emphasis on presenting the best side and wanting others to see them in a positive light is a common cultural norm. This relates to the Social Identity and Self-Categorisation theories mentioned earlier.

Mindless conversation can play a significant role in influencing the likelihood of engaging in fat talk. When individuals participate in mindless conversations, they may rely on common topics that are readily available, such as discussing one's weight or body size. This can perpetuate the normalisation of fat talk and contribute to its frequent occurrence within social interactions (Smith et al., 2019).

Participant 6: Yeah, I think, for my case it's completely like, opposite. ‘Cause, my office is very… flexible or, how do I say this? More on the not-so-serious side, it’s just this morning, even like, I was just like, it was mostly for fun lah, like, we just like, “Oh” I just walked up to my friend and called her fat just because like, she had a lot of food. So yeah, again, it’s all, kind of going into your work culture, whichever like, whichever your colleague is more concerned with. If you’re genuinely concerned about their, about their body image then for sure, a good talk with general advice it’s… it’s always, appreciated. But whereas where I think, in my office, it’s more on the like, stressed with work, sometimes you just wanna have like, have that, fat shame talk.

Excerpt 9
Excerpt 9 highlights how Participant 6’s surroundings, in this instance, his office, would use fat talk as a mindless conversation topic. As Participant 6 works in an environment where he spends most of his time with his colleagues, there are times when
they would run out of topics to talk about. So, the ease and familiarity of discussing weight-related topics make them convenient go-to options, even in situations where individuals may not consciously intend to engage in fat talk. This conversation appears to be based on a mindless topic without much thought or intention, as Participant 6 mentions it being mostly for fun. The Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory can be applicable here as the conversation about weight and body image serves as a way for Participant 6 and their colleagues to bond and engage in a shared topic related to their bodies. The conversation reflects the influence of social identity and shared concerns about body image. Furthermore, this excerpt aligns with Objectification Theory as it demonstrates how fat talk can be used in a casual and mindless manner, objectifying and dehumanising individuals based on their body size or weight.

While fat talk is typically associated with negative outcomes related to body dissatisfaction, there may be instances in which engaging in such discussions fosters social connections and strengthens relationships as well as promoting positive body acceptance.

Fat talk can serve as a common ground for individuals with shared insecurities and contribute to social bonding within these friendship circles. In between close friends, fat talk is brought up as a topic of conversation to not judge each other, but people surrounding them. The topic is merely used to showcase one’s thoughts and perhaps, in hopes of acquiring acknowledgement of similar thoughts from their peers and validation of their opinions. Although engaging in fat talk is entertaining and bonding when it occurs among close friends, responding to fat talk initiated by strangers can be seen as an attempt to establish a connection or seek attention, albeit in a potentially insincere manner.

Researcher: So, you’re saying if you talk something good or bad about another person, we would reciprocate more I think. Like, we would add in to your comment. Participant 1: Yeah, but like not much, like if my partner I talk about body appearance, he doesn’t really talk about it. Like, it’s not that important between me and him. But when I’m out with my friends, it’s because we share the same braincells, so we are also judgmental people, so we talk more.

Researcher: Can you describe if you have any potential positive outcomes from engaging in fat talk, like you feel bonded to that person? Or you feel closer? Participant 1: If it’s among us then okay la. It’s like, entertainment for us. For close friends only. And like, what you say lah, feels bonded. Like if a stranger comes talk to you about another person’s body, like fat body or what, then if you respond, then it’s like you’re trying to be friends with that person also, try to get that person’s attention, even though you’re being fake.

Researcher: So for you, this is a topic that you would only prefer with like close friends? Participant 1: Yeah, or if in my office, if my colleagues talk about it, it’s usually when people talk bad about them first like, one of the supervisors said my HR manager is fat and my manager will attack him back. But behind his back. Like my supervisor will talk bad about him, like, he also fat, with us lah. Among us colleagues only, behind the supervisor’s back. Then we will engage and get angry together lo. So same lah, being bonded together. Like what participant 2 said, if friends tell her she’s fat, she will take it as constructive feedback, something to motivate her.

Excerpt 10

Excerpt 10 suggests that fat talk is more prevalent in certain social contexts, such as with friends, as compared to romantic partners. As both participants and the researcher are long-time friends who usually share similar views and opinions, fat talk could
sometimes occur in their conversations, usually to poke fun at others without directing these comments to the said person. While this occurrence is not necessarily positive as it may unintentionally hurt others’ feelings, fat talk has served as a topic used for social bonding between this group of friends, which supports previous research that fat talk occurs more commonly in same-sex groups and is used as a bonding mechanism (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). At the same time, Participant 1’s comment about judging others' bodies also aligns with the idea that fat talk perpetuates negative stereotypes and stigmatisation of individuals based on their weight or body size (Bessenoff, 2006; Cikaja & Lindgren, 2012). However, Participant 1 also noted that the potential bonding effect of such talk is limited to close friends or colleagues, and not to strangers or acquaintances. This reflects the idea of in-group and out-group categorisation. Engaging in fat talk with members of one's in-group (close friends or colleagues) can lead to bonding and a sense of belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Despite its negative connotations, engaging in fat talk can create a supportive environment where individuals feel comfortable discussing their body concerns and insecurities with trusted others, or even reaching out to ask for pieces of advice to better themselves. In interviews conducted as part of this study, participants consistently expressed that fat talk provided an avenue for emotional connection and support among friends and family members. Emotional support, demonstrated through understanding and constructive feedback, plays a pivotal role in shaping the perception of fat talk in relationships.

Participant 4: Mm… hm… it depends on scenarios though. Um… if… say… that person is actually open or… okay for me to tell them, so that they would be more aware? In terms of like, relates back to their health, not by commenting on like, social media. I guess, that would be a positive thing to talk about? Provided that they… provided that they don’t mind sharing it. If they do mind… then… probably it’s not a good idea to… to continue further?

Participant 4: Yeah so I guess in that way, if the person is okay for me to share it with him or her, I guess that’s kind of like, open to another, another phase of friendship where it’s closer lah. ‘Cause we tend to, because this is a very sensitive ah… case. So if they’re actually comfortable you telling them um… and then, the reason why we tell them is because of health issues? I guess that’s um… that’s a positive way of how we see it. Yeah.

Excerpt 11

In Excerpt 11, Participant 4 mentions that discussing body-related concerns and health issues can be a positive thing to talk about, as long as the person is open and comfortable with sharing that information. They highlight that if someone is receptive to receiving suggestions and feedback, it can lead to a closer friendship with increased trust and understanding. This aligns with the concept of emotional support, where engaging in fat talk allows individuals to express their vulnerabilities and seek empathy and reassurance from trusted others. Participant 4’s mention of discussing health issues suggests that fat talk can be framed in a way that emphasises concern for overall well-being rather than solely focusing on appearance.

This excerpt relates to Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory. Participant 4’s comments highlight the importance of open and receptive communication within relationships, indicating that fat talk can contribute to bonding and creating a sense of closeness between individuals who share their concerns. This aligns with the notions of social identity and categorisation, as individuals use fat talk as a means to connect with
others who understand and can relate to their body-related concerns.

Participant 5: I think if… I think it depends on your relationship with that person, that’s number one. And second, is like, like I said, the way you put that. Yeah, if, if, if… and also it depends on that person. If they are willing to take it in. So… three factors right. And then, yeah, like, it depends on that, in my opinion, it depends on that three factors. Um… which can… break or improve the relationship. So if… best case is the person come to you for advice, you want to help them, they want to learn and the context that you give them back, um… the guidance you give them back is more on uh… something that is more constructive than destructive, more motivating than demotivating that person, in terms of that fat talk conversation. That’s how I see it.

Participant 6: Pretty much subjective. I mean, the way I see it like, okay so me and participant 5 lah. Like, actually the whole reason why I kind of started gym was kind of how I wanna see myself like “Okay, maybe I need to gain some weight and maybe some muscle lah”. So, in that sense, when I was going through that kind of phase, it was also that kind of fat talk that we kind of brought each other like, he was just like, “Yeah yeah yeah you can do this you can do that” you know “Your body here there, can improve a little bit” It was that kind of motivation. Again, like participant 5 said, constructive instead of destructive and that sort of… motivates me to… improve my body. And somewhat… gave us more bonding time at the gym lah.

Participant 5: Yeah… and a lot more… conversation that we can talk about, right? Because right now we have the same kinda…

Participant 6: Mindset.

Excerpt 12
Participants 5 and 6 emphasise in Excerpt 12 the importance of the relationship between individuals engaging in fat talk and the way the conversation is approached. They highlight the significance of providing constructive guidance, motivation, and support to each other in terms of body improvement. This indicates that fat talk, when conducted in a supportive and constructive manner, can create emotional bonding and motivation between individuals. The emphasis on constructive feedback, motivation, and support echoes the concept of emotional support that can arise from engaging in fat talk. Similar to Excerpt 11, the participants’ responses align with the notion that fat talk can serve as a means of expressing vulnerabilities, seeking reassurance, and strengthening the connection between individuals. These dynamics are in line with Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory, which suggest that individuals seek to bond with others who share similar concerns and identities.

Participant 5: Yeah, but I also don’t think not having fat talk is a good thing. ‘Cause uh… having that talk about your… body image or… how you want to improve or things like that, it can open doors to a lot of different things. It can open doors to like, like we said right, like I said previously… yeah it can, it can connects people.

Participant 6: Shows you a different side of… of…

Participant 5: [Of you. Yeah. Different side of things like… everyone’s view on uh… certain body image. And how someone look like.

Excerpt 13
To further elaborate on the previous excerpt (excerpt 12), Participant 5 mentioned in excerpt 13 that having conversations about body image could help to connect people. While this may be directly pointing towards fat talk serving as a social bonding topic,
Participant 5 was suggesting that fat talk could help to provide an avenue for individuals to seek support from those who are more experienced or knowledgeable enough to give health-related tips or advice. At the same time, the person giving the advice would normally provide emotional support to the other party for making the effort to bring about changes to his or her life in terms of health, regardless of what his or her intentions are.

Fat talk could help to promote body acceptance and foster support among individuals. Engaging in fat talk allows individuals to address their insecurities openly, fosters empathy and understanding, and challenges societal beauty standards. By sharing their struggles and offering support, individuals can cultivate a sense of acceptance and belonging within their social circles.

Researcher: So, like I mentioned... you mentioned how you talk about this to your boyfriend as well, is there any difference if you were to compare that when you talk about... um, this topic with your sister or friends? Compared to when you talk about it with your boyfriend?
Participant 3: It’s the same. Because... I’m quite, I’m very comfortable with him. So... whatever I said to my sister, I ever told him. And not only that, because he’s super... super thin. We would also tend to compare (laughs) but... yeah, he would... he would reassure me that this size is... is fine.

Excerpt 14
Excerpt 14 above seems to be providing support for the idea that engaging in fat talk with a romantic partner can have a positive impact on the quality of the relationship, as Participant 3 mentioned that her boyfriend reassured her about her body size. This excerpt aligns with the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory. Participant 3 also pointed out that she would rarely engage in such talk with her boyfriend but whenever she does, she would find comfort in discussing body-related concerns with her boyfriend, which could suggest a sense of social connection. While her boyfriend might not be able to relate to her experiences as he himself is skinny by nature, it implies that he understands her concern and perhaps insecurities from her past, leading to more opportunities for emotional support and body acceptance.

Participant 9: ... I may portray fat talk as harmful but in that case, it sounds like a diet talk. I feel like um... now... fat talk or like a diet talk, or me getting fat, I’m still happy about it because I need to use it for... my sport, my activities so it is uh... it is... I would say, in a good way... engaging, engaging to your own body’s understanding. Let’s say, oh I got fat “Aiya you got fat already ah, that means you ate a lot of carbs ah” “Oh is it? Means, uh... is it that my carbs has to be measured?” things like that. But that’s one thing. Because it’s more specific. In the sense of gaining your weight, if you gained weight, that means you’re getting stronger. That’s what, that’s what encouragement we have for our sports, so there is part that is... that is nice.

Excerpt 15
Albeit the fact that fat talk may be used as a way of promoting body acceptance between one’s circle, it is interesting to note that this may differ for different groups of people. For example, in one instance (Excerpt 15), Participant 9, who is an active powerlifter, mentioned that she, as well as her group of powerlifting friends) do not see fat talk as a negative phenomenon when they get comments on their body image. Instead, they take it positively by thinking that they have gotten stronger, both physically and mentally, for their sport/activity.
While engaging in fat talk has helped to improve relationships between individuals, especially in the younger generation, it is undeniable that there may still be negative impacts imposed onto these connections. While fat talk primarily focuses on body dissatisfaction, individuals may engage in these discussions seeking validation and support from others. While in a discussion with the participants, it was revealed that when approached with care and empathy, discussions about body image can foster a sense of support and concern for one another’s well-being. It provides individuals with an opportunity to reflect on their own body image and make positive changes if desired. Otherwise, if concerns about their weight were expressed in a constructive and supportive manner, participants would be keener to take it as an opportunity for self-reflection and positive change. This indicated that the way fat talk is communicated plays a crucial role in its reception.

Participant 2: Actually I have this mindset, I think people shouldn’t be judging any girls on their body because it’s very sensitive to girls especially. I know everyone they care about their body image, so I really don’t appreciate when those people say girls are fat. Actually my dad would say when someone looks fat then… that’s why I don’t really concern myself with such matter because this is someone’s body so if my family say I’m fat, I take it negatively because they don’t say it in a nice way. My mom always used to say I’m fat as well. Like, she wants me to eat a lot but when I do, then she will say I’m fat and keep asking me to lose weight. That’s why, if my family members say I’m fat, I will be sensitive. In a good way, it’s directed to me, like they would only say this about me for my own sake. So that is the good side — if I know I’m fat already then I would want to lose weight. But with friends, if my friends say I’m fat I would take it as constructive feedback to lose weight. Let’s say I’m fat already and my family says I am, and my friends say the same, then it’s time to reflect on myself and tell myself “you need to lose weight”. Like that one time during core, I realised that I’m really fat.

Researcher: So, for participant 2, you don’t like it when your family says it but if you were to take it positively, you would take it as a motivation to lose weight. But, you don’t mind if your friends say it. So you’d be more sensitive if your family say it.

Participant 1: But why?
Participant 2: I think it’s the same as you — when they say it, it’s not in a nice way, especially my mother. She will always criticise me but it’s not like she can do anything about it or help me with it. But she would only criticise. Basically, it just doesn’t sound nice.

Researcher: So I guess, maybe you don’t like the bluntness? Like, when friends say it, it doesn’t sound as bad. Like, they say it in a nicer way.

Participant 2: Yeah like, I would prefer if people talk nicer to me. Because you wouldn’t want to hurt their feelings. You might wanna say them but you still don’t wanna hurt their feelings. So I would prefer if they talk nicely. My family wouldn’t – they’re too blunt.

Excerpt 16

In excerpt 16, Participant 2 has expressed that she did not like it when their family members, particularly her mother, make negative comments about their weight or body. Although Participant 2 said that this did not affect her relationship with her mother, the researcher observed otherwise and believed that this seemed to have caused a possible strain in their relationship. It was observed that although this had only occurred with her mother in the past, there were multiple times Participant 2 expressed feelings of being hurt when she recalled the comments made, even if her mother meant no harm.
Participant 2 also mentioned that her family members tend to be more blunt and less censored when giving opinions, this was perceived as hurtful which could also potentially affect their relationships unknowingly. This aligns with previous studies that have shown that engaging in fat talk can have negative effects on relationships, such as decreased relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012).

Furthermore, Participant 2 expressed a preference for friends as friends are normally more understanding and would talk in a nicer way, suggesting that they value supportive and constructive feedback. The participant's response relates to the Objectification Theory, as they express a preference for being spoken to nicely and not wanting to hurt others' feelings. This indicates an understanding of the impact of negative comments on body image and the emotional well-being of individuals.

Researcher: Mm, have you noticed any changes in the quality of your friendships or relationships as a result of engaging in fat talk?
Participant 3: Mm… I think, my relationship got better.
Researcher: With?
Participant 3: With… my current boyfriend. ‘Cause we… we started being together when we were seventeen. And… I did voiced out that I don’t really like when he likes to joke around people being fat.

Excerpt 17

Excerpt 17 showed an instance of Participant 3 mentioning that her boyfriend trying to engage in fat talk had negative effects on their relationship before. This supports the findings of Arroyo and Harwood (2012) that fat talk can lead to negative relationship outcomes such as decreased relationship satisfaction. However, after voicing out her concern regarding body image talks, it led to a positive change and improvement in their relationship.

Fat talk within relationships can lead to detrimental effects, such as fostering a culture of comparison. When individuals engage in fat talk, they often compare their bodies or weight to those of others, perpetuating a cycle of self-evaluation and comparison. This can create a competitive environment in which individuals feel the need to meet certain appearance standards or conform to societal ideals. It can also fuel unhealthy competition within relationships, particularly when it comes to appearance and body image. Engaging in fat talk may inadvertently turn relationships into battlegrounds where individuals feel the pressure to conform to beauty standards or engage in body-shaming behaviours. This competitive atmosphere can erode trust, empathy, and the foundation of genuine support within relationships.

Participant 3: I was chubby when I was in primary 3. And… it. Oh… no wonder my sister said to talk to me ‘cause I was being bullied very bad. Not very bad but favouritism.
Researcher: In… primary school?
Participant 3: Mhmm.
Researcher: Actually I’d like to know more about the bullying if you don’t mind sharing. Are those… comments coming from guys or girls?

Participant 3: Guys… and girls. It’s not… when it comes to girls, it’s not really bullying. But when it comes to guys, it is. They actually like… they like to fat shame. Mm… I remember when I was younger, because I was fatter, the name is easily… they gave me a name, it’s called 小猪猪 (little pig). (laughs) yeah, because of my… my mm… body size. And… that’s how they label? It’s like, they call you names.

Researcher: Uh huh… how about like… girls?

Participant 3: Girls it’s comparing. They don’t bully but they compare. They compare you to like skinnier girls? Oh guys also compare. They would… I remember like, yeah my ex also… his friends would say like “Why is your girlfriend so fat?” Not only that, it’s like… it’s not, I don’t think it’s also… maybe I also see favouritism as bullying for me. Because it’s obvious that… teachers don’t prefer me… they prefer the pretty ones. So if people associate thin, they would associate pretty. So I thought, thin means pretty.

Excerpt 18
Excerpt 18 shows the multiple occasions Participant 3 mentioned being bullied (in actual terms, fat-shamed and compared to) in primary school, either by classmates or her previous partner, leading to negative feelings and ultimately affecting the relationships between her peers and her. This pressure to conform to society’s expectations of a certain body image was further accelerated by perceived feelings of favouritism by her teachers who prefer her peers who are more attractive looking than Participant 3. These instances are in line with both the Objectification Theory and Gender Role Theory in terms of the societal pressure to conform to certain body size and shape, particularly for women.

Participant 5: Very, very bad. We are, we are all… we are. People nowadays are on social media a lot. And… because of how the algorithm are, people… who look better, you know, those Greek god bodies, those girls with like, hourglass body are all on your social media and… and in a way or another, you tend to compare yourself to them? Even if you don’t realise it.

Excerpt 19
Participant 5 mentions in Excerpt 19 that while the society is constantly exposed to images of individuals with idealised body types on social media platforms, users tend to compare themselves to these individuals, disregarding the fact whether they were conscious or not. This suggests that Participant 5 is aware of the prevalence of idealised body standards on social media and acknowledges the potential for comparison with these images. This aligns with previous study by Perloff (2014) that social media leads to social comparison.

Participant 5's statement relates to Objectification Theory, which suggests that individuals can be treated as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). This statement also indirectly supports Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorisation Theory, as it indicates the presence of shared characteristics or body ideals on social media platforms. The participant highlights that these idealised body types are pervasive and present on everyone's social media, suggesting the existence of a shared social identity or category based on appearance. This supports the idea that individuals may engage in fat talk to bond or gain acceptance from others who share similar appearance-related concerns (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987).
The act of engaging in fat talk, whether directed towards oneself or others, can create a toxic environment that fosters body dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues, leading individuals to withdraw from social interactions with certain individuals or groups. This avoidance behaviour can manifest as a reluctance to engage in meaningful conversations, reduced emotional closeness, and even a decline in overall relationship quality.

Researcher: As a result of this topic, have you noticed any changes in your relationship with whoever engage you into that topic?
Participant 1: A bit like I won’t like to be with this kind of person. Unless it’s like us close friends, we talk about it, we judge together then that’s fine. But if it’s other people, and they start talking bad about other people’s body, in my mind, I don’t think I’ll be able to be close with this kind of person because this is not someone I would like to be with. And if the aunties uncles call me fat, I will always remember that auntie uncle. I feel like if I have some kind of gathering, I will try to avoid those aunties uncles. Don’t want to be close to them. I don’t know, I feel very petty but it’s just not nice.
Participant 2: If let’s say, someone I’m not close to, like I just met this person, if this person will only say bad things about others, I wouldn’t like it. Because why does looks matter so much to them? Before you judge others, you should look at yourself. If it’s family, I’m used to it, I can only try my best to look better. If it’s friend, my close friends, if they want to tell me I’m fat, I’m sure they will tell me nicely so I will react positively. But so far I haven’t met any friends who would do that in a harsh way. If my partner, okay, no one said I’m fat before. Even those who did, it’s always in a nice way. So I can still react positively.

Excerpt 20

Based on Excerpt 20 above, Participant 1 mentioned that if someone talked badly about other people's bodies, they would not like to be close to that kind of person. This indicates that negative comments about body size or weight can affect the quality of a relationship. Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned that if someone only says bad things about others, they would not like it, suggesting that negative comments about body size or weight can have an impact on the likability of a person. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have shown that engaging in fat talk can lead to negative relationship outcomes such as decreased relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Arroyo & Harwood, 2012). This excerpt can be related to the Self-Categorisation Theory, which could specifically suggest that individuals may categorise others as "bad" or "not nice" based on their comments about body size or weight, indicating that shared characteristics related to body image can influence attitudes and behaviours towards others.

Participant 10: They, uh… I feel like one point, there is avoidance? Yeah, they be like, “Yeah yeah” but they’re not doing anything. Or… they’re in denial also? Or like, could, I don’t know man, could like, um… they don’t know how to? So yeah, they just continue to do what they do?

Excerpt 21

In Excerpt 21, by ‘avoidance’, participant 10 meant that the involved parties would avoid discussing anything related to this topic: weight loss, exercise, and food intake. However, it could also indicate that these people would, in a way, avoid
Participant 10 in case she brings the topic up again because they did not want to or were not interested in making any changes to their lifestyle.

The findings of this study shed light on the role of fat talk in the relationships within the Bruneian Chinese society. Engaging in fat talk was found to have both positive and negative impacts on relationship quality. On the positive side, it was observed that fat talk can facilitate increased social bonding among individuals, providing them with a platform to connect and share common experiences related to body image and weight concerns. Additionally, fat talk was found to contribute to increased emotional support among individuals, as it allowed them to express their insecurities and concerns with trusted others. Furthermore, fat talk played a role in promoting body acceptance by fostering conversations around body image and challenging societal ideals. However, there were also negative consequences associated with fat talk. Engaging in fat talk was linked to decreased relationship satisfaction, as individuals who frequently discussed their weight and appearance experienced heightened levels of self-comparison and feelings of inadequacy. Fat talk also led to the avoidance of certain social situations, where individuals felt uncomfortable discussing their bodies or feared judgment from others.

Several factors were identified as influencing the likelihood of engaging in fat talk within the Bruneian Chinese society. First, social comparison emerged as a prominent factor, with individuals more likely to engage in fat talk when they perceived others to be thinner or more attractive than themselves. Generational differences also played a role, as older individuals were found to be more prone to engaging in fat talk compared to younger generations who were more accepting of the different body sizes in today’s society. Cultural norms were identified as influential, with the pressure to conform to societal ideals of beauty and slimness driving individuals to engage in fat talk as a means of seeking validation and acceptance. Additionally, fat talk was observed to be a mindless topic of conversation, serving as a default topic for small talk or as a way to fill conversational gaps.

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will discuss the key findings and implications derived from my study on the role of fat talk in the relationships within the Bruneian Chinese society. By synthesising the wealth of knowledge accumulated throughout this research, I aim to shed light on the significance of my findings and their potential impact on fostering healthier and more inclusive social dynamics. I will delve into the conclusions drawn from my investigation, highlighting the transformative potential of this study, and outlining actionable steps towards cultivating a society that embraces self-acceptance, resilience, and authentic connections. This chapter serves as a comprehensive culmination of my research, encapsulating the core insights and paving the way for future exploration and intervention in this crucial area.

Various factors were identified as influencing the likelihood of engaging in fat talk within Bruneian Chinese society. Social comparison emerged as a prominent factor influencing the likelihood of engaging in fat talk within the Bruneian Chinese society. Participants in this study reported that the topic of fat talk was often brought up when individuals compared themselves to others or when discussing the physical appearance of others. This suggests that fat talk serves as a mechanism for seeking validation and reassurance, as individuals seek to measure their own bodies against perceived societal standards (Thompson et al., 1999). Contrary to initial research where participants were found to compare themselves to others deemed more attractive or thinner than them (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001), participants in this study tend to compare themselves to their past selves more, especially when seeing their past photos. Furthermore, peers
surrounding these participants will also compare the participants’ current image to the last time they have seen them, suggesting that social comparison is a common factor of fat talk being brought into conversation when one is compared to their past selves, rather than being compared to another person or societal standards. This is perhaps because physical appearance is usually the primary characteristics that individuals notice about others during social encounters (Langlois et al., 2000), people tend to remember others from the last time they see them, especially one’s physical appearance. Thus, the comparison is often brought up in their next meeting.

Additionally, generational differences and cultural norms were found to play a role in the prevalence of fat talk. Contrary to initial expectations (Smith & Jones, 2018; Tan et al., 2018), it was observed that older generations tend to initiate fat talk conversations more frequently, while younger generations exhibit a tendency to avoid engaging in such discussions. This finding suggests that cultural traditions and values play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards body image and conversations surrounding it. The older generation's inclination to bring up fat talk may be attributed to cultural norms that place importance on maintaining a certain physical appearance and body shape, which has been reinforced by traditional societal expectations (Tan et al., 2018). This unnecessary pressure placed on the younger generations to meet societal standards seems to be in line with the Objectification Theory where fat talk seems to play a role in having them to conform to societal expectations (Gapinski et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 1995). In contrast, younger individuals may be influenced by Westernised beauty ideals and media portrayals, which promote more diverse and body-positive representations. As a result, they may actively avoid fat talk discussions as a means of challenging and resisting these ideals, seeking alternative sources of validation and self-expression (Martz et al., 2020). Interestingly, self-categorisation theory might be applicable here as well, as participants in this research tend to avoid discussing this topic with the older community, such as parents or older relatives, but have no problem continuing the conversation with their peers, such as friends or colleagues. This is a reflection of Pila et al. (2013)’s implication of Self-Categorisation Theory where individuals are found to be more likely to engage in this topic with their social groups, who they interact with most of the time and may have similar thinking as they do which, in this case, are friends and colleagues.

Furthermore, the mindless nature of fat-talk conversations was identified as a contributing factor. Results have shown that this seems to be a common topic brought up in family settings, usually by the older generations who do not seem to see the detrimental effects this talk has, especially on the younger generations. Findings have also shown that fat talk often served as a default topic of conversation, requiring little thought or effort to initiate and maintain social interactions (Salk et al., 2014). This is repeatedly mentioned by Participants 5, 6 and 7, who mentioned that this topic of conversation is always brought up when interacting with their colleagues. This mindlessness may perpetuate the cycle of fat talk, as individuals engage in these discussions without necessarily reflecting on the potential consequences or implications for their relationships. However, it is interesting to note that participants mentioned they had no intention to taunt or offend their peers, but as they spend much of their time with their colleagues, this was just another topic to fill up conversational gaps. At the same time, participants also noted that if they noticed any discomfort from their peers in this type of discussion, they will be more careful when, or even avoid, bringing this topic up in the future.

Engaging in fat talk has been shown to have both positive and negative impacts on the quality of relationships. On one hand, it can contribute to increased social bonding among individuals, as it provides a common ground for shared experiences and emotions.
related to body image concerns. Fat talk can serve as a mechanism for seeking emotional support and validation from others, fostering a sense of empathy and understanding within relationships (Fredrickson et al., 2018). Furthermore, it may promote body acceptance and self-compassion, as individuals openly discuss their insecurities and challenge societal beauty standards collectively.

On the other hand, there are negative consequences associated with engaging in fat talk. The findings of this study indicate that participating in fat talk can lead to decreased relationship satisfaction. Comparisons arising from fat talk discussions can fuel feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction within individuals, leading to strained interpersonal dynamics (Martz et al., 2020). Moreover, fat talk can potentially result in avoidance behaviours, as individuals may feel uncomfortable or pressured to conform to societal expectations regarding body image, leading to decreased authentic self-expression and social engagement (Vartanian et al., 2014). Even though the younger generations would tend to avoid in order to refrain from such discussions, in times when this topic is inevitable, they will still be polite and respectful with the situation, especially when engaging in such topic with the older generations. This seems to be in line with the Social Identity Theory where social relationships are highly valued in the Bruneian Chinese society that individuals are aware of the opinions of others (Wong, 2017).

Future studies should examine the effects of fat discussion on Brunei's other cultural and ethnic groupings, as one suggestion. Although the current study concentrated on the Bruneian Chinese community, fat talk is utilised by all social groups. It is possible that other ethnic groups in Brunei, including the Malay or indigenous peoples, have distinct cultural standards and viewpoints on fat talk. An in-depth insight into how this phenomenon impacts relationships in Brunei could be gained by comparing the prevalence and effects of fat talk among the various cultural and racial groups there.

Another recommendation is to examine the possible benefit of interventions to lessen fat talk in fostering positive body image and self-esteem. According to earlier studies, therapies like cognitive-behavioural therapy may be able to assist people in overcoming unfavourable thoughts and beliefs about their bodies (Cash & Deagle, 1997). Additionally, self-compassion and self-acceptance-promoting therapies have shown promise in lowering negative body image and raising self-esteem (Neff, 2003). The development of focused and culturally appropriate strategies to reduce fat talk and its effects on relationships could be aided by evaluating the efficacy of such treatments in the Bruneian Chinese society.

Finally, given how cultural norms influence the use of fat talk, future research may look into how to encourage direct and honest discussion of weight-related concerns while still upholding cultural values. One strategy may be to teach people how to speak up or offer assistance in a clear but courteous way while highlighting the value of honest dialogue and positive relationships. By empowering people to confront weight-related issues directly, fat talk and other indirect or potentially damaging communication techniques could be avoided.

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