

Broken Promise: The Skinny on Special K's Fight Against Fat Talk

By

E. COURTNEY BROWN

An inquiry project in the Master of Arts in Communication Program
submitted to the faculty of the James L. Knight School of Communication
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts at Queens University of Charlotte

Project Advisor: LEANNE PUPCHEK, Ph.D.
Capstone Advisor: JOHN A. MCARTHUR, Ph.D.

May 2, 2014

Abstract: In late 2013, Kellogg's Special K launched *Fight Fat Talk*, a campaign that encourages women to stop saying negative things about their bodies and focus on a more positive weight management conversation. This study explores the reasons why Special K, a diet cereal designed to assist women with weight loss, urges women toward positivity, when it seems that a prevalence of negative body image would ultimately sell more cereal. I seek to answer the following question: What does Special K's campaign say about women and body image?

In this study, I explore rationality and the construction of reality in terms of stories. I suggest that Special K consumers (women) hear different stories that drive them to make decisions, and that in this case, the dominant story that drives women is the story of body dissatisfaction, rather than the story about positivity that is offered by Special K. The study concludes with a brief ethical perspective on the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign: does Special K represent a positive shift in advertising for women?

On December 9, 2013, Kellogg's® Special K teamed with supermodel Tyra Banks to launch *Fight Fat Talk*, a campaign that would "help shift the weight management conversation to a more positive one" (Kellogg Company, 2013a, para. 1). The campaign's home base is *FightFatTalk.com*, a website designed to be a tool for any visitors who wish to "SHHHut down Fat Talk" (Kellogg Company, 2013b, para. 3). The primary feature of the website is a video that offers women a vivid example of what fat talk is and how it affects them. The video is also available on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEIFISBodVM>).

Here is what a viewer experiences when watching the video (see Appendix A for a more complete description). Women file into a store's front door from the outside, and mill around in what appears to be a clothing boutique. Cheerful saleswomen greet

patrons who have just come inside, and the shoppers discuss items of clothing amongst themselves: *"This is cute."* *"Very cute."*

One by one, the women notice what's around them. They begin to look indignant. One woman's voice says, *"What?"* as we see close-ups of small brown cards attached to items of clothing: *"I look fat in this,"* and *"Cellulite is in my DNA."* The women slowly come to a consensus that the store is designed to make a point. One says, *"Well this is like... looking at the inside of my head."* Others agree: *"It's like you're bullying yourself,"* and, *"an instant rude awakening."*

The narrator says, *"You wouldn't talk this way to anyone else,"* and continues, *"so why do it to yourself?"* The women in the video proceed to talk about the experience as *"eye-opening,"* or *"damaging."* One woman is initially too emotional to speak to the interviewer. All of the women commit to ending fat talk and promoting positive talk. One proclaims, *"I don't wanna hear it anymore! From anyone!"* As the video closes, the viewer is left with the impression of positive, determined women who are motivated to "shut down" any fat flak they encounter in their lives.

The press release for the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign justifies its purpose by advising women that,

Fat Talk is contagious – and it's weighing women down. Whether sparked by an unflattering photo or shopping for jeans, these negative comments women make about their own bodies and others are a destructive and significant barrier to weight-management success (Kellogg Company, 2013a, para. 1).

It goes on to say that fat talk is a common phenomenon, prevalent in conversations among women today, and is an obstacle getting in the way of women's healthy weight goals. The website *FightFatTalk.com* claims to track "Actual fat talk found online," and also tracks "Positive posts that are helping silence the negativity," and shows these opposing numbers in the header of the web-page. Special K encourages women to find out how much fat talk appears on their own social media, share the campaign on Facebook, and Tweet about the campaign using the hashtag #FightFatTalk to join the conversation on Twitter and help to silence the negativity (Kellogg Company, 2013b).

Not everyone agrees with Special K's feel-good message. Popular news site *Jezebel.com* offers a different perspective. "You could get whip-lash from the mixed messages in the press-release," says author Kelly Faircloth (2013, para. 6). "Special K is in fact presenting fat talk not as corrosive to mental health, but rather as a *barrier to weight loss*" (para. 8). *Adweek's* Tim Nudd says, "The spot is clearly going for an empowering vibe, à la Dove or Pantene. [...] But in some ways, it doesn't feel as natural. Without any positivity at all, the signs just don't seem very inspiring" (2013, para. 3). Does Special K express that it cares about the women who eat the product? Or does their focus on fighting fat talk backfire? What *does* Special K's *Fight Fat Talk* campaign say about women and body image? Through this study, I will show that Special K supports a canon of positive body image and self-esteem because they are confident that a larger story of body dissatisfaction will still drive women to buy Special K products.

This study explores the controversy surrounding the campaign by performing a critical analysis, focusing on the message that Special K is urgently expressing to women: "Shut down fat talk." To set up this study, I will briefly examine the scholarly background of the communication phenomenon known as fat talk (Nichter & Vucovic, 1994). Then, I will explore the context of the campaign by examining the nature of women's body image, as well as a brief history of Kellogg's Special K brand cereal and the continuum of controversy surrounding its messaging.

Methods of critical analysis will be used to examine the rhetorical positioning of the Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign and video, as well as the Special K brand and the experience of the target audience. How does the campaign fit into the ways that women view their bodies? Are competing messages involved? How do women process and understand these messages, and how do they know what to believe? I will conclude this study by offering a brief contextual ethical analysis of my findings.

UNDERSTANDING FAT TALK

"Fat talk," a term coined by Nichter and Vucovic (1994), refers to the discursive process of body disparagement among women. It describes a process by which women mutually lament their body shapes and sizes during conversational exchanges. For instance, in a fat talk exchange, one woman complains, "I am getting so fat," and her friend responds by offering reassurance, or complains about an element of her own body in response. For those of us who live in Western cultures, these kinds of exchanges are plentiful and easily recognized, just like the women in the Special K ad showed. In fact, in one study of college women, almost all admitted to engaging in fat talk with

their peers, and nearly one-third called their fat talk frequent or even very frequent (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). Fat talk commonly occurs among the mainstream female population; it is not a phenomenon that occurs only among women and girls with eating pathologies (Ousley, Cordero, & White, 2008).

Mimi Nichter (2000), who studied fat talk in young women, notes, "Although it is not acceptable for a girl to speak highly of herself, it is acceptable for her to say self-deprecating things and have others correct her" (p. 55). Fat talk results from conversational expectations that may or may not be based on actual body dissatisfaction. Britton, Martz, Bazzini, Curtin, and LeaShomb (2006) found that college students recognized mutual self-degradation (fat talk) as a normal occurrence, because women expect other women to fat talk. Tucker, Martz, Curtin, and Bazzini (2007) found that fat talk may be something that is mimicked in conversations; female study participants tended to vocalize self-derogating or self-aggrandizing statements following discussions about body satisfaction that depended on what confederates voiced first. If the confederate expressed confidence about her body, the participant expressed confidence as well.

In Salk and Engeln-Maddox's 2011 study, participants admitted that, during fat talk conversations they initiated with peers, they most often sought sincere reassurance that they were not fat. Participants added that they most often offered the same sincere reassurance to others who initiated fat talk with them. The women said that knowing that they were not the only ones feeling bad about their bodies helped them.

Other fat talk expectations within conversations span a broad and complicated spectrum. Beebe, Holmbeck, Schober, Lane, and Rosa (1996) found that women who had a strong body focus expected other women to evaluate their own bodies in the same ways. Studying anxiety and self-objectification, Cory and Burns (2007) found that women were less anxious when hearing other women put themselves down and more anxious when other women referred to themselves as 'skinny,' which might invite a comparison (and personal dissatisfaction or anxiety) with their *own* bodies.

Fat talk is associated with greater body dissatisfaction and thin-ideal internalization; in other words, when more fat talk happens, women are unhappier with their bodies. What seems like normal conversation becomes an exacerbation of body image disturbance (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). Nichter (2000) also worries, "What effect might this linguistic strategy (fat talk) have on an already fragile sense of self?" (p. 56). Research positively correlates body dissatisfaction with how frequently women reported engaging in fat talk: fat talk might promote body dissatisfaction, or body dissatisfaction might promote fat talk – or both (Salk & Engeln-Maddox, 2011). The bottom line is that although fat talk may feel comfortable among friends, it does not provide a healthy outlet for women's bodily insecurities.

UNDERSTANDING BODY IMAGE

The term "body image" refers to how individuals "think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes" (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004, p. 571, as cited in Cory & Burns, 2007). Body image is a complex aspect of the self that is shaped by both internal and external variables.

Research demonstrates that children of all ages express preference for thinner body shapes over heavier ones (see Lerner, 1973; Lerner & Gellert, 1969; Goodman, Richardson, Dornbusch, & Hastorf, 1963; Richardson, Goodman, Hastorf, & Dornbusch, 1961; Matthews & Westie, 1966; and Davis, Shipp, & Pattishall, 1965 for more information on this subject). Women are bombarded with media images of other women on a daily basis. Whether they visit the Ralph Lauren Facebook page, glimpse sleek fitness ads by Equinox ("Behind the lens," 2011), or browse for clips of popular television shows like *Modern Family* (Cox, 2010), women are frequently exposed to images of a thin female body. They see images of thinness wherever they turn, whether the body belongs to a model, an athlete, or a fit mother of three. Skinny women are portrayed as happy, successful, and good people, and women in the audience notice (see Nichter, 2000; Albertson, 2003; and Cory & Burns, 2007). Exposure to so many examples of seemingly perfect women in the media arouses body image concerns among women (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), and it may even bring about doubt as to personal self-worth (Strahan, Lafrance, Wilson, Ethier, Spencer, & Zanna, 2008). Additionally, considering that the "idealized" female body has become much smaller over the past 50 years while the average real woman's body has become larger, it is easy to believe that girls and young women can become hyper-aware of weight and body size at early ages (Urquhart & Mihalynuk, 2011). Cahill and Mussap (2007) measured women's body dissatisfaction and emotions surrounding exposure to images of thin female models, and found that this exposure substantially decreased body satisfaction and increased anger. Interestingly, these results were measured after

relatively brief exposures to images of models, whereas real-life exposure to unrealistic media images of thin women is more continual.

The drive to secure an "ideal" body takes a toll on women. Research shows that women who experience a disconnect between their actual bodies and idealized bodies can suffer "a unique form of shame" (Cory & Burns, 2007, p. 97). Fredrickson and Roberts' objectification theory (1997) posits that women internalize observers' views of themselves, and that the observer's perspective then becomes their own primary self-view. They explain that internalizing the observer's perspective may lead girls and women to habitually self-monitor, which may affect motivation, increase anxiety and shame, and produce a multitude of other mental health risks. For example, a young woman may wear a new pair of jeans to school and worry about how others evaluate her body in those jeans. She might be focused on this issue constantly, as she goes through the day and encounters peers in her classes at school. Perhaps she just feels a little more self-conscious walking down the hall, or maybe she obsesses over how she should sit at her desk, assured that everyone in the room is studying and judging her body from all angles. Fat talk statements direct all conversational attention to the physical body in this way, and may be another channel through which women internalize observers' views of themselves.

Fredrickson and Roberts' objectification theory complements another concept, Objectified Body Consciousness (OBC), proposed by McKinley and Hyde (1996). OBC assumes that the social construction of the female body provides the key to understanding women's body experiences (see Bartky, 1988 and Spitzack, 1990 for

more information on this subject). OBC posits that women learn to look at their bodies as outside observers; they internalize external standards, and then they believe that reaching these standards of body size and shape are possible for everyone. "Because cultural standards for the feminine body are virtually impossible to realize fully, women who internalize them, connecting achievement of those standards with their identity, may feel shame when they do not measure up," say McKinley and Hyde (1996, p 184).

Apart from media images, common female ideologies in society suggest that women should be constantly attending to their physical bodies, which are "texts through which their morals and values will be read" (Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004, as cited in Cory & Burns, 2007, p. 97). Nichter (2000) discusses ideal weight in her work on fat talk, saying, "being an ideal weight [is] a marker of a woman's identity, achievement, and self-control, and by extension, a statement of her moral virtue and overall self-worth" (p. 183). She says that women young and old are encouraged to subject themselves to constant self-examination and are expected to correct the parts of themselves that need improvement. Nichter adds that teenage girls are especially sensitive to sensing others' scrutiny of their bodies and their actions. As a result, they self-monitor and fat talk frequently.

Knowing that fat talk is associated with body dissatisfaction, and that body dissatisfaction is something all too familiar to women in their pursuit of the thin ideal, one could argue that Special K brings attention to an important issue with its *Fight Fat Talk* campaign. The existing research tells us that Special K is correct, in some respects: Fat talk is indeed prevalent, and may be genuinely damaging to women, in terms of

body image.

UNDERSTANDING SPECIAL K

Kellogg's® Special K® cereal, launched in the mid 1950s, started out as a basic breakfast alternative without any particularly stellar selling points. It was just another product from Kellogg, marketed as a delicious, efficient way to deliver protein at the breakfast table (Choi, 2013). By the 1970s and 1980s, Special K became a way to cut calories with advertisements advising consumers that we could look better in our bathing suits, and that we should eliminate any body fat beyond a single pinch-able inch, by incorporating Special K in our diets (Sagan, 2012).

A box of original Special K toasted rice cereal in January, 2014 delivers a familiar brand image along with the product. On the front, the box features a clean, simple design: The large red letter "K" takes up around a quarter of the total space and is complemented by the image of a small bowl of Special K cereal in milk, with a loaded spoonful being raised to the virtual mouth of the viewer. The nutrition facts and ingredients are listed on one narrow side of the box: one serving size equals one cup of Special K. A Special K serving is recommended with ½ cup of skim milk, though the daily nutrition values are conveniently offered for cereal with and without the milk. Many vitamins and minerals have been added to Special K: Riboflavin, Selenium, Iron, and so on. The first three ingredients on the label are rice, wheat gluten, and sugar. The back of the box encourages daily meal plans and progress tracking for assistance in meeting weight loss goals. It also provides advertising, urging consumers to try new Special K Nourish: hearty hot cereal and nutrition bars, in a variety of flavors with real

ingredients. The cereal itself is light, crunchy, and slightly sweet, and it is easy to understand why women respond when the box urges them to “start [their] day with a complete Special K breakfast.”

Special K, says Candice Choi of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, is now “a diet food empire” (2013, para. 1). In 2003, with “The Special K Challenge,” a campaign that promised women that they could lose six pounds in two weeks by replacing breakfast and lunch with Special K cereal, the product was cemented as a weight management tool (Choi, 2013). Other notable campaigns have garnered both public support and public criticism in the past ten years, such as “What will you Gain When You Lose?” (Walker, n.d.), and “More Than a Number” (2013).

Huffington Post blog contributor Charlotte Hilton Anderson wrote an article about Special K's branding in 2008, called “I Hate Special K.” She says, “Their marketing slogan might as well read, ‘We Hate Women's Bodies So You Will Too’” (para. 3). Claire Mysko of *Thefrisky.com* says, “Women believe we're not thin enough, pretty enough, good enough because for decade after decade, advertisers have *told us these things* in order to sell products as the solution to the insecurities they stoke” (2013, para. 2). She says advertisers have begun to explore “this newfangled ‘empowerment’ thing [...] to sell the same old disempowering products. Hey, it might work!” (para. 5). Marketing professional and blogger Emilie Littlehales says that Special K's brand is based on false positivity rather than legitimate positivity. In 2013, she wrote, “because all women want to lose weight—and Special K gives them the means to do that—the brand is helping to make women happy” (para. 6). She wonders why this approach is so successful, and

suggests that it is because Special K convinces us that losing weight will make us better versions of who we are. She adds, "They create a dream scenario we can't help but want to buy into. Special K's advertising is about having it all—being thin and beautiful and still getting to eat what you want (just as long as a good deal of it is Special K)" (para. 12).

Body dissatisfaction may be perpetuated by the mass media, especially advertising by industries who could benefit from such dissatisfaction, such as beauty, cosmetic, and fashion industries (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). It follows that diet cereal could fall into that category. Indeed, it would seem that the Kellogg's Special K brand needs women to experience discontent with their bodies, or they would see little need to buy Special K cereal.

METHOD

I intend to study the messaging of the *Fight Fat Talk* video while simultaneously exploring the two supporting messages that come into play for the target audience: the message behind the Special K brand, and the messages associated with the female body image experience. How do women process and understand the messages they receive every day, and how do they know what to believe? Indeed,

Women's narratives [tell us] that body image is not a static construct, but has multiple elements, is dynamic and fluctuating. While body image appears to be embedded in women's experiences and perceptions of those experiences, it varies as women encounter or create new experiences, or re-interpret old ones (Paquette & Raine, 2004, p.1049).

RQ1: What *does* Special K's ad campaign really say about women and body image?

This study will explore the messages at hand: the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, the Special K brand, and the female body image experience. It will examine them through storytelling; specifically, it will offer an analysis based on the interplay between the stories that exist for Special K as a company, the story of the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, and the body image experience stories that exist for women, who are Special K's target audience.

Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm (1984) and Jerome Bruner's ten features of narrative (1991) will provide lenses through which to study these stories.

According to Harris and Barnes (2005), "No matter how important or profound an idea may be, it will have no impact or influence unless others listen to it, understand it, and take action" (p.7). So what drives people to listen, understand, and act? Walter Fisher (1984) suggests that one answer is *stories*, and theorizes the narrative paradigm. He starts by emphasizing that people are reflective beings. "From such reflection they make the stories of their lives and have the basis for judging narratives for and about them" (p. 15).

By 'narrative,' Fisher (1984) refers to words or actions that "have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 2). The narrative paradigm centers around the idea that as storytelling animals, human beings make decisions in life based on the stories we believe rather than rational evidence. When it was proposed, the idea represented a grand shift in perspective from the rational world paradigm, the

way to make decisions that assumes people have experiences, consider evidence, and decide among options according to logic. The rational paradigm seemed to ignore that people spend much of their time telling stories, hearing stories, and deciding which stories make sense to them or not. Fisher argues that story-related decisions help to drive their actions. Some people may be more likely to buy into a great story than a reasoned and carefully articulated argument. Fisher explains, "The position that I am taking is that [...] the narrative paradigm, may offer a better solution, one that will provide substance not only for public moral argument, but for all other forms of argument, for human communication in general" (p. 6). A year later, when articulating the narrative paradigm more thoroughly, Fisher (1985) put it even more eloquently: "Technical discourse is imbued with myth and metaphor, and aesthetic discourse has cognitive capacity and import. The narrative paradigm is designed, in part, to draw attention to these facts and provide a way of thinking that fully takes them into account" (p. 347). Thus, Fisher does not dismiss rational deductions with the introduction of this new paradigm; rather, he attempts to simply reveal a different perspective.

Fisher (1984) says that people believe in stories because of *good reasons* instead of reasoned arguments, and those good reasons vary according to the person's culture, personal history, and character. People find good reasons (or not) as they search a story for *narrative rationality*, a quality made up of narrative probability and narrative fidelity. A story that possesses narrative probability is one that strikes us as coherent; it is likely to be true because it could happen, according to what we know about the world around

us. A story that possesses narrative fidelity is one that corresponds with our own life experiences, or with other stories we have already established are true. Something recognizable in the story causes us to see it as consistent to other truths.

While Walter Fisher (1984) introduced us to a way of considering what is believable and not believable in terms of stories, Jerome Bruner (1991) explains, "We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on" (p. 4). Bruner suggests that little effort has been expended on discovering either the ways that people construct the social world around them or the things that happen within that constructed world, and he says those things also happen in terms of stories. Narrative operates as an "instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (p. 6) and can be studied according to ten characteristic features that can be applied to the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, as well as to the story of the Special K brand and the woman's story: Referentiality, narrative accrual, hermeneutic composability, genericness, intentional state entailment, narrative diachronicity, particularity, normativeness, and canonicity and breach.

By studying the ways that the stories are heard, told, and received, and by acknowledging the ways that the stories shape reality, this study will reveal a deeper message of the campaign to answer the question: What does Special K's *Fight Fat Talk* campaign actually say about women and body image? I will conclude by examining my findings according to an ethical perspective from John Alan Cohan, who in 2001 called

for a change in advertisements aimed at women. Is Special K a brand that supports women?

NARRATIVE RATIONALITY: BRAND APPEAL, PUBLIC MORAL ARGUMENTS, & EXPERTS

Brand Appeal: Harris & Barnes (2005) say that stories are often an effective way to communicate leadership, inspiring people by making the teller relatable. In a business environment, stories are particularly applicable in situations such as coaching and mentoring, starting a meeting on a sensitive or touchy issue, illustrating a concept, or talking about a common problem. Perhaps these scenarios, which are supposedly ideal for narrative influence, don't only apply to *internal* leadership and organizational communication. I suspect that they could also apply to the communicated identity of a company's brand, like Kellogg's Special K.

Weight loss is certainly a common concern for women, and it is definitely a sensitive issue. Women are clearly open to coaching and mentoring in this arena, as evidenced by the success of a multitude of weight loss products available today. Could it be that Special K's ad campaigns are just effective stories, accurately illustrating the concept of the weight loss experience, driving the brand to be a leader in the marketplace? According to Fisher (1984), anyone can be 'rational' inside of the narrative paradigm, even people who are not adept at logical, rational consideration. This means that consumers are inherently capable of determining which stories are convincing and which ones aren't.

Stories may indeed be the key to the future of advertising. The organization Story Worldwide would agree, considering themselves a "post-advertising" agency that

believes in the power of stories. "We connect brands to customers by telling engaging and entertaining stories that audiences actually want to hear" (Cheyfitz, n.d., para. 1). Story Worldwide argues that in an age of media bombardment, the only messages people will absorb are the ones we want to absorb. The age of interrupting people with ads is over, because we can fast forward through the commercials, ignore the banner ads, unsubscribe to the emails. Ultimately, we need to hear a great story to identify to a product, says Story Worldwide.

The things that people talk about, listen to, and believe in are not always things they have reasoned out. Walter Fisher (1984) promotes the use of the narrative paradigm to re-conceive public and social knowledge, because such an approach would give that knowledge a form, or "give shape to [...] ideas as identifiable entities in the discourse of citizenry" (p. 15). Kellogg's Special K has produced many campaigns that have garnered publicity, and the common thread within those campaigns is a vein of narrative rationality. The brand is a leading cereal because it has the added edge of serving an additional purpose than most other cereals, in that it is both a breakfast food and a diet food.

Public Moral Arguments: Special K campaigns are each stories, and could be considered what Fisher calls public moral arguments. Each campaign is *public* in that it is available to the masses, aimed at ordinary people, and it is uncontained – anyone with a loud voice can speak up and be an expert on a subject matter, dominating the conversation, as Kellogg has done with the Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign and advising women of the *right* way to talk about our bodies. A public moral argument is *moral* in that it is

rooted in the bigger questions in life; life, death, who people are and how they should be treated. In this way, Special K's *Fight Fat Talk* campaign fits the criteria again, because it addresses how women should treat *themselves*. It is an *argument* because the teller of the story wants to provide good reasons for witnesses of the story to believe the story. Special K is using this particular campaign to make a specific persuasive point: We support women's self-esteem. We don't tear women down. We are here for you. In fact, this is the message Kellogg sends with many of their recent Special K campaigns, like "What will you Gain When You Lose?" (Walker, n.d.), and "More Than a Number" (2013).

Experts: Merriam-Webster's Dictionary online defines "expert" as an individual who has been taught or experienced a special skill, which he or she shows to others ("Expert," n.d.). Does Special K display "expert" status, then, when it comes to the nature of the female experience? While Kellogg is the principal figure crafting messages for its Special K products, Special K is the trusted brand delivering it to the masses, becoming a figurehead for the organization. Special K makes statements about how to live life with each and every campaign, which, according to Walter Fisher (1984), makes them an expert on something, whether or not they deserve the title. Fisher says an expert's role should be that of a counselor in the midst of a public moral argument. "The expert assumes the role of public counselor whenever she or he crosses the boundary of technical knowledge into the territory of life as it ought to be lived" (1984, p. 13). The public, upon identifying the Special K brand as an expert, then evaluates the figure's stories (in this case, campaigns) according to narrative rationality. Narrative rationality

does not have to be taught, because people learn it through life experience. Stories, says Fisher, must possess certain truthful qualities that coincide with a form of good reasons, "the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (Fisher, 1985, pp. 349-350). In other words, does the story warrant an acceptance of and adherence to the wisdom it offers? Kellogg as an organization needs women to recognize certain truthful qualities and good reasons in its Special K campaigns, so that they feel more connected to the Special K brand and buy more cereal.

Stories of Body Dissatisfaction and Self-Esteem: As an expert, Kellogg certainly advises women on how to live with its Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign in particular, by using actresses in the video to illustrate the proper reaction to hearing negative body talk. The *Fight Fat Talk* video is two minutes long, and depicts women's experiences inside of a very unusual type of store. It appears at first to be a typical boutique-style apparel store, but it is designed by Special K to show fat talk statements throughout the interior, via placards and tags that would normally only feature prices, sales, or product features. The messages include things like *Feeling so disgusted about my figure at the moment #Cow, I can't wear a skirt because my legs chafe together, and I look from the neck up, actually said on 10.10.13*. The viewer watches as the unsuspecting female customers process these messages. Women's faces begin to show dismay, one after another. An unseen woman's voice says, "What?!" incredulously, as we see a close-up of a brown card in her hands: "I look fat in this." Another pair of hands holds a card with, "I have a muffin top," and a third pair of hands shows us a card that says, "Cellulite is in my DNA." The viewer sees women react to these statements. They are incredulous and sad. "It's

kind of bewildering to me, to... to think that someone could do this and say this and feel this way about themselves," says one. An emotional woman shakes her head and says vehemently, *"I can't talk about myself that way."*

This video asks women to understand that this is a pretend scenario established by Special K to show them just how impactful the fat talk statements are. We know that this is not a real store, but we are asked to believe that these could be real women. They seem like women we could know from work, school, or church. In terms of narrative probability, the video story rings true for this reason. We believe that these fat talk statements are really things that women say, because we have heard them. We as women know that we are capable of saying those things about our bodies. Because we accept Special K's presentation of the fat talk as an accurate depiction of reality, and because the actresses are believable, this story meets a sufficient standard of narrative rationality to most women.

There is another element in the video that rings true to female audiences, too. Just as women are all too familiar with body image dissatisfaction and the pursuit of the thin ideal, so are they accustomed to another type of story that is perhaps nearly as prevalent: Feel good about who you are. Be confident in how you look. Beauty is only skin-deep. It's what's on the inside that counts. While women feel pressure to submit to an ideal standard of beauty on a daily basis, they also hear this kind of message, too. For example, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty ("Dove Campaign," n.d.) launched in 2004, its ads depicting images of women who did not fit the mold for the ideal female body. By 2010, Dove had "created self-esteem- building, educational programs and activities

that encourage, inspire and motivate girls around the world" (para. 9). Articles advise mothers that by instructing their daughters "that a woman's value is not based solely on outer looks but on her inner essence [...], [she] goes a long way to ensure her daughter's future mental, emotional and physical health" (Sussman, 2004, para. 13). Other articles tell women to look at assets, rather than fixating on flaws: "Many characteristics make people appealing--and most of them have nothing to do with fitting into a size 4" (Colino, 2005, para. 6). Women should stop putting themselves down, stop exaggerating their problem areas in their minds, and how to *act* confident, because real confidence is sure to follow (Colino, 2005).

These messages are not foreign to women in Western cultures. Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) tells us that people innately pursue self-integrity, and seek to reach a positive self-image. Armitage (2012) found that girls responded positively to self-affirmation of values other than those related to their appearances (for example, asking a subject to recall an instance when she forgave another individual a wrong) which) improved self-esteem, overall. This shows that messages of positivity are impactful, or at least, impactful in the moment. The women in the Fight Fat Talk video react dramatically to the insulting fat talk statements, but not so dramatically that their reactions did not ring true to the target audience in some way. The audience agrees that fat talk is unhealthy and holds women back, because they agree that high self-esteem is important: it is a story they believe about themselves, and other women.

Women bring personal stories with them when they evaluate ad campaigns, so their body image experiences are important as well. Take my personal story, for

example. I was a freshman in college when I bought my first box of Special K cereal. My roommate and I had been getting concerned about weight gain toward the end of our first semester; we saw a commercial for The Special K Challenge, and off to the small campus grocery store we went. We believed the story we saw there: Lose 6 pounds in 14 days! That was an amount that felt exactly right to us; we would trim down a bit without going on any extreme diets or starving ourselves. We ate Special K for two of our meals each day, diligently washing the only two bowls we had in our dorm sink after each use in preparation for the next "meal." I think we lasted a couple of weeks, and Kellogg probably got 10 or 20 dollars out of us before we became too cranky to rise to the Challenge any longer. We heard our mothers' voices in our heads, telling us that we were beautiful and warning us against the perils of eating disorders and body image obsession, but we also felt keenly aware of our little bit of weight gain. Special K's campaign rang true to us both, and without evaluating it rationally, we determined that it met our needs exactly because of our own personal experiences (stories).

NARRATIVE AS REALITY

Stories, says Bruner (1991), are instruments the mind uses to construct reality. Stories can be studied in terms of ten features, he says, to determine how they play into how we conceive of reality. Some of Bruner's features are re-ordered from his original layout, and grouped into logical pairings for improved analysis in this study.

Referentiality: Bruner says narrative should be based in verisimilitude, not grounded in fact. *Stories must appear to be legitimate rather than actually being exact or accurate*

depictions. Fisher (1985) based his narrative paradigm on this characteristic: "Narrative fidelity concerns the 'truth qualities' of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (p. 349-350). Stories do not need to be verifiable; they should be *just familiar enough* to the receiver. Thus, it doesn't matter that the clothing store in the *Fight Fat Talk* video is not a real store, or even if the actors in the video are real women or not – the important aspect to the story is that these things *could be* real. Similarly, it does not matter if a woman can verify whether or not an idealized female figure's life is actually better, or if she is actually a happier individual. That the story seems likely is enough to drive women to believe it.

Narrative accrual: *Stories create culture, tradition, and history.* Again, we know this from Fisher's (1984) work on the narrative paradigm, because the stories we accept drive us to make decisions, and decisions shape the culture and society around us. The ads we believe drive us to buy the products we buy, and ads are essentially stories. Special K counts on the fact that the women viewing its ad campaigns share many of the same cultural experiences, and thus buy in to the same kinds of campaigns (stories). Bruner (1991) says "One of the principal ways in which we work 'mentally' in common [...] is by the process of joint narrative accrual. Even our individual autobiographies [...] depend on being placed within a continuity provided by a constructed and shared social history in which we locate our Selves and our individual continuities" (p.20). Women make decisions to buy certain cereals based on the stories they believe, and their

decisions to purchase Special K (instead of Cheerios, or Lucky Charms, for example) add up over time, shaping culture, tradition, and history.

Hermeneutic composability: *All narratives are subject to interpretation.* What is expressed in a story differs from and what the text might mean, even when a story's meaning seems immediately apparent. "Great storytellers have the artifices of narrative reality construction so well mastered that their telling preempts momentarily the possibility of any but a single interpretation," says Bruner (1991, p.9). Story receivers must intuitively study the components of a story to make deductions about its meaning. Individuals' intention attribution and background knowledge (among other factors) will come into play as he or she processes the *Fight Fat Talk* video, even when the story's receivers have similar experiences. This seems at first like an application of the rational world paradigm, because Bruner refers to more than a story's universal believability, but it is still rooted in narrative rationality. Stories, unlike arguments over rationality or logic, allow for open negotiations of "truth" because people interpret differently based on their own personal contexts. In other words, we will all study stories a bit differently based on our individuality, but whether or not they ring true is still ultimately what determines whether they're accurate.

Genericness: Good stories must not be too limited in terms of structure or target audience. *Narratives use genre to construct, categorize, and tell us how to relate to a given human plight, but may be hermeneutically limiting.* This means that the more generic a story is, the more subject to interpretation it is, and thus the better a story it

becomes. For instance, the Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign's video is geared toward women in general, and includes women of all ages, races, and personal styles. This means that the video is more likely to be relatable by a diverse female audience, and is more generic than a video that features only Caucasian teenagers, or only older African-American women, or only single mothers, for example. With a broad audience, Special K strengthens its story, because these women all bring individual perspectives to the table as they watch the video, and they will all perceive the advertisement as *for them* in some way as they consider whether it is a good story. Additionally, a broader span of narrative accrual is more likely as a story is more generic and appeals to an audience's shared history (more on narrative accrual soon).

Intentional state entailment: *Characters in a story must have intentions that are tied to their beliefs, values, cultures, etc. Intentional states and subsequent action must be linked in some manner, and somehow justified, even if a story's outcome is largely unpredictable.* This feature points out some key discrepancies between the main and supporting stories in this study. The characters in the campaign video are believable, even as they get quite emotional in response to the fat talk statements they see around the make-believe clothing store. The audience of women can understand the video characters' reactions because they have likely felt bothered by their own negative-body-talk statements. The characters' assertions that they should stop talking about their bodies that way ring true to the real women watching the video – women agree that this kind of talk is not getting them anywhere. As established before, stories of high self-

esteem and positivity are nearly as familiar to women as stories of ideal bodies, and this makes the *Fight Fat Talk video* a good story to them.

If we consider the Special K brand as its own story, then the main characters in the Special K narrative are the decision-makers for the Kellogg's Special K brand (the "experts"), and they reveal an interesting conflict. Much like Fisher's public moral argument leaders, these characters' intentions must be tied to their own beliefs, values, and culture – and we know Special K's primary objective is to sell cereal. *Fight Fat Talk* tells women to stop fixating on the negative, yet women who feel innately positive and confident about their body sizes and shapes probably do not need to buy Special K cereal, because Special K is a cereal designed for women who want to lose weight. Thus, while the *Fight Fat Talk video's* female characters establish intentional state entailment, the Special K brand does not establish intentional state entailment with its campaign.

Considering the other supporting story that exists in this study, the story of the female body experience, women are the main characters in that narrative. As established in the review of the literature, women's values are viewed by society as tied to their body appearances (Rubin et. al, 2004, as cited in Cory & Burns, 2007). A woman are expected to concern herself with pursuing the thin ideal, even if her body type is better suited at a size and shape that is different from that ideal. Her intentional state (wanting to be something she isn't) and subsequent action (trying to trim down by purchasing Special K cereal, for instance) are linked, even if she never achieves her goal of reaching that thin ideal.

Narrative diachronicity, and particularity: *Narratives happen over continual time and are not understood by their moment-by-moment significance. Narratives are characterized by specific happenings, however. While narratives are processed in terms of their greater scope, happenings become emblematic of those narratives. These happenings become recognizable in other, similar stories, and these particulars are necessary to determine a story's relevance.*

Applying this feature to the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign seems at first challenging, because it is such a brief and finite story with a clear beginning and end, but we could consider the video a representation of a single happening that becomes emblematic of a greater story of how women feel about fat talk. The women in the video are acting out an emblematic happening: they are all fed up with negativity. The audience accepts that these characters have had lives up until this point and will have lives once they leave the imaginary boutique seen in the video. Perhaps this video characterizes a key moment in a familiar narrative that women experience.

A woman's experience is an ongoing narrative that spans her entire life, and yet she associates certain things that happen to her strongly with her overall body image. For instance, she is likely not consciously questioning her body each and every time she sees a supermodel, or experiencing a devastating reaction with every pair of pants that she decides are not flattering. Perhaps, though, she remembers a specific instance when she experienced a body image disturbance that impacted influenced her more than usual that she associates with her overall body image experience. Perhaps one brief

encounter with someone or something made her feel insecure enough about her body that the shadow of the experience stuck around, making her more susceptible to self-scrutiny. Is Special K attempting to serve as one of those specific happenings that impact her body image experience... in a *positive* way? At first glance, it certainly seems that way. We can all probably remember a time someone paid us a compliment or reminded us that our inner beauty is what life is really about, the way that Special K has spoken to us through the *Fight Fat Talk* video.

The Special K brand has a story that defines it, that develops over time. Special K's campaigns could be seen as the specific happenings that come to represent the brand itself. Campaigns like *Fight Fat Talk* are important in determining how relevant the brand is to its primary audience: in this case, women.

Normativeness, and canonicity and breach: *There must be some concept of "normal" in a narrative, or else the "Normal" cannot be interrupted.* According to Bruner, a narrative must first be interrupted in order to be a proper narrative that is worth telling, meaning that it must address a breach of something canonical (something that is traditional, agreed upon, or typical). Special K's campaigns are designed to breach the typical. In the *What Will You Gain When You Lose?* campaign, for instance, women step onto a "larger than life scale," expecting a frightening number, but see inspirational words instead (Kellogg Company, 2010). Stepping onto a scale and seeing those inspirational words is not a typical body experience. Similarly, the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign shows an unusual

scenario in which women's thoughts are made public, displayed in a clothing store-- certainly not an ordinary occurrence either.

Special K is addressing a specific canonical breach with many of their campaigns. In the *Fight Fat Talk* video, Special K is telling women that fat talk is a breach of positivity, and we all agree that high self-esteem is a good thing. Special K suggests that women should fight this negative trend and work to bring things back to a normal state. Women agree that high self-esteem feels *great*, and we support this canon that teaches us about inner beauty, lifting each other up as women, celebrating our curves, and so on. Tompkins, Martz, Rocheleau, and Bazzini found in a 2009 study that female study participants admitted that they actually *liked* a female target more when she expressed body confidence, for example. Bruner (1991) warns that we often witness a narrative that fits so nicely within an accepted canon that, "We can assign it to some well-rehearsed and virtually automatic interpretive routine" (p. 9), which is perhaps the reason women buy Special K cereal.

Women live by two very different canons, though. One is most definitely that we should be confident, and not speak damaging things about our bodies, but the other is that we must meet a standard of ideal female beauty. The Special K brand *should* be more aligned with the latter canon, according to what we know about the purpose of Special K cereal (to assist women with weight loss). Why does Special K urge women to shut down fat talk, an accomplishment that would support a canon of positive body image, a story that apparently conflicts with the story that sells their cereal?

FINDINGS: WHICH STORY DRIVES US... MORE?

Perhaps a personal story (about stories) is helpful to transition toward the study's findings.

At the age of 18, Special K's commercial intentions were not on my radar. The most important thing to me at that age was how I looked to others, and I was painfully aware that I'd put on a few pounds since I'd moved away from home and started college. I had been warned about The Freshman 15 (that mysterious 15 pounds that gathers on the thighs and waistlines of many first-year college students). The idealized female bodies I saw on TV and in magazines, and even the bodies of some other girls in the dorm where I lived, looked different from the reflection I saw in the mirror in my dorm room. Exposure to these images invited my own body image concerns. It even brought about anxiety, depression, and doubt as to my personal self-worth. I had already learned to be critical of my body, at a younger age, and began to diet and self-monitor more eagerly. I knew all about this story.

Ten years later, much has changed in my life, but some things remain the same. I may feel more comfortable in my skin at 28 than I was at 18, but I still worry about others' perceptions of me, compare myself to other women, and fixate on aspects of my body that I'd like to change. If I were hearing about The Special K Challenge now, armed with life experience, a feminist sensibility, a critical awareness of advertising strategies, and a concern about healthy and unhealthy body image... well, I would *still* pause to read the details listed on the box, to see how the brand could make me feel a little less

insecure. I am aware that healthy self-esteem is something to be proud of, and something to strive for. I embrace confidence when I can muster it. I know all about this story, too. Yet I still experience the drive to better my physical appearance according to societal standards of the thin ideal, and those moments seem to trump the confident ones.

The ever-present drive to improve one's physical appearance is a dominant story in a woman's life. She looks at herself as others look at her, and perhaps she starts to believe that achieving the thin ideal is feasible, even mandatory. She begins to habitually monitor her appearance, and when she doesn't measure up to the ideal figures she sees, her anxiety and shame about her body is amplified. Women like her stop treating these exposures to ideal bodies as incidental stories to be studied according to narrative rationality. Bruner would say that narratives happen over continual time and are not understood by their moment-by-moment significance, and the story becomes a constant in her life. *This* is the story that haunts her more than other stories in her life. She feels that she is never attractive enough. She feels that her story should match the stories of other women, that she should always have the intentional state of wanting to work on "problem areas". She has been taught through a series of small stories that she should always want to be improved physically, and that her morals and values are tied to the size and shape of her body. Her pursuit of ideal body image is ingrained in her personality, behavior, and belief system. The ideal body story transcends the standards of narrative probability and coherence at a certain point, and becomes less of a story, and more of a lens through which she considers all other

stories.

In his 1985 elaboration on the narrative paradigm, Fisher conducts a comparison of the philosophies of Socrates and Callicles, according to the narrative principles rather than rational ones. He says that people may prefer one story because it promotes a sense of life as it was meant to be lived, yet they acknowledge the fact that there are other facets to their lives that are recognizable in other stories, which may be conflicting to that overarching sense of ideal life. Stories can offer a person differing applicable elements that are directly recognizable in his or her day-to-day life. Fisher (1984) refers to an earlier version of himself, a self just beginning an exploration of the narrative paradigm: "When one of the myths tends to dominate, whether in culture or in an individual, the other myth is always hauntingly there in the background" (p. 363). In terms of the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, women see an idealized sense of life in the video. They are immediately drawn to the visage of positive, strong women with healthy self-esteem, who will no longer stand for negativity. They associate that newfound self-esteem with the Special K brand. However, the other story they know so well, the story that they hear every day that tells them they are not quite thin enough, is still the myth that haunts them. It's the myth that haunts me.

The brilliance of Special K's approach with their campaigns lies in the combination of myths, or, more specifically, their blend of canonical breaches. On the one hand, in the dialogue and events that happen in the *Fight Fat Talk* video, Special K is telling women that an accepted canon of positive body image has been breached with the prevalence of fat talk statements, and Special K as a brand does not support that

breach. Women are pleased with the brand's stance against negativity. On the other hand, Special K is using the ad itself to initiate another breach: they want women to believe that they created the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign to demonstrate their disdain of the canon that drives women to pursue an unhealthy body image. They appear to be encouraging women to focus on positivity, instead of obsessing about problem areas or imperfections. Special K as a brand appears to support women from all angles; they inform us of a breach of the canon of positivity, and they appear to be committed to the disruption of the canon of unhealthy body image.

Special K capitalizes on these dual canons by understanding that encouraging women to feel positive won't detract from their cereal sales – women will still believe the more dominant story that tells them they aren't good enough, and we will still strive to achieve an ideal body. When we see the *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, and watch the video, we feel redeemed: Here's a brand that understands how hard it is to be a woman sometimes. Here's a brand that accepts us as we are and wants to make us better! Unfortunately, though, Special K does not want to leave women in a state of positivity. If we were left believing our bodies are fine as they are, we would never have the desire to purchase Special K products. They know that our positivity is euphoric, and their campaign will promote brand loyalty, but they are confident that we will return to our normal level of negativity soon and reach for the Special K.

The Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign seems reasonable, likely, and relevant to its target audience, women. The characters in the store are believable. The video is

subject to individual interpretation, yet generic enough that most all women can glean some inspiration from it. It is one in a chain of similar advertising campaigns that work together to constitute the Special K brand, thus *Fight Fat Talk* is an active element in narrative accrual, and this campaign serves as a singular particularity among a larger span of diachronicity. In it, viewers see that a norm of positive thinking and healthy body image is disturbed by fat talk, which serves as the breached canon. The Special K *Fight Fat Talk* campaign is a stunning success, in terms of narrative rationality and narrative as reality. It is a stunning success in terms of taking advantage of women's insecurities by serving as an expert, and pretending to be a brand that supports women.

AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FIGHT FAT TALK

In 2001, John Alan Cohan published an article in *The Journal of Business Ethics* called "Towards a New Paradigm in the Ethics of Women's Advertising." He argues that sales can be generated by ads that don't objectify women and render them sex objects, and that companies can sell products without playing into stereotypes of weakness in women. Advertisers, says Cohan, should emphasize the values that are important to women. Some of his concerns about advertising to women, as they pertain to this study:

Sex stereotypes: Ads present gender stereotypes that fixate on women's weaknesses, "suggesting that women are constantly in a need of alteration or improvement, or are to feel ashamed of themselves, and dissatisfied in life" (p. 327). Cohan points out that women are also portrayed as submissive, confused, child-like, or vulnerable, and that these kinds of ads encourage women to be so.

Attractiveness as an unattainable ideal: Ads redefine what it means to be attractive, shifting it from something fluid and natural to something that is not possible to accomplish. Models in ads are airbrushed, made up, and coiffed to sleek perfection.

“Perfection” is the new equivalent to “attraction,” says Cohan, and women are pushed to take drastic and expensive measures to achieve the proper kind of appearance.

Women are led to believe that they must meet this standard of attractiveness in order to feel true happiness, and there’s no room left for important things, like inner beauty.

Objectification: Ads often present women as objects to be desired, featuring “stunningly disordered models” (Cohan, 2001, p. 327) or perhaps even seductive limbs, or flawless, headless bodies. This, says Cohan, separates a woman’s body, fragmenting the coherent “self.” He says this objectification flies in the face of our society’s apparent commitment to gender equality, and that it has drastic effects on women’s self-esteem.

Cohan says that most people don’t even notice any wrong in these portrayals of women. He praises companies like Lancome, who had a campaign that featured photographs of women that weren’t heavily retouched. This kind of advertising, says Cohan, is the start of a paradigm shift in women’s advertising that “re-establishes images that encourage you to ‘find your own beauty,’ rather than images of unattainable, idealized perfection” (p. 323). He suggests that ads can be re-conceptualized to continue to emphasize the high standards of a product, while also committing to a greater good in our society by remembering that material gain is merely

a means to an end and not an ultimate goal. Ads for women, he says, can turn to more positive imagery that promote self-esteem.

Where do we situate Special K's *Fight Fat Talk* campaign, then, in terms of ethical advertising for women? It appears to address and destroy the family of stereotypes that say that women are too fixated on appearance, or too dissatisfied, or too superficial, and would meet Cohan's requirement for an ethical advertisement in that way. It presents women of all shapes and sizes and colors, and while the figures are generally attractive, no one is airbrushed or model-thin. No one is sexualized or fragmented. These characters show complex emotional reactions that extend beyond blanket assertions about how women "are." It would seem that this campaign is quite ethical, according to Cohan's call for a new approach for advertising. It certainly appears to be a shift in a more ethical direction.

Unfortunately, though, granting that *Fight Fat Talk* doesn't sexualize women, objectify women, or promote any common female stereotypes is not enough to qualify it as an ethical campaign. Even acknowledging that it is packed full of laughter, positivity, and healthy attitudes is not enough. Special K actually presents a complex cocktail of ethical and unethical messages with this campaign, and the ones that are most apparent are the ones that *appear* to benefit women. The canon of positivity gives Kellogg's Special K the luster of an ethical advertiser, but we have to remember that Special K needs women to be perpetually dissatisfied with our bodies in order to succeed as a brand. The campaign rises to meet all of Cohan's requirements for ethical

advertisement for women, at first glance, makes women feel great, and then manipulates those good feelings for its own good, ultimately disregarding what should be the ultimate societal goal: the betterment of women's lives.

CLOSING COMMENTS

"Narrative comprehension is among the earliest powers of mind to appear in the young child and among the most widely used forms of organizing human experience," says Bruner (1991, p. 9). This analysis tells us that it is possible for us to allow two seemingly competing stories drive us in different ways – we recognize the benefit in being positive and avoiding fat talk, but we also remember that society tells us we must remember to pursue the thin-ideal, above all.

Could Special K create campaigns that are supportive of women and still sell cereal?

Unfortunately, I don't think they can. Special K is not a brand that encourages healthful eating, proper nutrition, or exercise. Special K is not a brand that can survive if women feel positive and secure with their bodies. Special K is a brand that capitalizes on women's fears about body image, and ultimately should be viewed as a brand that does not support women. They create manipulative campaigns because they need to sell cereal to survive, and they must turn their backs on women in order to do so.

REFERENCES

- (2013, August 21). *Special K: More than a number*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQOpjnEG4GY>
- (2011, September 1). *Behind the lens: "By Equinox"*. Retrieved from <http://q.equinox.com/articles/2011/12/terry-richardson-campaign>
- Albertson, N.K. (2003). *Internalization of western culture's thin ideal: A literature review on internalization and individuals with eating disorders* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). (ED474676)
- Anderson, C.H. (2008, May 6). *I hate Special K*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charlotte-hilton-andersen/i-hate-special-k_b_100033.html
- Armitage, C.J. (2012). Evidence that self-affirmation reduces body dissatisfaction by basing self-esteem on domains other than body weight and shape. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 53(1), 81-88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2011.02442.x>
- Beebe, D.W., Holmbeck, G.N., Schober, A., Lane, M., & Rosa, K. (1996). Is body focus restricted to self-evaluation? Body focus in the evaluation of self and others. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 20(4), 415-422. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1098-108X\(199612\)20:4<415::AID-EAT9>3.0.CO;2-Q](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1098-108X(199612)20:4<415::AID-EAT9>3.0.CO;2-Q)
- Britton, L.E., Martz, D.M., Bazzini, D.G., Curtin, L.A., & LeaShomb, A. (2006). Fat talk and self-presentation of body image: Is there a social norm for women to self-degrade? *Body Image*, 3(3), 247-254.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), 1-21.
- Cahill, S. & Mussap, A.J. (2007). Emotional reactions following exposure to idealized bodies predict unhealthy body change attitudes and behaviors in women and men. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 62(6), 631-639. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2006.11.001>
- Cheyfitz, K. (n.d.). *Our story: Everything you knew about advertising is BS – before story*. Retrieved from <http://www.storyworldwide.com/our-story/>

- Choi, C. (2013, May 28). *A diet giant*. Retrieved from <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/a-diet-giant-209130291.html>
- Cohan, J.A. (2001). Towards a new paradigm in the ethics of women's advertising. *Journal of Business Ethics, 33*(4), 323-337.
- Colino, S. (2005). Real bodies real beauty. *Time Inc. Health, 19*(5), 138-145.
- Cory, A.L., & Burns, S.R. (2007). What did she say? An examination of the influence of conversation and media exposure on participants' body objectification and anxiety. *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research, 12*(3), 97-103.
- Cox, D. (2010, January 24). *Modern Family – Claire Dunphy (Julie Bowen) in HOT underwear*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3pl6H-In34>
- The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*. Retrieved from <http://www.dove.us/social-mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx>
- Expert. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expert>
- Faircloth, K. (2013, December 11). *Buzz off, Special K, we don't need your lecture on fat talk*. Retrieved from <http://jezebel.com/buzz-off-special-k-we-dont-need-your-lecture-on-fat-1481047640>
- Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs, 51*. 1-22.
- Fisher, W. (1985). The Narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs, 52*. 347-367.
- Fredrickson, B.L. & Roberts, T. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21*(2), 173-206. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1997.tb00108.x>
- Grabe, S., Ward, M.L., & Hyde, J.S. (2008). The role of media in body image concerns among women: A meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(3), 460-476.
- Harris, J. & Barnes, B.K. (2005). Leadership Storytelling: Learn how to get people to connect with you. *Leadership Excellence, 22*(4), 7-8.

- Kellogg Company (2010, December 28). *New Special K® 'what will you gain when you lose' campaign challenges women to view new year's resolutions in a new way.* Retrieved from <http://newsroom.kelloggcompany.com/index.php?s=27529&item=76351>
- Kellogg Company (2013a, December 9). *Special K® partners with Tyra Banks to help women achieve weight management goals this New Year.* Retrieved from <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/special-k-partners-with-tyra-banks-to-help-women-achieve-weight-management-goals-this-new-year-235040781.html>
- Kellogg Company (2013b). *Shhhhut down fat talk.* Retrieved from www.fightfattalk.com
- Littlehales, E. (2013, March 25). *Losing weight (and \$\$\$) the Special K way.* Retrieved from <http://www.blisstree.com/2013/03/25/food/special-k-diet/>
- McKinley, N.M., & Hyde, J.S. (1996). The objectified body consciousness scale: Development and validation. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 20*, 181-215.
- Morrison, T.G., Kalin, R., & Morrison, M.A. (2004). Body-image evaluation and body-image investment among adolescents: A test of sociocultural and social comparison theories. *Adolescence, 39*, 571-592.
- Mysko, C. (2013, September 4). *The wolf in the cereal bowl: How Special K and other companies co-opt body acceptance to sell body shame.* Retrieved from <http://www.thefrisky.com/2013-09-04/the-wolf-in-the-cereal-bowl-how-special-k-and-other-companies-co-opt-body-acceptance-to-sell-body-shame/>
- Nichter, M. (2000). *Fat talk: What girls and their parents say about dieting.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nichter, M. & Vucovic, N. (1994). Fat talk: Body image among adolescent girls. In N. Sault (Ed.), *Many mirrors: Body image and social relations* (109-131). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Nudd, T. (2013, December 11). *Special K tries to stop women who 'fat talk' by confronting them with it: Empowering or just odd?* Retrieved from <http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/special-k-tries-stop-women-who-fat-talk-confronting-them-it-154428>
- Ousley, L., Cordero, E. D., & White, S. (2008). Fat talk among college students: How undergraduates communicate regarding food and body weight, shape & appearance. *Eating Disorders: The Journal of Treatment & Prevention, 16*(1), 73-

84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10640260701773546>

Paquette, M. & Raine, K. (2004). Sociocultural context of women's body image. *Social Science & Medicine*, 59, 1047-1058.

Ralph Lauren Facebook page. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/RalphLauren>

Rubin, L.R., Nemeroff, C.J., & Russo, N.F. (2004). Exploring feminist women's body consciousness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28(1), 27-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00120.x>

Sagan, A. (2012, March 3). *Kellog's (sic) Special K advertising* [video files]. Retrieved from <http://aleksagan.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/kellogs-special-k-advertising/>

Salk, R.H., Engeln-Maddox, R. (2011). "If you're fat, then I'm humongous!" Frequency, content, and impact of fat talk among college women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 35(1), 18-28. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0361684310384107>

Strahan, E.J., Lafrance, A., Wilson, A.E., Ethier, N., Spencer, S.J., & Zanna, M.P. (2008). Victoria's dirty secret: How sociocultural norms influence adolescent girls and women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(2), 288-301. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167207310457>

Steele, C.M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol 21, 261-302). New York: Academic Press.

Sussman, J.L. (2004). Confident mothers, healthy daughters. *Total Health*, 26(3), 42-43.

Thompson, J.K. & Heinberg, L.J. (2009). The media's influence on body image disturbance and eating disorders: We've reviled them, now can we rehabilitate them? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55, 339-353.

Tompkins, K.B., Martz, D.M., Rocheleau, C.A., & Bazzini, D.G. (2009). Social likeability, conformity, and body talk: Does fat talk have a normative rival in female body image conversations? *Body Image: An International Journal of Research*, 6(4), 292-298. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2009.07.005>

Tucker, K.L., Martz, D.M., Curtin, L.A., & Bazzini, D.G. (2007). Examining "fat talk" experimentally in a female dyad: How are women influenced by another woman's body presentation style? *Body Image*, 4(2), 157-164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2006.12.005>

Urquhart, C.S., & Mihalynuk, T. V. (2011). Disordered eating in women: implications for the obesity pandemic. *Canadian Journal Of Dietetic Practice & Research*, 72(1), 115-125. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3148/72.1.2011.50>

Walker, K. (n.d.). *Special K: What will you gain when you lose?* Retrieved from <http://vimeo.com/35607314>

APPENDIX A

We see a white screen, and then: *A Special K Production*, written in a red sans-serif font. Piano music plays in a quick repetitive in three-quarter time as the video begins. The screen shows an extreme close-up of a mobile phone's Twitter feed. A Tweet rises up from Diana Perez Smith, just now: *"My tights are WAY too tight. #thunderthighs."* Then another close-up of a Facebook status, what's on Dominique Reyes's mind: *"My face is so fat today. Gross!"* Then a close-up of a tablet screen. The camera zooms in as a Tweet from Brie H. Yaksic appears, from just 3 seconds ago: *"I just wish I was skinnier. #fatty"*. Text appears on the screen over a white background, and a female voice reads: *"93% of women fat talk"*. The camera shows a medium shot of a duo of women pressing their faces against a storefront window, peering in under the letters they see there: *SHHHH*. The camera cuts to a longer shot, as healthy-looking, average-weight women (not too thin, not overweight) file in through the store's door. The voice



continues, "...*We believe it's a barrier to managing their weight. It happens everywhere... especially when shopping for clothes.*"

Inside, on the other side of the door, perhaps a dozen women mill around inside a store that looks reminiscent of an Urban Outfitters, or Anthropologie. The narrator says, "*To show how damaging words can be, we created a store filled with actual fat talk.*" As she finishes the statement, the camera zooms in to a sign on a table of accessories that says, "*Feeling so disgusted about my figure at the moment #Cow.*" Cheerful saleswomen greet women who enter the store: "*Hi, good morning!*", and "*Welcome!*" and the happy-looking shoppers discuss items of clothing amongst themselves: "*This is cute.*" "*Very cute.*"

Then, there is a disgruntled expression from a young woman, who looks at a dark garment with a furrowed brow. She has noticed something. The camera's view is partially obstructed; it's like it is catching her reaction in secret.



Two more women's faces show dismay, one after another. An unseen woman's voice says, *"What?!"* incredulously, as we see a close-up of a brown card in her hands: *"I look fat in this."* Another pair of hands holds a card with, *"I have a muffin top,"* and a third pair shows us one that says, *"Cellulite is in my DNA."*

The camera begins to cut between women's reactions more quickly now. *"Hashtag cow...?"* someone asks. *"I mean, that's awful,"* says a woman pointing at a sign that reads, *"I can't wear a skirt because my legs chafe together."* We hear other comments, such as, *"It's horrific,"* and *"I'm like, starting to sweat."* Someone finally asks a salesperson, *"What is this? The signs?"*

The women slowly come to a consensus that the store is designed to make a point. *"I mean, these are all things that I've said,"* says one woman. Another says, *"Well this is like... looking at the inside of my head,"* and another, *"It kind of makes me feel nauseous."* We see a woman looking pensive and worried, as another female voice says,



"I feel sad," and another, *"I didn't realize how bad it was."* We see a placard with another fat talk statement, *"I look from the neck up,"* with smaller print that says, *"actually said on 10.10.13"* as we hear, *"It's like you're bullying yourself."* A woman with dark red nails holds a hand over her mouth in apparent disbelief as we hear, *"an instant rude awakening."*

The screen goes white again, with a phrase written there: *"You wouldn't talk this way to anyone else,"* which then transitions to, *"so why do it to yourself?"* Then we return to the women, but now they are facing the camera in a one-on-one interview type of setting. A woman talks in the general direction of the camera, but avoids eye contact and looks around nervously. She seems slightly uncomfortable or unsettled as she says, *"It's kind of bewildering to me, to... to think that someone could do this and say this and feel this way about themselves."* Another woman with bright red lips tells us the experience *"was definitely eye opening,"* and then we see the woman with the red nails again (pictured above). She is very emotional and can't really speak. After about three seconds of seeing her reaction, the camera cuts to another woman, who says, *"it's damaging."* We return to the emotional woman, who shakes her head and says vehemently, *"I can't talk about myself that way."*

The woman who just told us that she found the experience eye opening is back on the screen, and she explains, *"I teach young girls to dance, and I don't wanna fat talk, because I wanna be a role model to them."* Another woman smiles and says, *"Promoting more positive thoughts, within myself, as well as with my friends,"* as though someone has just asked her, *"What will you be doing to Fight Fat Talk?"*



The camera starts to cut between shots of pairs of women, now. One woman in the first pair says, *"No more fat talk."* Another half duo offers, *"I don't wanna hear it anymore! From anyone!"* as the woman next to her smiles and nods enthusiastically.

The white screen returns, and the text now reads, *"Let's shhhhut down fat talk"*. A woman's voice, but not the narrator, says, *"We need to shut it down!"* We see three individual woman face the camera, one after another, saying *"Shhhh!"* and making a hushing motion with their fingers. Then four women stand together in the store, and from a long shot the camera catches them laughing and saying *"Shhhh!"* to each other. *"We are all doing this and we're all in this together,"* a voice says, and another continues, *"We need to be each other's support,"* and a third chimes in, *"reversing the fat talk, making it positive talk."* We see women hugging in the store, smiling at the camera.

The video concludes with the Special K logo, and a call to action: *Join us at FightFatTalk.com.*