RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEELING FAT AND INHIBITED EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN WOMEN

by

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Abstract

Feeling fat, regardless of one's actual size and shape, is an experience that is commonplace among females in our society, and one that can have detrimental effects on their health and well being. Despite this fact, very little research has been conducted that examines women's experience of feeling fat. Clinical literature has suggested that feeling fat may be a result of females transposing emotions that they do not recognize or express onto their bodies; however, there is no empirical data to date that supports this hypothesis. In the present study, relationships between feeling fat and inhibited emotional expression were explored in 143 women between the ages of 20-59 years. The participants completed 4 measures of feeling fat (frequency per day and per week, intensity, and degree) and 3 measures of inhibited emotional expression (silencing the self, anger expression, and emotional expression). In addition, a subset of women (n=45) responded to the question, "What do you mean when you think or say 'I feel fat'?". Results indicated that there were significant bivariate relationships between feeling fat and inhibited emotional expression. Standard multiple regression analyses suggested that two of the inhibited emotional expression variables (Externalized Self Perception and Divided Self) contributed the most to the models of feeling fat. Analysis of the meaning of feeling fat question indicated that feeling fat is primarily a physical experience, there are differences in how the women describe this experience, and some women have an awareness that feeling fat is exacerbated by emotions brought on by internal and external triggers. Possible explanations for the findings are discussed, and future research directions are suggested.
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Chapter One: Introduction

In 1981, Chernin noted that "we have entered an era of cultural life when everyone is preoccupied with a woman's body, but few women, whether fat or thin, feel comfortable living inside the body they possess" (p. 35). Unfortunately, over 20 years later, this statement still rings true. With a diet and exercise industry that spends billions of dollars a year to promote the improvement of the 'flawed' female form, and a media that uses 'ideal' body images to sustain the consumer economy, the focus on women's bodies has only intensified. Subsequently, body image dissatisfaction has become so widespread among females in Western society that it has been referred to as a "normative discontent" (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984, p. 267). While this alone is disconcerting, of even more concern is the fact that this discontent also has serious implications for the physical and emotional health and well being of those who are affected by it. Body image dissatisfaction has been linked to eating disorders, chronic dieting and disordered eating, depression, and low self-esteem (Hutchinson, 1994).

One way that this negative attitude toward the body is manifested is through the experience of 'feeling fat'. Research has found that a majority of women report feeling fat, even though their weight may be within a normal range (Huon & Brown, 1984; Wooley & Wooley, 1984). In fact, in our culture today, this experience has become commonplace among women. Few people would be surprised to hear a woman say that she felt fat, regardless of her actual size. Furthermore, feeling fat is not only widespread among adult women, it is also common among adolescent girls (Koff & Rierdan, 1990; Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999). Alarmingly, the prevalence of this experience is gaining ground in younger girls as well, with elementary school aged girls already beginning to engage in "fat talk" (Nitchter & Vuckovic, 1994, p. 110). As
with body image dissatisfaction, this experience of feeling fat negatively affects how women and girls feel about their bodies and about themselves (Wooley & Wooley, 1984). This, combined with the fact that women themselves have seemingly little awareness that their obsession with, and hatred of, their bodies and selves is not a normal state, is indicative of the need for a closer examination of this issue.

The question of what causes women to feel fat, regardless of their actual size, is perplexing, and one that has received only scant attention within the research literature. Recent work has suggested that feeling fat is not related to the physical body at all, but rather is a far more complex issue. Empirical research, along with informal observations of women, suggests that feeling fat tends to be a variable experience, in that women seldom feel fat all the time (Altabe & Thompson, 1990; Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983; Haimovitz, Lansky, & O'Reilly, 1993). In other words, women seem to feel fat at some times, whereas at other times they are not aware of this feeling at all. Furthermore, the periods of time between which women seem to switch from feeling fine to feeling fat can be very short, within days or even hours. This would reinforce the idea that feeling fat is not merely about the size of one's body, as it seems unlikely that the physical size or shape of a woman's body could change within such short time periods. Rather, the literature in this area has suggested that feeling fat has instead become a culturally constructed 'catch all' for a variety of other thoughts, needs, and emotions that women experience but are unable to clearly distinguish or express directly (Friedman 1993, 1997; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995).

Unfortunately, much of the literature that is available related to the topic of feeling fat is based on clinical theorizing that lacks empirical data to support it. It is the goal of the current research study to begin to fill these gaps in the research literature.
This thesis intends to expand the existing research and literature by further exploring the link between women’s experience of feeling fat and the inability to distinguish among and express emotions. Furthermore, this research will attempt to provide a clearer indication of what feeling fat means to the women who experience it, and to help generate a greater awareness of its underlying causes, both from a theoretical and counselling perspective.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Many women, at various points in their lives, experience a negative sense of their bodies, and express this sense as ‘feeling fat’. In fact, this has become such a normative part of the female experience that it is often difficult to remember that feeling fat is not a feeling at all. Furthermore, this ‘feeling’ seems to occur regardless of women’s actual size or weight and results in women viewing their bodies, and subsequently themselves, in a negative light. This, in turn, impedes upon women’s ability to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

Despite the prevalence of the experience of feeling fat, there is very little research that explores what feeling fat is and why so many women experience it. The current research will attempt to fill this gap to some degree, beginning with this literature review which will describe feeling fat as a component of body image dissatisfaction, examine feminist theory that places feeling fat in a larger cultural perspective, and explore the available research findings related to this issue.

Body Image Dissatisfaction

Women’s experience with feeling fat seems to be directly connected to a general dissatisfaction with their bodies and weight (Jasper & Maddocks, 1992). It is for this reason that a discussion of body image dissatisfaction is included. This discussion will provide both background information and a rationale for the current research. This section of the literature review will define body image and body image dissatisfaction, and explore the prevalence, consequences, and influencing factors of body image dissatisfaction in women.

Definitions

Slade (1994) presented a comprehensive definition of body image, defining it as “a loose mental representation of the body’s shape, form, and size, which is
influenced by a variety of historical, cultural, social, individual, and biological factors which operate over varying timespans" (p. 502). Slade further asserted that there were two main components that make up this representation: perceptual and attitudinal. The perceptual component of body image is the accuracy of an individual's body size estimation whereas the attitudinal component reflects the attitudes, feelings, and cognitions that an individual has towards his or her body. It is the latter component that is of interest in the current research as it includes the experience of comfort or discomfort and satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with one's appearance (Pruzinsky & Cash, 1990). The complexity of the body image construct lies in the fact that a person's internal representation of his or her body is not necessarily a realistic image but rather is highly personal and subjective. As Hutchinson (1994) noted, a person's body image is “a product of the imagination, not to be confused with the actual physical body or with the image that the body projects to an outside observer”(p. 153). She further explained that the translation from the actual physical body to the body image is a complex process that is prone to distortion. It is this distortion that often results in the experience of body image dissatisfaction.

Many studies have been conducted that explore the issue of dissatisfaction with one's body and different researchers have used different terminology to describe this experience. For example, body image dissatisfaction, body image disturbance, and negative body image have all been used to describe the basic experience of being unhappy with the appearance of one's body. For the purpose of this research, the term body image dissatisfaction will be used, based on the definition offered by Jasper and Maddocks (1992), who defined body image dissatisfaction as “disparaging or disliking one's body-the way one experiences one's body” (p. 183).
This definition seems to most closely resemble how women feel about their bodies, particularly with regards to how they feel when they 'feel fat'.

It should be noted that body image also includes perceptions of other aspects of appearance such as face, height, and specific body parts. However, in terms of this research, discussion of body image dissatisfaction will be concerned only with women’s experience of body shape and weight, as these seem to be the factors that lie at the heart of women’s experience with feeling fat. This stance is supported by the fact that much of the research that explores body image dissatisfaction also focuses primarily on a person’s body build and weight. In fact, many researchers appear to consider dissatisfaction with weight and the desire to be thinner to be synonymous with body image dissatisfaction (e.g., Allaz, Bernstein, Rouget, Archinard, & Morabia, 1998; Cash, Winstead, & Janda 1986). Likewise, this body image dissatisfaction is often operationalized as the difference between a figure that represents a person’s ideal body shape and size and a self-perceived current figure as selected from a group of drawings (see Thompson & Altabe, 1991). Again, such operationalizations are indicative of the fact that body size and shape are the factors that seem to be most relevant in terms of exploring this construct.

Prevalence

Results of several large scale surveys conducted over the past 30 years indicate that not only is body image dissatisfaction an issue for many people in our society, but that it is becoming increasingly prevalent (Berschied & Walster, 1972; Cash et al., 1986; Garner, 1997; Thompson et al., 1999). In a comparison of survey results, Thompson et al. noted that overall dissatisfaction with one’s body has increased from 23% to 56% for women and 15% to 43% for men in the period between 1972 and 1996. Furthermore, as indicated by these results, body image
dissatisfaction seems to be a greater concern for women than for men, although clearly, rates are increasing in the male population as well.

Research has shown that over one half of women experience body image dissatisfaction (Cash & Henry, 1995) whereas three quarters report 'feeling fat' (Wooley & Wooley, 1984). These findings are in spite of the fact that the majority of these women would be considered to be of average weight or underweight. In fact, body image dissatisfaction is so prevalent among women that it has been referred to as a "normative discontent" (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984, p. 267); that is, it is an experience so common that it is considered a normal part of women's lives.

Dissatisfaction with one's body does not seem to be restricted by age group, but instead appears to be common across women's life spans. While much of the research has focused on young women, several studies have examined body image attitudes in women up to 70 years of age (Allaz et al., 1998; Cash & Henry, 1995). These researchers found that a majority of middle-aged and aging women also expressed dissatisfaction with their weight. In fact, Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin (1986) noted that concern about changes in weight was second only to concerns of memory loss in women over age 62. Alarmingly, this discontent is also increasingly evident among adolescent girls and children. Paxton et al. (1991) found body image dissatisfaction to be "considerable" (p. 375) among adolescent girls, a result that is supported by a number of other studies (Cash et al., 1986; Koff & Rierdan, 1990; Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999; Wardle & Beales, 1986). For example, Wardle & Beales found that a majority of adolescent girls felt fat and were concerned about their weight, despite being within or even below the normal weight range. A similar trend has been found in younger girls. A review of the current literature indicated that up to 55% of preadolescent girls desired a thinner body size
(Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001) and 31% of 10 year olds reported 'feeling fat' (Cash, 1990). Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that girls as young as seven years old have weight concerns and express dissatisfaction with their bodies (Collins, 1991; Kostanski & Gullone, 1999; Lucero, Hill, & Ferraro, 1999). Clearly, body image dissatisfaction is a significant issue that begins at a young age and continues throughout women's lives.

Consequences

The feeling of being dissatisfied with one's body is not only a problem in itself; research has shown that it is also connected to many serious physiological and psychological difficulties. Most commonly, body image dissatisfaction has been linked to the development of clinically diagnosed eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1989). It is also associated with other disordered eating patterns such as chronic dieting or food restriction, purging, and binge eating, as well as over-exercising and laxative use (Cash et al., 1986; Silberstein, Striegel-Moore, Timko, & Rodin, 1988; Thompson & Psaltis, 1988). These behaviours, in turn, are associated with physical symptoms that can have far reaching effects. For example, extreme dieting and other weight reduction methods can lead to renal and liver problems and gastrointestinal disorders (Rodin et al., 1985). For aging women, dieting can become a health risk because this population is vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies (Allaz et al., 1998). Likewise for children and adolescents, restricted food intake may cause impaired growth and functioning in cases in which the necessary nutrients for healthy development may be lacking (Wardle & Beales, 1986).

In addition, other health related issues also appear to be influenced by body image dissatisfaction. For example, several researchers have found evidence that the
increased rate of tobacco use among adolescent girls may be linked to dissatisfaction with their bodies and weight, as the girls believe that smoking could assist in weight management (Nichter & Nichter, 1991; Paxton et al., 1991). Garner (1997) found a similar trend among adults, with 50% of women surveyed indicating that they smoked to control their weight.

In terms of psychological consequences, body image dissatisfaction has been linked to a number of indicators of psychological well-being such as depression (Cash et al., 1986; Rierdan & Koff, 1997; Thompson & Psaltis, 1988) and decreased levels of self-esteem (Davies & Furnham 1986; Mautner, Owen, & Furnham, 2000) in both women and adolescents girls. Other psychological variables that have been connected to body image dissatisfaction include decreased life satisfaction, loneliness, and feelings of social alienation (Cash et al., 1996; Wooley & Wooley, 1984). In fact, Wooley & Wooley found that 95% of women reported that how they felt about their bodies ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ affected how they felt about themselves which, in turn, affected their behaviour. For example, dissatisfaction with their bodies led to dieting, caused avoidance of situations in which they felt self-conscious, and affected their desire for, and enjoyment of, sports, exercise, and sex. As Hutchinson (1994) stated, “our troubled relationship to our bodies spills over into troubled relationships to ourselves” (p. 152), leaving women vulnerable to disrupted physical and mental well being, as well as a restricted quality of life.

**Influencing Factors**

There are a number of factors that are believed to influence the development and maintenance of body image dissatisfaction. These factors fall within three categories: demographic, developmental, and sociocultural influences (Kashubeck-West & Saunders, 2001) and each will be discussed in turn.
Demographic influences.

In terms of demographic influences, gender, race, and socioeconomic status (SES) have all been investigated in terms of their influence on body image. As mentioned previously, there is a decided gender effect in that women tend to have greater levels of body image dissatisfaction than their male counterparts (Thompson et al., 1999). Unfortunately, the research related to the other demographic factors is not as conclusive. In terms of race, there is little or no research concerning many racial and ethnic groups, and for those who have been examined, the results are contradictory. For example, several studies have compared differences in body image dissatisfaction for African American and Caucasian women. Results from some of this research have shown that African American women have lower levels of body image dissatisfaction than their Caucasian counterparts (Cash & Henry, 1995). Thompson et al. (1999) have speculated that this may have resulted from the fact that African American culture supports a beauty standard that does not emphasize thinness, therefore allowing these women to feel better about their bodies no matter what their size or shape. However, other research has failed to support this conclusion, instead finding comparable rates of dissatisfaction for women within each of these groups (Mautner et al., 2000; Serdula et al., 1993). It is believed that the ambiguity of these results may be related to the third developmental factor, socioeconomic status (Kashubeck-West & Saunders, 2001). It has been found that women in higher SES groups (i.e., those with higher education and income levels) also have higher levels of body image dissatisfaction (Allaz et al., 1998; Rierdan & Koff, 1997; Wooley & Wooley, 1984). It is believed that SES may work in conjunction with race, but with SES being the more powerful variable. In other words, women with similar levels of income and education would hold similar values concerning body size.
and shape, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. More research in this area is needed to examine this argument.

*Developmental influences.*

Several developmental factors have also been identified as potential contributors to body image dissatisfaction in women. These factors include puberty, modelling, and a history of appearance-related teasing. For most females, the experience of puberty has a significant effect on their body image as they adjust to the dramatic changes that occur in their bodies during this period. Added to this, is the fact that puberty also serves to move girls away from the cultural ideal of thinness, because a normal part of girls' pubertal development involves a significant increase in fat and weight (Rierdan & Koff, 1997). This combination results in a decrease in body satisfaction for a majority of adolescent girls (Rierdan & Koff, 1997; Smolak, Levine, & Gralen, 1993). Another link between body image dissatisfaction and puberty is that this is a time when girls begin dating. It is believed that this additional pressure, along with the fact that many girls associate dating success with thinness, also increases the likelihood of developing a more negative body image (Kashubeck-West & Saunders, 2001; Smolak et al, 1993). And finally, several authors argue that this connection between body image dissatisfaction and puberty is a feminist issue that is related to women's position in society (Friedman, 1993, 1997; Stern, 1991). This hypothesis is central to the current research, and will be discussed more fully in upcoming sections of this literature review.

Modelling has also been found to play a key role in the development of body image dissatisfaction. Specifically, it is believed that behaviour and attitudes related to dissatisfaction with one's body are modelled by significant others, and that this, in turn, influences a woman's feelings about her own body (Kashubeck-West &
Saunders, 2001). Peers have been found to be influential in this way, particularly during the adolescent years (Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994). Likewise, it has been found that family environments also serve as models in terms of emphasizing thinness and encouraging body dissatisfaction. Maternal modelling, in particular, has been found to influence girls' body satisfaction (Nichter & Nichter, 1991; Pike & Rodin, 1991; Rieves & Cash, 1996; Wooley & Wooley, 1984). It is believed that mothers may transmit their unhappiness with their own body to their daughters by being overly critical of their daughters' bodies (Nichter & Nichter, 1991), as well as encouraging dieting and concerns about weight through both implicit and explicit messages (Pike & Rodin, 1991).

The third developmental factor that is believed to influence body dissatisfaction is having a history of appearance related teasing. Numerous studies have found that being teased during childhood and adolescence is strongly related to body dissatisfaction in adults (Cash, 1995; Cash et al., 1986; Garner, 1997; Thompson & Psaltis, 1988). While peers in general were cited as the most frequent teasers, there is a connection to the family for this factor as well (Cash, 1995). Cash found that, when asked who was the 'worst perpetrator' of teasing or criticizing appearance, family members and specifically brothers were implicated by 35% of the respondents.

Sociocultural influences.

While both developmental and demographic factors play an important role in the development of body dissatisfaction, sociocultural variables are considered to be the most common and powerful influences. Sociocultural theory purports that "individuals, particularly women, are exposed to pervasive, culture-wide ideals and expectations regarding what is deemed attractive and in Western culture, the socially sanctioned ideal is remarkably thin" (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 125). This theory
maintains that this omnipresent standard, which is out of reach for the average woman, results in a majority of women feeling dissatisfied with their bodies because they are not able to conform to this ideal. Thompson et al. asserts that evidence of the power of these sociocultural mores lies in the fact that eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction are rare in cultures that do not value thinness.

This "culture of thinness" (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 214) is believed to be maintained through two complementary stereotypes that are pervasive within our society (Rodin et al., 1984). The first of these is the belief that 'what is beautiful is good' (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972), with the addendum, 'what is thin is beautiful'. Research has shown that people who are considered physically attractive are also perceived as having virtually every character trait that is socially desirable to the perceiver, such as being interesting, kind, strong, and having successful and fulfilling lives (Dion et al., 1972). Moreover, it appears that the pressure to be attractive is more intensive for women. As Seid (1994) explained, "women's self-image, their social and economic success, and even their survival can still be determined largely by their beauty whereas for men these are based largely on how they act and what they accomplish" (p. 9). And as noted, in our society, thinness has become synonymous with beauty. This is evident in the striking trend towards increasing thinness that can be seen in models, actresses, and beauty contestants, women who are thought to epitomize attractiveness (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992).

The complementary stereotype to 'what is beautiful/thin is good' is 'what is fat is bad'. Rodin et al. (1984) believed that at the root of women's body image dissatisfaction is their fear of being fat, a fear that is perpetuated by the harsh negative views that our society holds towards people who are overweight. These
authors argue that, in our culture, to be overweight is to be faced with psychological, social, and economic punishment. Again, these sanctions seem to be more severe for women than men. There is evidence to indicate that overweight women tend to have lower incomes and less education, suffer education and employment discrimination, and often experience downward social mobility (Rothblum, 1994). Furthermore, overweight women tend to be psychologically stigmatized, because negative traits are associated with fatness in much the same way that positive characteristics are attributed to those people who are thin. Research has shown that fat people are characterized as lazy, dishonest, unintelligent, dirty, and mean, a stereotype that is demonstrated by children as young as five years old (Kirkpatrick & Saunders, 1978, as cited in Nichter & Nichter, 1991; Richardson, 1961). In fact, discrimination of fat people is so common and so pervasive that it has been referred to as one of society's last acceptable prejudices (Ikeda & Naworski, 1992). The message that is transmitted by this stereotype is that nothing is worse than being overweight and that no price is too high to avoid this fate (Fontaine, 1991).

Added to the stereotype that 'what is fat is bad' is another appearance-related myth that affects women's body image dissatisfaction. This is the erroneous assumption that the body is infinitely malleable; that is, a woman can choose, and is responsible for, her body shape and weight (Rodin et al., 1984). By this standard, women who are overweight are believed to have chosen that state, thereby revealing themselves to be "weak willed, nonachieving and out of control" (Fontaine, 1991, p. 672), traits that are viewed as shameful in our achievement driven society. This adds to the stigma related to fatness, and places more pressure on women to strive towards the thin ideal, using rigorous, compulsive diet and exercise to mold themselves into this image. Unfortunately, due to biological differences, only a small
A minority of women can ever expect to be able to match the culturally sanctioned ideal (Rodin et al., 1984). The rest are left with a sense of dissatisfaction and self-contempt for failing to achieve this goal.

A variety of sociocultural factors are involved in the delivery of these messages about how women should look, and the ideal to which they should strive. Again peers, friends, and families are believed to play a large role (Kashubeck-West & Saunders, 2001). These people pass on society’s myths about the importance of thinness by rewarding and encouraging weight loss efforts, reinforcing fat discrimination and stereotyping, and modelling attitudes and behaviours that reflect these beliefs.

However, the most powerful communicator of the thin ideal for women is believed to be the mass media, particularly television programming and women’s magazines. It is argued that the media perpetuates the thin standard of bodily attractiveness for women through its “constant barrage” (Tiggemann, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000, p. 655) of images, articles, and advertisements that reinforce the message that thinness is the cultural norm for which to strive. There is some debate regarding causality in this respect, as it is unclear whether the media determines women’s view of themselves or whether women themselves influence the media (Thompson et al., 1999).

However, as Silverstein et al. (1986) argued, “even if it were true that the presentations of a thin standard of bodily attractiveness for women appear only when media decision makers believe many women desire such presentation, these decisions would still feed back to affect other women” (p. 531).

Body image dissatisfaction is encouraged and promoted by the media in a number of ways. First, the media transmits the thin ideal by presenting a narrow view of what is acceptable in terms of body shape and weight (Thompson et al., 1999). Research that has examined the content of women’s fashion magazines and
television programming indicates that the majority of images of the female form that are available to consumers are decidedly thinner than the average woman could presume to be (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Silverstein et al., 1986). Furthermore, it is argued that the media exerts an especially toxic influence because the models in these mediums are seen as realistic representations of actual people rather than carefully manipulated, artificially developed images (Lakoff & Scherr, 1984).

A second way that television and magazines influence women's dissatisfaction with their bodies is through the large number of articles and advertisements that promote dieting and exercise. Research has found that such ads and articles are up to 11 times more frequent in women's magazines than in magazines targeted at men (Andersen & DiDomenico, 1992). Furthermore, not only does the media encourage women towards continuous body alterations, it also perpetuates the message that changing bodily appearance will lead to a better life. Malkin, Wornian, and Chrisler (1999) discovered evidence of this in the alarming trend of having articles and bylines that encouraged weight loss and exercise positioned beside those that promoted happiness and successful living. Evidence of this type of message can also be seen in the way that overweight women are represented in the media. Although very few images of overweight women are available in magazines or television programming (Silverstein et al., 1986), when they are, they are most often depicted as the target of bad humour or as unattractive and undesirable (Thompson et al., 1999). The subtle message here is that being overweight is a less than desirable position, devoid of respect, love, or happiness. The influence of this suggestion should not be underestimated in terms of its effect on women's satisfaction with their bodies.

Several research studies have demonstrated that not only does the media perpetuate the message of the thin ideal, but this exposure does affect women's
experience of body image dissatisfaction. For example, both Stice and Shaw (1994) and Turner and Hamilton (1997) found that women who were exposed to fashion magazines and the thin models associated with them reported higher levels of body image dissatisfaction than women who viewed neutral magazines or stimuli. Furthermore, these women also demonstrated higher levels of depression, anger, shame, and insecurity, all variables that have been previously linked to this construct. In both of these studies, the reported effects were produced as a result of short periods of exposure to the stimuli. As Turner and Hamilton noted, the implications of this in terms of long term exposure are alarming. Likewise, research related to television viewing and body image dissatisfaction has produced similar results. Several studies have found that viewing programming that presented women in stereotyped roles and promoted the thin ideal, resulted in women feeling more dissatisfied with their own bodies (Heinburg & Thompson, 1995; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996).

Finally, a recent meta-analytic study by Groesz, Levine, and Murnen (2002) of all existing research in this area confirmed this trend. These authors believed that the large effect size revealed by this analysis supports the sociocultural perspective that mass media leads many females to feel badly about their bodies. As Silverstein et al. (1986) argued, the ability of the media to influence women in such a way is a call not only for further study in this area, but also for pressure to change the way that women and their bodies are portrayed in this medium.

Overall, it can be seen that body image dissatisfaction is an issue that is prominent and powerful within women’s lives. The fact that women are decidedly more affected by this issue than men calls into question why this difference is so pronounced and what factors have influenced this gender gap. The next section of
this review will examine the body image dissatisfaction construct from a feminist perspective in an attempt to provide answers to this question.

Feminist Perspectives of Body Image Dissatisfaction

A discussion of feminist theory as it relates to women's body image dissatisfaction is integral to the current research because much of the relevant work related to feeling fat takes a feminist approach. Therefore, it is important to have a basic understanding of this perspective.

The primary assumption underlying the feminist theory of body image dissatisfaction is the belief that women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and weight cannot be viewed as an individual discontent but, rather, must be examined from a larger perspective. Indeed, the fact that millions of women mimic the behaviours and mindset of those with clinical eating disorders (Seid, 1994) indicates that this phenomenon requires an explanation that goes beyond the scope of individual pathology. Feminists argue that "women's attitudes toward, feelings about, and behaviours directed at influencing their bodies need to be understood within the context of Western philosophical, political, and cultural history" (Striegel-Moore, 1995, p. 224). Specifically, these authors believe that the complicated relationship between women and their bodies is a product of living in a patriarchal society that fails to recognize, honour, and respect the collective experience of women (Bartky, 1990; Chernin, 1981; Hutchinson, 1994; Striegel-Moore, 1995; Wooley, 1994). A review of the feminist literature reveals several hypotheses that attempt to explain how this devaluation of women is related to the "tyranny of slenderness" (Chernin, p. 110) and women's normative dissatisfaction with their bodies.
Body Image Dissatisfaction as Oppression

The most prevalent theme within this body of literature is that women's body image dissatisfaction is a direct result of the patriarchal culture's desire to subjugate and oppress women, rather than accept and embrace the female gender as equal (Brown & Jasper, 1993; Chernin, 1981; Thompson et al., 1999; Wolf, 1991). In this hypothesis, it is argued that the thin ideal is promoted and women are encouraged to be preoccupied with this 'body arena' because this preoccupation serves to reduce their strength and energy and to drain resources that might otherwise be used to gain power and status within society. Proponents of this stance believe that, because women are generally socialized to equate their physical attractiveness with self-worth (Thompson et al.), their endless and futile struggle to achieve the arbitrary ideal not only distracts them from other pursuits, but also results in lowered self-esteem and a sense of self-hatred. This self-hatred has been likened to a "patriarchal psychic tapeworm, eating away at energy and self-love and reducing women's abilities to act powerfully" (Brown, 1985, p. 63).

An examination of history reveals that the current trend of controlling women through their bodies is not without precedence. In early cultures, women and their bodies were viewed as sacred, based on their ability to give birth and sustain life (Wooley, 1994). Evidence of this was seen in the rise of goddess-worshipping societies and the "fat and fecund" (Wooley, p. 37) statues that these cultures produced. However, as patriarchal cultures "conquered, suppressed, and merged" (Wooley, p. 22) with these goddess-worshipping societies, females became subordinate to men with their bodies becoming the legal property, and thus under the control, of their fathers and husbands (Wooley). It has been argued that a fear of women and what is female lies at the heart of this oppression (Brown, 1985; Chernin,
1981; Hutchinson, 1994; Wolf, 1994). With this shift to patriarchal rule, the view of
civilians shifted as well. Females were no longer seen as sacred, but rather as
mysterious and powerful, "her body associated with instinct, irrationality,
unpredictability, sensuality, uncleanliness, and evil" (Hutchinson, p. 154). Because
women were feared, and yet were also essential, it was necessary that they be
controlled. Control of women through their bodies served this purpose as it "restricted
her freedom and weakened her strength" (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 33).

Since the time that patriarchal cultures came into domination, nearly every
civilization has sought to impose a uniform shape upon the female body as a means
of maintaining control over this population. As Rothblum (1994) noted, "under the
guise of fashion...women's behavior and appearance have been radically restricted"
(p. 59). The Burmese neck ring and Chinese tradition of foot binding, female
circumcision and the steel ribbed corset (Brownmiller, 1984; Rothblum) are all
examples of ways in which patriarchal societies have asserted control over women.
The message implicit in these actions was that the female body was imperfect in its
natural form, and that appearance, not accomplishment, was the feminine
demonstration of desirability and worth (Brownmiller).

While women were made to bear 'fashionable' restrictions in previous eras, the
current "culture of slimming" (Seid, 1994, p.6), is a 20th century phenomenon (Brown
& Jasper, 1993; Chernin, 1981; Ussher, 1989; Wolf, 1994). Prior to the previous
century, excess flesh on women's bodies was seen as not only acceptable, but
preferable. This fact is evidenced in the art and literature of the times, which show the
ideal female form as rounded and voluptuous. Fat was viewed as a "silken layer"
(Seid, p. 5), a sign of mental and physical well being, while thinness was considered a
"terrible misfortune" (Seid, p. 5). During these periods, changes in the shape of
women's bodies were accomplished through more structural means, with clothing and cosmetics being used to create the illusion of the desired appearance (Seid). However, in the 20th century, the control of women began to be more concerned with the body itself and subsequently, attitudes towards fatness and thinness underwent a complete shift. Fat became the enemy, with the former admiration of the plump feminine form transformed into disgust and hatred, and thin was suddenly 'in' (Wolf). Furthermore, as Seid noted, "[n]o longer did a women have the luxury of manipulating only what was outside her body, the "not me"; now she had to manipulate her self, the once private stretches of the body" (p. 10).

Many feminist authors believe that this "great weight shift" (Wolf, 1994, p. 97) was the result of the increasing progress toward greater political and personal freedom that has occurred for women throughout the 20th century (Brown & Jasper, 1994; Chernin, 1981; Thompson et al., 1999; Ussher, 1989; Wolf, 1994). In this way, women's obsession with thinness was a direct solution to the dangers posed by women who were moving outside the realm of the home, out from under the control of their fathers and husbands, and into other areas of society that had previously been male dominated. As Wolf explained, "[w]hen women came en masse into male spheres, women's pleasure of their natural fullness had to be overridden by an urgent social expedient that would make women's bodies into the prisons that their homes no longer were" (p. 96).

Evidence of this trend can be seen in the fact that each movement made by women in the past century towards increased power and independence has been countered by increasing pressure from society towards the thin ideal. For example, in the 1920s, women's struggles to obtain new rights through the suffrage movement prompted the beginnings of fat aversion. The image of the flapper with her "asexual
flatness" (Ussher, 1989, p. 38) was representative of this attitude. Likewise, the onset of the women's movement in the 1960s coincided with another "reduction movement" (Brown & Jasper, p. 29) during which Twiggy's "emaciated shape" (Brown and Jasper, p. 26) personified the preference for a smaller, less threatening female form. And finally, in today's society, where women have achieved unprecedented movement towards equality in the areas of politics, education, career, and personal freedom, the body ideal that is honoured portrays them as "small, vulnerable, weak, and powerless" (Brown & Jasper, p. 29). As Hesse-Biber (1991, as cited in Rothblum, 1994) noted, "when women are demanding 'more space' in terms of equality of opportunity, there is a cultural demand that they 'should shrink' (p. 61). This preoccupation with the shrinking of the physical self is the "ultimate restriction of freedom of mind" (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 51), precisely fulfilling the goals of the patriarchy that created it. As Wolf so aptly observed, the indoctrination to this culture of thinness has resulted in a population of women who are "weak, preoccupied and mentally ill in useful ways and astonishing proportions" (p. 97).

**Body Image Dissatisfaction as Power and Control**

Several feminist authors offer an opposing view of women's experience of body image dissatisfaction, one that is less commonly assumed but noteworthy nonetheless. Proponents of this theory have speculated that the thin ideal, rather than being a form of oppression, is actually an "antipatriarchal rebellion" (Brown & Jasper, 1993, p. 29). In other words, women define themselves by their appearance and body shape, which are seemingly within their power to alter, thereby experiencing a sense of control that is otherwise thwarted in other areas of their lives (Chernin, 1981; Orbach, 1978; Thompson et al., 1999; Wolf, 1994). In this way, although women seem to passively submit to the demands imposed by the culture of thinness, they
are, in actuality, actively rebelling against the devaluation of their gender by using their weight and bodies to achieve specific ends.

One objective that adoption of the thin ideal allows women to fulfil is that it enables them to move away from the shape that is representative of traditional gender role constraints and move toward liberation (Brown & Jasper, 1993, Striegel-Moore, 1995). The thin female body is the antithesis of the ample feminine form that has traditionally been associated with weakness and passivity. The thinner female body connotes such highly valued characteristics as independence, mobility, freedom, and self-control, allowing women to gain a greater sense of control and power in a society that freely offers them neither (Striegel-Moore). Because fat is the medium and regulator of female sexual characteristics and thereby inextricably related to being female (Wolf, 1994), women are able to increase their push towards equality and emancipation by moving away from what is, in essence, their femaleness, and by demonizing this simple body substance.

Another objective that is believed to be accomplished by the movement towards the thin ideal is the rejection of society's objectification of women's bodies, and thus protection from sexual harassment and coercion (Chernin, 1981; Wolf, 1994; Wooley, 1994). It is argued that the thin ideal grew in response to society's glorification of pornographic images, which presented women's bodies as objects of desire and welcoming of men's sexual attentions (Wolf, 1994). Wooley believed that evidence for this idea lies in the fact that the parts of the bodies that women are most dissatisfied with are those that are most sexual, the areas between their waist and knees. It is thought that a return to a less feminine form, one that is thinner and more androgynous, allows women to achieve a sense of safety and freedom by reducing unwanted and unwarranted male attention (Chernin, 1981). Wolf supported this view
by noting that women in our culture are presented with only two options for their bodies: one is pornographic and the other is anorexic. As she observed, because women “do not have the choice to...demand a better dream...[t]he anorexic body is sexually safer to inhabit” (101).

**Feminist Theory and Feeling Fat**

The preceding discussion of the feminist theory of body image dissatisfaction is especially relevant in terms of the current research because much of the available literature related to the issue of feeling fat also explores the larger sociocultural influences that promote this experience. Specifically, it is argued that the devaluation of women and the incongruity of being a woman in a man’s world promote responses of both conformity and resistance to these pressures. This struggle is believed to lie at the heart of the experience of feeling fat as women learn to cope by focusing on their bodies and, subsequently, feeling fat (Friedman, 1993, 1997; Jasper, 1993; Hirshmann & Munter, 1995; Stern, 1991). The theories related to feeling fat will be discussed in greater detail; however, an examination of other existing research within the feeling fat literature is first warranted, as it is a starting point upon which the current research will be based.

**Women’s Experience of Feeling Fat**

The body image research notes that body image dissatisfaction has become such a prevalent phenomenon that it can be considered a normal part of the female experience. As has been suggested, this dissatisfaction is often expressed by women as ‘feeling fat’ (Jasper & Maddocks, 1992). In fact, it has been found that a majority of women report feeling fat, even though their weight may be within a normal range (Huon & Brown, 1984; Wooley & Wooley, 1984). Given the pervasiveness of feeling fat and “fat talk” (Nitchter & Vuckovic, 1994, p. 110) within our culture, and
women's seeming lack of consciousness to the underlying causes of these 'feelings', it seems clear that there is a need for further exploration of this experience. Surprisingly, despite the normative nature of this experience for women in our society, there is a decided lack of research that explores this issue. A review of the relevant literature will examine the research that is available, and connect this work to the current research questions.

**Feeling Fat as a Distinct Construct**

The first section of the literature related to the concept of feeling fat examines its validity as a distinct component of body image dissatisfaction. In other words, is the experience of feeling fat different from merely thinking that one is fat or actually being fat? Several studies have explored this concept and found support for the hypothesis that feeling fat is a distinct construct (Cash, 1994; Huon & Brown, 1986; Kostanski & Gullone, 1998; Thompson & Psaltis, 1988; Tiggemann, 1996).

Thompson and Psaltis (1988) first found a discrepancy between the cognitive (thinking one is fat) and affective (feeling fat) components in their study which asked women for their perception of their body size and shape using the Figure Rating Scale\(^1\). The women in this study were instructed to rate their current size based on how they felt as well as according to what size they thought they were. The researchers found that women rated their size as larger for the affective instruction (4.33) than for the cognitive instruction (3.85). Furthermore, Thompson and Psaltis noted that the women's ratings of size were larger for the affective instruction than the ratings reported when the women were asked how they believed others saw them (3.68), whereas there was no difference between their cognitive estimate of size and

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\(^1\) The discrepancy between current and ideal body size is believed to provide an accurate indicator of dissatisfaction with one's body (Thompson & Altabe, 1991).
the others' rating of size. The authors believed that this indicated a clear differentiation between these two aspects of body image. Tiggemann (1996) also explored the differences between the cognitive and affective components of body image and found a difference between these components.

The discrepancy found between the cognitive and affective components of body image dissatisfaction is not merely an effect of the Figure Rating Scale, which is the measure that has been used in many of the studies related to this issue. Cash (1994) also found a distinction between the affective and cognitive components of women's dissatisfaction with their bodies in his research that examined the structure of the attitudinal body image construct. In this study, undergraduate women completed a battery of body image inventories. Multiple regression analysis revealed that body image attitudes are indeed multidimensional, with a clear distinction between the affective and cognitive components.

Clearly, the affective component of body image dissatisfaction, the experience of feeling fat, is a distinct construct and, as previously cited research reported, it is an experience common to many women. However, little is known about what causes so many women, regardless of their weight or size, to feel fat. Examination of the available research in this area provides some insight into the variables that may underlie this component of body image dissatisfaction, and provides a rationale for the current research effort.

**Feeling Fat Research**

Only four studies have specifically examined factors related to women's experience of feeling fat (Eldredge, Wilson, & Whaley, 1990; Roth & Armstrong, 1993; Striegel-Moore, McAvay, & Rodin, 1986; Wardle & Foley, 1989). These studies
provide an important starting point towards understanding the phenomenon of feeling fat among women.

In their 1989 article, Wardle and Foley examined three variables of body image dissatisfaction: feeling of fatness, body size estimation, and body size satisfaction. These variables were investigated in terms of their interrelation with each other, their stability, and their relation to different environmental conditions. Specifically, the three variables were evaluated before and after a 'fattening' and a 'slimming' meal which, in actuality, were matched in terms of energy content. Subjects' experience of feeling fat was assessed using a 100mm visual analogue scale, labelled 'very thin' and 'very fat' at the extremes. Subjects were instructed to put a cross indicating their current state.

This study of normal weight undergraduate women yielded several interesting results. First, the authors found that the feeling of fatness was related to body dissatisfaction \( (r = .59) \), indicating that women who were less satisfied with their body appearance also tended to feel fat. Second, the correlation between the two baseline assessments of feeling of fatness, which were taken prior to eating the two meals on separate days, indicated that feeling of fatness was stable \( (r = .87) \), with most of the women recording that they felt 'slightly fat'. Third, the authors found that feeling fat was associated with restraint. In other words, women who reported frequent dieting to modify weight also reported a greater feeling of fatness than those who did not diet. Interestingly, despite reporting that feeling fat was a stable trait, the authors also found that there was some relationship between feeling fat and eating, as both restrained and non-restrained subjects reported greater levels of feeling fat after the meal conditions, particularly after the 'fattening' meal. This may indicate that, although women consistently feel 'slightly fat', the experience of eating exacerbates this feeling to some degree. Although possible explanations for the effect were not explored in
this study, it could be hypothesized that the physical sensation of being full may add to women's feeling of fatness or, alternatively, there may be some relationship between feeling fat and guilt or shame over what one eats. This second hypothesis is supported by the fact that the women indicated greater levels of feeling fat after the seemingly fattening meal than they did after the slimming meal. Additional research is needed to explore these possibilities further.

Striegel-Moore, McAvay, and Rodin (1986) also explored the construct of feeling fat in their research, which attempted to link several psychological and behavioural variables to this experience. These authors held two hypotheses. First, they believed that women's experience of feeling fat is exacerbated by perceived sociocultural pressures toward thinness and that a number of psychological variables, such as self-esteem and perfectionism, would serve to amplify women's responses to these pressures. Second, they speculated that women who feel fat might hold a self-schema in which body weight is central. This presumption is based on Markus's (1977) work, which defined a self-schema as a cognitive generalization about the self that is derived from prior learning and experience. Self-schemata are formed around the aspects of the self that are regarded as most important, thereby providing the mechanism through which information about the self is processed. Striegel-Moore et al. speculated that women who feel fat process self-relevant information with their weight 'in mind' and that any experience leading to general self-evaluation will also lead to evaluation of one's body and weight.

Based on these hypotheses, Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) assessed eight variables to determine their relationship with feeling fat: parental aspirations, weight-related remarks, pressure toward thinness, self-perceived lack of control over eating, perfectionism, positive self-image, comparison of one's body with others, and failure.
Subjects were also asked to report the frequency of dieting and binge eating behaviours. It was predicted that, after controlling for actual weight, each of these variables would be significantly correlated with feeling fat.

Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) used a multiple regression/correlation analysis to examine their results. Percent overweight was added as a covariant. While this variable did account for some of the variance in feeling fat, the authors concluded that “feeling fat is not simply a matter of being overweight” (p. 944). It was found that five variables, including percent overweight, accounted for 71% of the variance in feeling fat. Specifically, the results indicated that women who felt fat also reported a high degree of perfectionism, an increased tendency to compare one’s body with others, greater social pressure toward thinness, and were adversely affected by experiences of failure. Likewise, significant relationships were also found between feeling fat and a sense of lack of control over eating (r=.80) and increased frequency of binge behaviour (r=.53) and dieting (r=.50). The authors cautioned that, because the relationship with each variable is correlational, causal inferences could not be made.

This study not only provided evidence that the experience of feeling fat is related to other variables above and beyond one’s actual size or weight, but also granted some insight into what some of these variables might be. Of particular interest in terms of the current research was Striegel-Moore et al.’s (1986) finding that failure experienced in non-weight related domains affected women’s feelings about their bodies, a result that the authors believe is indicative of a weight self-schema. The idea that women may somehow transpose general, self-evaluative information about themselves onto their bodies suggests that perhaps women’s experience of feeling fat is more than just a physical sensation, but rather a complex interaction
between the body and the mind, one that goes beyond merely being an indicator of body image dissatisfaction.

Eldredge, Wilson, and Whaley (1990) expanded upon Striegel-Moore et al.'s (1986) research by looking specifically at the psychological variable of failure in relation to feeling fat. Eldredge et al. supported the idea that many women who feel fat have a self-schema in which body weight and shape is a central component. Thus any experience that gives rise to self-evaluation in such women would lead to evaluation of body and weight. The authors hypothesized that, for women with a weight self-schema, the experience of a sense of failure and the self-evaluation arising from this experience would lead to a more negative evaluation of her body.

Subjects for this study were normal weight undergraduate women, half of whom were determined to have a body shape and weight self-schema. For the purpose of this study, the authors assumed that a preoccupation with diet and weight was indicative of a self-schema that held weight as a central component. Subjects who scored high on a restraint scale were considered suitably preoccupied with their weight to be assigned to the restrained eater, or weight self-schema, condition of the study. The remainder of the subjects was designated as non-restrained eaters. Subjects from both groups were then randomly assigned to either the success or failure condition. The authors administered measures of affect, depression, and an eating disorder inventory, followed by two experimental tasks that provided the success or failure condition. The authors then used three body image inventories to assess the subjects' experience of their body image.

The results of this study failed to support the hypothesis that the experience of failure would lead to a more negative evaluation of their bodies in women with self-schemata for weight and body shape. Eldredge et al. (1990) offered speculations as
to the reason that the hypothesized result was not evident. They suggested that this response might only be demonstrable over an extended period of time. In other words, a negative mood state induced by a failure experience may first lead to a more general self-evaluation that would then trigger feelings of fatness at some point in the future when the woman was confronted with weight related stimuli. Alternatively, Eldredge et al. felt that the result might have been more pronounced if the failure had occurred through tasks in a weight-related domain.

Through use of an individual scaling analysis (INDSCAL)\(^2\) on one of the body image questionnaires (Semantic Differential Measure), Eldredge et al. (1990) did find evidence for a cognitive effect on the nature of the restrained eaters' subsequent self-evaluative style. In other words, although the women did not feel more dissatisfied than usual after the failure manipulation, the experience of success or failure did lead them to describe their bodies differently. For example, unlike the unrestrained women, the descriptions that all restrained women subsequently made of their bodies following a success or failure condition was primarily evaluative in nature. The authors believed that this effect may have been due to mood changes related to experiencing either success or failure, and suggest that it parallels the finding by Striegel-Moore and colleagues (1986) that there is a strong correlation between feeling fat and the extent to which failure experiences affect how a woman feels about her body. Similar to Striegel-Moore et al.'s schema theory, Eldredge et al. believed that women who already felt negatively about their bodies (i.e., restrained eaters) would feel worse in any situation that promotes self-focused attention and self-

\(^2\) INDSCAL is a multidimensional scaling method used to detect the implicit dimensions or hidden structure individuals use in classifying or judging perceived similarities about varied constructs such as people, attributes, situations, objects, or events. For this study, the INDSCAL analysis was employed to detect differential reliance upon implicit meaning dimensions among subjects for ratings of their feelings about their bodies on descriptor pairs that reflect judgements based on evaluation, potency, or activity.
evaluation. In any case, the authors asserted that “focusing on body image when experiencing a negative affect constitutes a very dysfunctional style of self evaluation” (p. 48) that needs further exploration.

One final study from within the body image dissatisfaction research addressed the issue of feeling fat in women. Roth and Armstrong (1993) developed a questionnaire designed to explore the issue of whether affective body experience, and specifically feeling of fatness, varied across a diverse range of situations. These researchers felt that the development of such a measure was important because while there was some evidence that an individual's body experience may fluctuate in response to internal or external variables (Eldredge et al., 1990, Wardle & Foley, 1989), the majority of instruments used to measure body image dissatisfaction disregard possible cross-situational variability.

Roth and Armstrong (1993) developed The Feeling of Fatness Questionnaire (FOFQ) to assess the stability-variability of the subjective feeling of fatness within and across a comprehensive range of psychosocially significant contexts that included affective, achievement, social, somatically hypervalent, and self-focused situations. Subjects were initially asked to rate, on a 7 point Likert scale, the extent to which they felt thin or fat in 80 stimulus situations. Examples of these situations included, “When I feel angry”, “When people try to control me” and “When I look at my nude body”. The original item pool was reduced to 61 items, using a reliability analysis and principal components analysis. The authors also had participants complete two other standardized measures of cognitive-affective body experience and one measure of perceptual body image to ascertain the construct validity of the inferences made from their instrument.
Results of this study yielded some interesting results. As Roth and Armstrong (1993) predicted, it was found that there was considerable cross-situational variability with regards to the participants' experience of bodily thinness-fatness. In particular, body experience was influenced by affective state, performance evaluation, public scrutiny, self-consciousness, and the nature of one's interpersonal field. Furthermore, a principal components analysis indicated that two factors, which the authors labelled 'Troubles' and 'Satisfactions', were responsible for over 58% of the variance in the results. Factor one items, which were concerned with the experience and expression of negative emotions, negative bodily self-consciousness, and failure to live up to personal expectations, were more likely to be associated with heightened feeling of fatness. Meanwhile, factor two items, which represented the expression of positive emotions and personal experiences, predicted feelings of relative thinness. This variability presents interesting implications in terms of examining women's bodily experience. Similar to the results presented by Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) and Eldredge et al. (1990), which indicated that women may transpose general information about themselves onto their bodies, the findings of this study also seem to indicate that women's experience in external situations have an effect on their feelings of fatness. In this case, the experience of positive and negative emotions and situations resulted in differing effects upon women's affective experience of their bodies.

Roth and Armstrong (1993) concluded that "reports of perceived fatness-thinness can be constructed as the outcome of a complex and interrelated series of psychological operations that are initiated by an internal or external stimulus situation" (p. 355). They believed that contemporary information processing models could account for how women come to transpose their experiences onto their subjective
feelings about their bodies. These authors hypothesized that, in situations which drew women's attention directly to their bodies, such as feeling premenstrually bloated or seeing very thin women, individuals drew on extant beliefs regarding body size or relied on social comparison to reach their conclusion about their own felt degree of fatness or thinness. In stimulus situations that were concerned with affective states, interpersonal relationships, and adequacy of performance however, Roth and Armstrong hypothesized that an associative schematic network is enlisted that links bodily feeling with 'nonbody' experiences. This hypothesis seems to be a common thread that links the existing research related to women's experience of feeling fat, as it is very similar to Striegel-Moore et al.'s (1986) theory of a weight self-schema. In this case, Roth and Armstrong believed that weight related self-schemata combine views of self with information about weight that is derived from repeated exposure to culturally prescribed messages which link women's bodies with relationships, mood states, and achievement. In other words, the assertion that thinness is indicative of happiness, success, and fulfilment leads women to interpret their body state in accordance with these other variables. In this way, a sense of unhappiness or unfulfilled aspirations converts to a focus on fatness, or conversely, happiness and success becomes associated with feelings of thinness.

Although the research related to women's experience of feeling fat is fairly sparse, there is a common thread throughout that provides an interesting starting point for future research. Results from these studies indicate that feeling fat is a variable state that is influenced by a number of external and internal functions and situations. In other words, women appear to transpose feelings arising from other situations onto their bodies, possibly through complex cognitive schemata that link information about self with weight. While there is no empirical research that explores
this theory further, several authors have discussed this hypothesis based on their clinical work. These works will now be discussed in terms of their applicability to this issue, and the current research.

**Displacement**

Karin Jasper (1993) coined the term “displacement” (p. 198) to describe the phenomenon of women transposing emotions onto their bodies. She noted that many North American women are familiar with feeling fat, whether or not they are actually fat and, furthermore, for most women this feeling comes and goes. She argued that women continue to feel fat no matter what their size or weight because this experience is a result of negative feelings that a woman has about the self which are displaced onto the body. However, as opposed to the previously discussed research, which focused on the transfer of emotions arising from specific situations or experiences, Jasper’s theory of displacement was more concerned with negative emotions related to core beliefs about the self, such as being unlovable, out of control, or inadequate.

In keeping with the feminist theories, Jasper (1993) believed that the cause of displacement is cultural. She argued that, in our society, women’s bodies are often viewed as objects that are displayed for and scrutinized by others, a situation that is perpetuated by the media’s objectification of women as sexual objects. When women accept this view of their bodies as objects, it serves to alienate them from their bodies, which, in turn, makes displacement possible. Also aiding in this process is that fact that fatness is an arena that is already culturally associated with many negative characteristics, such as inadequacy, neediness, lack of control, and shame. Jasper believed that the objectification of women’s bodies and the negative
connotations linked with fatness combine to make women’s bodies natural targets for the displacement of negative emotions.

Unlike Eldredge et al. (1990), who believed that transposing emotions onto the body represented a dysfunctional style of self-evaluation, Jasper (1993) argued that the act of displacement serves a vital purpose. She believed that displacement allows women to diminish the power of a very negative feeling by localizing it onto their bodies, thereby making it more concrete and manageable. For example, while the feeling that one is unlovable may be overwhelming in its intensity and difficult to do anything about, it is relatively easy to deal with a body that feels fat, especially since the media regularly bombards women with diet and exercise ‘solutions’. Furthermore, when a woman does deal with her feelings of fatness by attempting to lose weight, she may be rewarded for this effort by positive external comments that serve to diminish some of the negative feelings that originally triggered the displacement. However, Jasper argued that the temporary reprieve that is found in the weight loss cycle eventually breaks down. As she stated, “because it was her very self rather than her body that she originally felt ashamed of, fixing it won’t make her feel better for long” (p. 199).

While Jasper’s (1993) theory of displacement is interesting and seems to fit with the existing research related to women’s experience of feeling fat, she does not offer any empirical data or research to support this theory. Furthermore, while Jasper acknowledged the cultural underpinning of displacement, her article did not explore any further explanation as to why or how it occurs. Fortunately, several other authors (Friedman, 1993, 1997; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995; Stern, 1991) have examined this concept, although they do not use the term displacement. These authors propose
that women have developed a "language of fat" (Friedman, 1997, p. 288) as a means of negotiating the female role within our patriarchal culture.

Language of Fat

The grounding for the idea that women's experience of feeling fat has developed as a way for women to fit into patriarchal society is rooted in the basic differences in gender development and socialization. It is argued that the worlds of men and women represent two separate cultures that have different languages and different ways of interpreting and responding to the world (Friedman, 1993). For example, it is believed that, through gender socialization, males learn to operate from a 'self in separation' stance whereby their sense of identity is based on their individual accomplishments and performance. Conversely, females hold a 'self in relation' position, with their identity being formed in the context of their relationships. Differences in language use also support this discrepancy. Male language is believed to be logic based and serves to establish them in a "secure hierarchical niche by keeping people [at a] safe distance" (Friedman, 1997, p.21). Alternatively, women use language and the process of talking as a means to draw people closer to them, to establish connections, and to create and maintain equality between each other. Because of these differences, girls grow up to be interdependent while boys become more independent.

Prior to adolescence, these gender differences do not negatively impact on girls. In fact, it has been noted that prepubescent girls display a strong sense of self and a confidence in their thoughts, opinions, and feelings that is unparalleled at any other time in their lives (Friedman, 1997). It is argued that this is partially due to the fact that, during this period, girls' unique manner of communication serves them well by allowing them to interact, problem solve, and develop the strong relationships that
are central to their identity. However, this situation is believed to change drastically as girls enter puberty and become involved in "a culture of relationships which is built largely by men" (Gilligan, 1991, p. 25).

As Friedman (1997) argued, because we live in "Adam's world" (p. 26), where life is presented from a male perspective that is assumed to be the norm, the female perspective and their way of being and interacting is less valued and less respected. In this way, as adolescent girls begin to enter more fully into this culture, their natural way of communicating and establishing and maintaining relationships becomes less valid or appropriate. Brown and Gilligan (1992) believed that this places girls in a "fundamental paradox" (p.7), in that they must give up what they know about themselves and how to interact in the world in order to maintain the relationships that are integral to their identity. In other words, girls and women give up an authentic relationship with themselves for the sake of being able to form and maintain relationships with others. It is this sacrifice that is believed to lie at the heart of the experience of feeling fat.

Proponents of this view argue that, in attempting to negotiate a solution to this paradoxical situation, girls and women learn to devalue their unique way of being and begin to censor and repress their natural thoughts and feelings to tailor themselves for a better fit into the 'man's world' (Friedman, 1993). This "disavowing the self" (Stern, 1991, p. 9) intensifies as females silence themselves in relationships, falling victim to the “tyranny of good and nice” (Friedman, 1997, p. 32) in order to avoid conflicts and to fit with the image of what is socially acceptable for women. Friedman (1993, 1997) believed that this silencing or inhibiting of thoughts and emotions works against females in two ways. First, it causes them to lose a secure sense of self because they give up their means of connection and their sense of what they know
and value to fit in with the male culture of relationships. She argued that this loss of self results in women looking outside themselves for definition, making them "vulnerable to those definitions that are readily available" (1993, p. 291), specifically the thin ideal. Furthermore, it is believed that this loss of self also causes women to lose their ability to distinguish and identify emotions, making it more likely that they will transfer these confusing feelings onto their bodies. Secondly, Friedman argued that this "systematic devaluation" (p. 291) of the female experience also reinforces a sense of powerlessness that promotes anger and frustration. She noted that "[w]hen women cannot criticize the society that victimizes them, they criticize themselves—turning their anger against themselves" (p. 291). It is believed that this combination of loss of self and self-directed anger reinforces the development of body image dissatisfaction and the experience of feeling fat, as women "transform their self-expression into self-repression" (Friedman, 1997, p. 45), and redirect these feelings against themselves and their bodies.

Similar to Jasper (1993), Friedman (1997) and Hirschmann and Munter (1995) believed that the body is a natural target for women's redirected emotions. Friedman argued, for example, that because adolescent girls associate the inevitable weight gain and increased body fat that occurs in puberty with the new social restrictions that are being imposed on them, they try to deal with the restrictions by focusing on these changes in their bodies. This is a pattern that is reinforced by society's focus on thinness and, subsequently, continues into adulthood. Likewise, Hirschmann and Munter believed that the negative connotation that fat holds in our culture also makes the focus on the body inevitable. They argued that because fat is seen as such a negative factor, each time a woman says or thinks, 'I feel fat', she is actually saying
that there is something wrong with her or the way that she is feeling, a sense that is in
direct response to women's need to act in ways that deny their true sense of selves.

Women's need to repress their authentic selves by inhibiting their emotional
expression and the subsequent focus on their bodies is believed to have promoted
the development of the language of fat, a term that encompasses the ways that girls
and women talk about feeling fat. In other words, it is believed that women, when
faced with situations in which they could not express themselves authentically,
learned to "switch from the feeling language to the fat language (Hirschmann &
Munter, 1995, p. 10), and focus those emotions onto their bodies instead. In fact, it is
argued that use of this language has become so commonplace, and so automatic,
that it is often difficult for women to remember that "feeling fat isn't a feeling at all"
(Friedman, 1997, p. 43). Rather, this way of talking and thinking negatively about
one's body, and 'feeling fat' no matter what one's weight, has become a culturally
acceptable way for women to express their 'unacceptable' emotions; it is a way that
women can find a space and sense of belonging within our patriarchal culture.

This idea of a link between women's inhibited emotions and their experience of
feeling fat is similar to the results in the empirically researched feeling fat literature,
which found that women do appear to transpose emotions onto their bodies (Roth &
Armstrong, 1993). Furthermore, the view set forth by Friedman (1993; 1997), Brown
and Gilligan (1992), and Hirschmann and Munter (1995) offers a clearer picture of
how and why women have come to engage in this practice. Unfortunately, there is
again no empirical data to support the connection between feeling fat and inhibited
emotional expression that they propose. However, several recent studies within the
body image dissatisfaction literature have found a link between inhibited emotional
expression and general body image dissatisfaction. This research will be discussed as a starting point for further exploration of women's experience of feeling fat.

**Inhibited Emotional Expression and Body Image Dissatisfaction**

In the previous section, it was noted that women in our society are particularly prone to inhibiting their emotional expression, and furthermore, that this repression of emotions seems to negatively affect their relationship with their bodies (Friedman, 1993; 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). While there appears to be no empirical evidence to substantiate this claim, there is research that links inhibited emotional expression with a number of other psychological and health difficulties, including depression (Jack & Dill, 1992) and eating disorders (Strober, 1991; Williams et al., 1993). This indicates that repression of emotions can have dire effects upon women's health and well-being. Two recent studies have expanded upon this research to provide evidence of an additional link between inhibited emotional expression and general body image dissatisfaction, a link that has interesting implications in terms of women's experience of feeling fat.

Geller, Cockell, Hewitt, Goldner, and Flett (2000) were the first to explore the relationship between general body image dissatisfaction and inhibited emotional expression. Their primary hypothesis was that eating disordered participants would exhibit greater levels of inhibited self-expression when compared with control groups. This hypothesis was based on previous research that found that women with anorexia nervosa are particularly prone to silencing their negative affect. However, of greater interest to the current research is their second hypothesis in which they speculated that body image dissatisfaction, as a commonly observed feature of eating disorders, would also be related to inhibited emotional expression. Because body image dissatisfaction is believed to lie on a continuum on which eating disorders represent
an extreme end point (Friedman, 1997; Striegel-Moore, 1995; Thompson et al., 1999), the exploration of a link between body image dissatisfaction and inhibited emotional expression is justified. Geller et al. noted that, while there have been clinical descriptions that link these two constructs, this relationship has not been tested empirically.

Central to Geller et al.'s (2000) research was Jack and Dill's (1992) Silencing the Self scale (STSS), which they used to measure inhibited emotional expression. This scale, which measures the cognitive schemas pertaining to securing intimate relationships, is based on Jack's (1991) theory of women's depression. Jack's research not only supports Friedman (1997) and Stern's (1991) feminist based theories related to women's inhibited emotional expression, it is also provides a link between that theory and the concept of self schemas, as per Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) and Roth & Armstrong (1993). Jack maintained that women living in a patriarchal society develop cognitive schemas about how to create and maintain safe, intimate relationships. Jack referred to these schemas as "categories of thought that people bring to actively interpret their worlds, guide their behavior, and assess the self" (Jack & Dill, 1992, p. 99) and noted that they are socially constructed and reflect gender specific aspects of socialization practices and material social power. Jack argued that many women engage in silencing the self by suppressing feelings and thoughts that do not fit with these schemas. She believed depressive symptomology is a direct result of this suppression. Geller et al. argued that this system of cognitive schemas operated in a similar way in women with eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction. While these authors did not explicitly make the connection, it is interesting to note that research has found a significant relationship between depression and body image dissatisfaction (Cash et al., 1995; Rierdan & Koff, 1997;
Thompson & Psaltis, 1988). From this, it is reasonable to imagine that inhibited emotional expression could be a factor that is common to both.

The Silencing the Self scale consists of four subscales that are based on specific cognitive schemas that guide women's social behavior and self-assessment. The first subscale is labelled Externalized Self-Perception and is concerned with the extent to which women judge themselves by external standards. The second subscale, Care as Self-Sacrifice, reflects attempts to secure attachments by putting the needs of others before one's self. The third subscale, labelled Silencing the Self, examines the inhibition of self-expression and action to avoid conflict and possible loss of relationship. And finally, the fourth subscale, Divided Self, examines the experience of presenting an outer compliant self to live up to feminine role imperatives while the inner self grows angry and hostile. In addition to this scale, Geller et al. (2000) also used the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI) to measure inhibited emotional expression. This scale examines how often anger is expressed against other people or objects in the environment (AX/Out) versus how often anger is suppressed or held in (AX/In). Body image dissatisfaction was measured using the Perceived Body Image scale, which examines both cognitive and affective body image.

Geller et al. (2000) administered these measures to three groups of 21 women each, matched for age and years of education. The first group consisted of women being treated for anorexia nervosa, the second were women with a variety of psychiatric disorders, and the third was a control group. Correlations among the STSS subscales, STAXI subscales, and Perceived Body Image subscales for the entire sample indicated that the Care as Self-Sacrifice, Silencing the Self, and Divided Self subscales of the STSS were significantly related to the cognitive and affective
components of body image dissatisfaction. Furthermore, women's dissatisfaction with their bodies on both the cognitive and affective subscales was also related to the suppression of angry feelings, as per the AX/In subscale, a result that is consistent with Friedman's (1997) hypothesis related to the connection between women's suppressed anger and feeling fat. Geller et al. (2000) performed a second set of correlations for the results from the women comprising the anorexia group that confirmed that the pattern of results for the total sample was the same for women with anorexia. Unfortunately, they did not perform similar operations to confirm if results for women in the control group would also indicate a relationship between the constructs. In other words, while there is the suggestion that inhibited emotional expression is related to affective and cognitive body image dissatisfaction in 'normal' women, this relationship was not examined specifically in this study.

Geller et al. (2000) offered several possible explanations for their results. First, they speculated that body dissatisfaction may reflect a difficulty with clearly identifying feelings and a tendency to "blur 'pure affect' with 'body affect'" (p. 17). In other words, women may be unable to distinguish between emotions that they are feeling from feelings about their bodies. Hence anger, for example, becomes a feeling of fatness. Alternatively, they suggested that women's dissatisfaction with their bodies may be the result of a redirection of threatening feelings or impulses from the appropriate recipients onto the body, which is a less threatening target.

Hayaki, Friedman, and Brownell (2002) also examined the relationship between women's emotional expression and body image dissatisfaction and found similar results. Based on eating disorder research that suggested women with eating disorders had decreased ability to acknowledge and express emotions and benefited from treatment approaches that emphasized interpersonal communication, these
researchers hypothesized that individuals with body image dissatisfaction may also benefit from treatment aimed at increasing emotional expression. This study was aimed at providing some evidence that these two variables were linked, as no previous research related to this issue was available. As predicted, the authors found an inverse relationship between emotional expression and body image dissatisfaction among female undergraduate students, indicating that women who exhibited greater body image dissatisfaction also had lower levels of emotional expression. The authors noted that this relationship was significant even after controlling for effects of body mass index, depression and nonassertiveness. Hayaki et al. believed that this was indicative of an "independent and unique relationship" (p. 61) between these two constructs.

Current Research Questions

In our society, many women suffer from body image dissatisfaction and, specifically, from the experience of feeling fat, regardless of their actual body size and weight. While the research literature related to feeling fat is sparse, it has been shown that feeling fat is a distinct construct that is different from thinking that one is fat or actually being fat, and furthermore, that it is a variable state that is influenced by a number of external and internal functions and situations. In fact, feeling fat seems to be more than just a physical sensation that one has in one's body, rather it appears to be a complex interaction between the mind and body. Several authors have hypothesized that feeling fat is the result of complex cognitive self-schemas that cause some women to transpose emotions that arise from self-evaluative situations onto their bodies (Eldredge et al., 1990; Roth & Armstrong, 1993; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). Furthermore, it is believed that these self-schemas are influenced, in part, by a society that promotes a link between information about the self and one's weight.
This idea of a cultural influence is supported by several authors whose clinical work has led them to hypothesize that women's experience of feeling fat has developed in direct response to the way that women are socialized in our patriarchal culture (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Friedman, 1993, 1997; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995). These authors argue that, because women's way of communicating and interacting is devalued, they learn to suppress their unique feminine way of being in the world. This, in turn, causes them to mistrust their own experience and lose a clear sense of themselves, which subsequently results in a decreased ability to recognize, distinguish, and express authentic emotions, needs, and thoughts to others. This inhibited emotional expression is believed to result in the transposing of these repressed emotions onto the body, which then produces the experience of feeling fat. Despite a strong clinical basis for this theory, there is a lack of empirically based data that explores the hypothesis that women's experience of feeling fat may be related to their inability to express themselves authentically. However, preliminary research in the body image field has provided a link between general body image dissatisfaction and inhibited emotional expression. This serves as a starting point for the current research, because feeling fat is a component of body image dissatisfaction. This thesis will examine the relationship between women's experience of feeling fat and several variables that broadly measure inhibited emotional expression: silencing the self in relationships to avoid conflict, suppressing anger expression, and the ability to attend to, discriminate clearly among, and regulate emotions.

The current research will address the following six questions:
1. To what degree are measures of feeling fat (i.e., frequency per day, frequency per week, intensity, and degree) related?

Very little research has been done to date that directly examines women’s experience of feeling fat. As a result, there is only one instrument available that purports to measure this phenomenon (i.e., Body Shape Questionnaire). Cooper et al. (1987) developed the Body Shape Questionnaire, which measures women’s concerns about body shape, based on subjects’ descriptions of their experience of feeling fat. Therefore, the BSQ is being used as a measure of the degree to which women feel fat. However, given the limited validity evidence that is available in the literature to support the use of this measure, it was decided to also include single-item measures of the frequency and intensity of feeling fat by subjects. It is hypothesized that there will be significant positive linear relationships among frequency of feeling fat per day and per week, intensity of feeling fat, and degree of feeling fat.

2. Is the extent to which women feel fat positively related to a tendency for these women to silence themselves in relationships (i.e., suppressing thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to fit with societally imposed gender roles)?

Several authors have suggested that women are socially conditioned to inhibit their true emotions, which leads to the transfer of these repressed feelings onto their bodies and, subsequently, to feeling fat (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Friedman, 1993, 1997; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995). If this is the case, it is expected that the extent to which women inhibited their emotional expression by silencing themselves in relationships will be significantly and positively related to the frequency, intensity, and degree to which these women feel fat. The current research will test this hypothesis through the

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3 The Feeling of Fatness Questionnaire (Roth & Armstrong, 1993) was not published and is not available from the researchers.
use of a measure (i.e., Silencing the Self scale) that examines women's tendency to silence themselves in relationships with others. Past research has identified this tendency as indicative of inhibited emotional expression (Geller et al., 2000) and, furthermore, has linked it to body image dissatisfaction in women. Specifically, the Care as Self-Sacrifice, Silencing the Self, and Divided Self subscales are expected to be significantly related to the three feeling fat measures.

3. Is the extent to which women feel fat positively related to a tendency for these women to suppress their anger expression by (a) directing their anger inward upon themselves, and (b) not expressing their anger outwardly at external targets?

It has also been hypothesized that women's experience of devaluation in our culture has led them to turn anger inward upon themselves and, more specifically, upon their bodies (Friedman, 1993, 1997). Therefore, it is expected that the extent to which women express their anger inwardly will be significantly and positively related to the frequency, intensity, and degree to which these women feel fat, which would replicate the Geller et al. (2000) findings. Furthermore, it is expected that the extent to which women express their anger outwardly will be significantly and negatively related to the frequency, intensity, and degree to which these women feel fat.

4. Is the extent to which women feel fat negatively related to their ability to attend to, discriminate clearly among, and regulate their emotions?

Several authors have hypothesized that the loss of self that women experience as a result of their devaluation in our culture results in a decrease in their ability to distinguish among and identify emotions (Brown & Jasper, 1992; Friedman, 1993, 1997; Stern, 1991). Subsequently, they transfer these confusing feelings onto their bodies. If this is the case, it is expected that women's ability to attend to, distinguish among, and regulate their emotions, as measured by the Trait Meta Mood Scale, will
be significantly and negatively related to the frequency, intensity, and degree to which these women feel fat. To my knowledge, no such research has explored this question before.

5. When examined together, do measures of inhibited emotional expression explain a significant proportion of variance in the feeling fat measures, and are all these measures needed?

For this question, interest is only in variables that have shown a significant bivariate relationship with the feeling fat measures in research questions 2 to 4. The question examined whether all of the inhibited emotional expression variables are needed to explain a significant proportion of the variance of feeling fat.

6. How do women define their experience of feeling fat?

To date, there is no published research that clearly articulates what women mean when they say that they are feeling fat. While Cooper et al. (1987) did use a procedure of open-ended questions to explore what feeling fat meant to women in the development of their Body Shape Questionnaire, this data has not been made readily available, nor has it been used to provide an operational definition of this variable. There appears to be an assumption in the research literature that the concept of ‘feeling fat’ has a universal meaning for all women when, in fact, this may not be the case. A more explicit understanding of this experience is essential if further research in this area is to be undertaken. The current study addressed this issue by asking a subset of participants to define their experience of ‘feeling fat’. Although this question is quite different from the focus of the previous five questions, it served several purposes. First, it provided a better understanding of what ‘feeling fat’ means; second, it gave some indication of whether it is indeed similar for all women; and finally, it provided an indication as to whether issues involving emotion and inhibited emotional
expression are mentioned spontaneously by women when asked about their own experience of feeling fat.
Chapter Three: Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 143 women aged 20-59 years (M=39.11, SD = 11.52) from a large Canadian city and surrounding suburban areas. These women volunteered to participate in this research based on the self-identified criteria that they could relate to, or understand, the concept of ‘feeling fat’. This meant that they knew what the experience of ‘feeling fat’ was, irrespective of whether they experienced it seldom or very often. Of this total group, 82.5% self-identified as Caucasian, with the remainder consisting of several other ethnic backgrounds including South Asian (2.8%), East Asian (2.1%), Aboriginal (2.1%), and Hispanic/Latin (0.7%). The rest (9.2%) identified as ‘other’, which usually meant that they identified themselves as being of mixed ethnic heritage. Almost half of the participants were married or in common-law relationships (43.4%), whereas 37.1% had never been married, and 18.2% were currently separated or divorced. The majority did not have children (66.4%).

In terms of socioeconomic status, the education level of the participants ranged from 10 to 21 years of education (M=15.61, SD= 2.17). The total gross household income (in Canadian dollars) of the participants represented the entire income range from ‘less than $19,999’ to ‘$120,000 or more’. Fifty percent of the participants had a household income of less than $50,000 per year. A majority of the participants (66.5%) were employed in the paid work force either full time (44.1%), part time (16.8%), self employed (2.1%), or a combination of these options (3.5%). Of the remainder, 18.2% were full or part time students and 14.7% were absent from the

4 Participants who identified themselves as both students and working part-time or full-time are only listed under the ‘student’ category and are not included in the ‘paid work force’ percentages.
paid work force for various reasons, including as stay-at-home moms, retired, unemployed, or on a leave. Several participants (.7%) chose not to respond to this question.

The final one third of the original sample, consisting of 45 women aged 20-58 years (M= 37.51, SD = 10.04), were asked what they mean when they say or think "I feel fat". Of this group, 73.3% self-identified as Caucasian, with the remainder consisting of several other ethnic backgrounds including South Asian (2.2%), East Asian (2.2%), Aboriginal (4.4%), and Hispanic/Latin (2.2%). One participant chose not to identify ethnicity. The remainder (13.3%) identified as ‘other’, which usually meant that they identified themselves as being of mixed ethnic heritage. Less than half of these participants were married or in common-law relationships (37.8%), whereas 46.7% had never been married, and 15.6% were currently separated or divorced. The majority did not have children (73.3%). In terms of socioeconomic status, the education level of these participants ranged from 11 to 19 years of education (M=15.47, SD= 1.80). The total gross household income (in Canadian dollars) of the participants represented the entire income range from 'less than $19,999' to '$120,000 or more'. Fifty percent of the participants had an income of less than $50,000 per year. A majority of the participants (66.6%) were employed in the paid work force either full time (46.7%), part time (13.3%), self employed (2.2%), or a combination of these options (4.45%). Of the remainder, 15.5% were full or part time students and 17.7% were absent from the paid work force for various reasons, including as stay- at-home moms, retired, unemployed or on a leave.
Measures

(1) Silencing the Self Scale

The Silencing the Self Scale (STSS; Jack & Dill, 1992) is a 24-item self-report measure of cognitive schemas pertaining to securing intimate relationships that have been shown to be associated with depression in women. It consists of four subscales: Externalized Self-Perception or the tendency to judge the self by external standards (6 items), Divided Self or the experience of presenting an outer compliant self while the inner self grows angry and hostile (7 items), Silencing the Self or inhibiting one's self expression and actions to avoid conflict and possible loss of relationship (9 items), and Care as Self-sacrifice or the tendency to secure attachments by putting the needs of others before the self (9 items). Items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores reflecting greater pressure to fulfil the norms expected for females in our culture. Internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha, in the present study was .78 for Externalized Self Perception, .81 for Divided Self, .85 for Silencing the Self, and .78 for Care as Self Sacrifice.

Friedman (1993, 1997) hypothesized that women silence themselves in order to avoid conflicts in relationships in general, thus fitting in with the image of what is socially acceptable for women. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, several of the questions in the STSS have been modified to allow a wider margin of what is considered an intimate relationship. The specific references to one's partner in an intimate relationship were changed to the more general terms of 'people', 'other people', 'another person' or 'people close to me' in questions 2, 8, 13, 15, 17, 18, 21, and 26 to allow for consideration of one's way of interacting in all relationships that
one has with others. Likewise, in question 17, the word ‘like’ was substituted for the word ‘love’ to also reflect this more general tone.

(2) The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2

The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2; Spielberger, Reheiser, & Sydeman, 1995) is a self-report 57-item scale that is concerned with the way in which individuals express their angry feelings. This measure contains six major subscales, two of which were used in the present study. Anger Out (AX/Out) is an 8-item scale that measures how often anger is expressed toward other people or objects in the environment. Anger In (AX/In) is also an eight-item scale that measures the frequency with which angry feelings are held in or suppressed. Items were rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from almost never to almost always, with higher scores in each subscale reflecting a greater tendency to react either by keeping anger in or expressing it outwardly when angry or furious. Internal consistency, using Cronbach’s alpha, in the present study were .62 for Anger Out, and .78 for Anger In.

(3) Trait Meta-Mood Scale

The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) is a self-report 30-item scale that assesses the relatively stable individual differences in people’s tendency to attend to, discriminate clearly among, and regulate their moods and emotions. The questions are divided into three domains. Attention to Emotions is a 13-item subscale that conveys the degree to which individuals notice and think about their feelings. The Clarity of Emotional Perception domain is an 11-item subscale that refers to the ability to understand one’s mood, and the Emotional Regulation or Repair domain is a 6-item subscale that contains items that refer to the degree to which individuals moderate their moods. Items are randomly ordered, and subjects respond on a 5-point scale anchored by 1=strongly
disagree and 5=strongly agree. High scores in each subscale indicate a greater ability
to pay attention to one's emotions, understand what one is feeling, and to be able to
regulate or repair one's emotions, respectively. The Cronbach's alphas for the
present study were .74 for the Attention to Emotions, .88 for the Clarity of Emotional
Perception, and .77 for the Emotional Regulation or Repair.

(4) Body Shape Questionnaire

The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ; Cooper, Taylor, Cooper, & Fairburn, 1987) is a 34-item self-report measure that examines concerns about body shape, in
particular, the phenomenal experience of 'feeling fat'. Respondents indicate their
response to each question on a 6-point Likert scale anchored by 1=never and
6=always, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of feeling fat. Cronbach’s
alpha for the present study was .95. The BSQ was used in the current research as a
measure of feeling fat, as well as a way to provide construct validity evidence for
inferences made from the previously unexplored variables of frequency and intensity
of feeling fat that were also used in this study.

(5) Single Item Feeling Fat Measures

The following questions were used in addition to the Body Shape
Questionnaire to measure the construct of feeling fat: (a) How frequently do you
experience feeling fat in an average day? (b) How frequently do you experience
feeling fat in an average week?, and (c) On average, how intensely do you feel fat?
For the two frequency questions, subjects responded on a 5-point scale anchored by
1=never or almost never and 5=always or almost always. For the intensity question,
subjects responded on a 6-point scale anchored by 0=not at all intense and 5=very
strong in intensity. These questions were created specifically for the purpose of this
study. As single item measures, it is not possible to obtain a measure of internal consistency for them.

Procedure

Potential participants who replied to advertisements about the study were contacted by the researcher and asked a short series of eligibility questions, which ensured that each woman matched the criteria for this study. Participation was restricted based on the following guidelines. First, women who had a clinically diagnosed eating disorder were excluded because several previous studies had found that women with eating disorders differ from women without eating disorders in numerous aspects of body image and weight related attitudes and behaviours (Huon & Brown, 1986; Pyle et al., 1983). Second, women who were pregnant or had given birth within the past year were excluded, as were women who were undergoing any medical treatment that may produce bodily changes, such as using medication that causes bloating or swelling. While participation was not restricted based on ethnicity, an important consideration was the participants' familiarity and absorption into Western culture. Based on this, only women who had lived within North America since the age of 10 years were included in the current research.

Participants who matched the study criteria were made aware of the general goal of the study: to explore possible relationships between women’s experience of feeling fat and their emotions. Women completed the questionnaire package primarily on an individual basis, either in the presence of a researcher or on her own and returned it later. Some participants completed the questionnaires as a group (8%), or had the questionnaire mailed to them (3%). Included in the package was an informed consent form, a demographic information form, four measures of feeling fat, and several measures of inhibited emotional expression, including ones that measured
anger expression, self-reported emotional intelligence, and the tendency to silence oneself in relationships. For participants who met with the researchers, the informed consent was signed and removed prior to completion of the questionnaires. In cases where the package was mailed, participants were instructed to detach the informed consent and mail it back in a separate envelope that was included in the package. This ensured the anonymity of the participants’ responses on the actual measures.

A subset of the participants (n=45) were asked, upon completion of the questionnaire package, to respond to the question, “What do you mean when you say or think 'I feel fat'?” The purpose of asking this question was to expand on our knowledge of this construct by exploring (a) how women define ‘feeling fat’; (b) whether this experience is described similarly by each of these women; and (c) whether issues related to emotions and inhibited emotional expression would be mentioned spontaneously by the women in response to this question. Each participant in this subset was interviewed individually. No additional prompts or clarifying questions were asked. Participants were encouraged to express their answers to their best understanding of the question to avoid influencing their responses.

Finally, a list of referral sources was made available to a few participants who seemed distressed or who asked for information regarding resources for dealing with body image issues.
Chapter Four: Results

Relationships Among the Feeling Fat Measures

To measure women's experience of feeling fat, one instrument and three single-item measures were used. The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) is a self-report measure that examines degree of feeling fat. Feeling fat was also measured in terms of the frequency with which the women felt fat per day and per week, and the intensity of this experience. The relations among the scores on the feeling fat measures are shown in Table 1.

As expected, there was a relatively strong positive relationship between the two frequency of feeling fat variables, indicating that women who felt fat more frequently in an average day also tended to feel fat more frequently in an average week. Fairly strong positive relationships were also found between both of the frequency of feeling fat variables and the intensity of feeling fat variable. These results indicate that women who tended to feel fat more frequently also tend to experience this 'feeling' more intensely. With regards to degree of feeling fat (as measured by The Body Shape Questionnaire, BSQ), fairly strong positive relationships were also found between the total scores on this measure and each of the frequency and intensity measures. Thus, women who tended to feel fat to a greater degree also tended to feel fat more frequently, both per day and per week, and tended to have more intense feelings of fatness. Overall, it appears that the four measures of feeling fat that were used in this study are measuring something in common in that women who experienced more of one of these variables also tended to experience more of the other variables as well. However, the fact that all of the correlations are below .75 indicates that there is considerable unexplained variance.
and thus these four measures are not exchangeable. That is, while these measures appear to be measuring something in common, they also appear to be measuring something quite distinct from one another as well. Because the research on feeling fat is still in the early stages, it was decided that it would be beneficial to examine the results using each measure separately, rather than as a composite score. Thus, the relationships between feeling fat and inhibited emotional expression will be explored and reported for each measure of feeling fat.

Table 1

Relationships Among Four Feeling Fat Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Fat Measures</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Week</th>
<th>Intensity of Feeling Fat</th>
<th>Degree of Feeling Fat (BSQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Day</td>
<td>.74 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.63 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.66 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Week</td>
<td>.62 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>.68 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of Feeling Fat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.60 &lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. BSQ = Body Shape Questionnaire; <sup>a</sup> = p<.05, <sup>b</sup> = p<.01, <sup>c</sup> = p<.001.

Relationship Between Feeling Fat and Silencing the Self

The Silencing the Self Scale (STSS) was used to measure the tendency to silence oneself in relationships by suppressing thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to fit with societally imposed gender roles. This measure consists of four subscales: Externalized Self-Perception, Divided Self, Silencing the Self, and Care as Self-Sacrifice. Each of these subscales is believed to measure ways in which women
silence themselves in their relationships. The relationships between the scores on the feeling fat measures and the scores on the STSS subscales are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Relationships Between Feeling Fat Measures and STSS Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Fat Measures</th>
<th>STSS Subscales</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Day</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Week</th>
<th>Intensity of Feeling Fat</th>
<th>Degree of Feeling Fat (BSQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Externalized Self Perception</td>
<td>.33&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.20&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.22&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.42&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided Self</td>
<td>.34&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.26&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.18&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.40&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silencing the Self</td>
<td>.18&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.21&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care as Self Sacrifice</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* STSS = Silencing the Self Scale; BSQ = Body Shape Questionnaire;<sup>a</sup>= p<.05, <sup>b</sup>= p<.01, <sup>c</sup>= p<.001.

*Frequency.*

Statistically significant positive relationships were found between the frequency of feeling fat variables (in an average day and in an average week) and two of the STSS subscales (Externalized Self Perception and Divided Self). Moderately sized correlations were found between the frequency of feeling fat per day and each of Externalized Self Perception (r=.33) and Divided Self (r=.34). Smaller, but still statistically significant, correlations were found between the frequency of feeling fat per week variable and each of Externalized Self Perception (r=.20) and Divided Self (r=.26). These results indicate that women who frequently felt fat, both during an
average day and an average week, also had a greater tendency to judge themselves by external standards and to present an outwardly compliant self while inwardly they felt angry. A small positive relationship ($r = .18$) was also found between the STSS Silencing the Self subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per day, indicating that women who frequently feel fat in an average day also had an increased tendency to inhibit their self expression and actions to avoid conflict in relationships. However, no significant relationship was found between this subscale and frequency of feeling fat per week, indicating that frequently feeling fat in an average week was not related to inhibiting self expression in this way. There was no evidence of a relationship between the Care as Self Sacrifice subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per day or per week. These results suggest that the tendency to secure attachments by putting the needs of others first was not related to the frequency with which women felt fat in an average day or week.

**Intensity.**

With regards to the intensity of feeling fat variable, small, but statistically significant, positive relationships were found between the intensity of feeling fat and the two STSS subscales of Externalized Self Perception ($r = .22$) and Divided Self ($r = .18$). This indicates that women who, on average, felt fat quite intensely also tended to judge themselves by external standards and to present an outwardly compliant self while inwardly they felt angry. No significant relationships were found between the intensity variable and the Silencing the Self or Care as Self Sacrifice subscales. This suggests that the intensity of women's experience of feeling fat was not related to silencing themselves in relationships to avoid conflict or securing attachments by putting the needs of others first.
Statistically significant positive relationships were found between the BSQ total score and three of the STSS subscales. Moderately sized correlations (r=.40 to .42) were found between the BSQ total score and the Externalized Self Perception and the Divided Self subscales. A smaller positive relationship (r = .21) was found between the BSQ and the STSS Silencing the Self subscale. These results indicate that women who felt fat to a greater degree also tended to judge themselves by external standards, present a compliant outer self while feeling angry inside, and silence themselves in relationships in order to avoid conflict. No relationship was found between the BSQ total score and the Care as Self Sacrifice subscale, indicating that the degree to which these women felt fat was not related to a tendency to put others' needs ahead of one's own.

**Relationships Between the Feeling Fat Measures and Anger Expression**

The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2) was used to measure the expression of anger. Two subscales of this measure were used: Anger Expression-Anger In (AX/In) and Anger Expression-Anger Out (AX/Out). The relationships between the scores on the feeling fat measures and the scores on the STAXI-2 subscales are shown in Table 3.

**Frequency.**

Results showed that there was a small, but statistically significant, positive relationship between the STAXI-2 AX/In subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per day, and a trend towards significance for the per week variable (r=.16, p=.053). This indicates that women who frequently felt fat in an average day and an average week also tended to suppress their anger (i.e., to hold anger inside instead of expressing it outwardly). With regards to the AX/Out, no significant relationship was found between
this subscale and either of the frequency variables. This suggests that expressing one's anger outwardly was not related to the frequency with which one feels fat.

Table 3

*Relationships Between Feeling Fat Measures and STAXI-2 Subscales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAXI-2 Subscales</th>
<th>Feeling Fat Measures</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Day</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Week</th>
<th>Intensity of Feeling Fat</th>
<th>Degree of Feeling Fat (BSQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger Expression-Anger In (AX/In)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.21 (^a)</td>
<td>.16(^*)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.26 (^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger Expression-Anger Out (AX/Out)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.24 (^b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* STAXI-2 = State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2; BSQ = Body Shape Questionnaire; \(^a\) = p<.05, \(^b\) = p<.01, \(^c\) = p<.001, \(^*\) = p = .053.

*Intensity.*

No significant relationships were found between the intensity of feeling fat variable and either the AX/In or the AX/Out subscales, indicating that the intensity of feeling fat was not related to keeping anger inside oneself or expressing one's anger outwardly.

*Degree.*

Contradictory relationships were found between the BSQ and the subscales of the STAXI-2. A significant positive relationship was found between the BSQ total score and the AX/In (r=.26), indicating that women who felt fat to a greater degree also tended to suppress their anger. However, a significant positive relationship was also found between this measure of feeling fat and the AX/Out subscale (r=.24).
Thus, it would appear that women who felt fat to a greater degree also tended to express their anger outwardly.

*Relationships Between the Feeling Fat Measures and Emotional Expression*

The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) was used to measure the ability to attend to, discriminate clearly among, and regulate one's moods and emotions. Three subscales were used: Attention to Emotions, Clarity of Emotional Perception, and Emotional Regulation or Repair. The relationships between the scores on the feeling fat measures and the scores on the TMMS subscales are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Fat Measures</th>
<th>TMMS Subscales</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Day</th>
<th>Frequency of Feeling Fat per Week</th>
<th>Intensity of Feeling Fat</th>
<th>Degree of Feeling Fat (BSQ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention to Feeling</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of Feeling</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Regulation or Repair</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* TMMS = Trait Meta Mood Scale; BSQ= Body Shape Questionnaire; *a* = p<.05, *b* = p<.01, *c* = p<.001, *p* = .051.

*Frequency.*

While no significant relationship was found between the Attention to Feeling subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per day, results did show a small, but statistically significant, negative relationship between the Attention to Feeling subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per week (r = -.17). This indicates that paying
attention to feelings was not related to the frequency of feeling fat per day, but women who frequently felt fat in an average week were less likely to notice or think about their feelings. Small negative relationships were also found between the Clarity of Feeling subscale and the frequency of feeling fat per day and per week. This indicates that women who frequently felt fat in an average day and an average week also tended to have a diminished ability to understand or recognize what they are feeling at a given time. There was a marginally nonsignificant negative relationship between Emotional Regulation or Repair and the frequency of feeling fat per day (r = -.16, p = .051); however, no relationship was found between this subscale and the per week variable. This suggests that the degree to which women moderate their moods was possibly related to how frequently they felt fat in an average day, but had no relationship to the frequency with which they felt fat per week.

*Intensity.*

No significant relationships were found between the intensity variable and any of the three TMMS subscales. This result suggests that the intensity of feeling fat was not related to the ability to pay attention to, distinguish among, or regulate one's emotions.

*Degree.*

No significant relationship was found between the BSQ total score and the Attention to Feeling subscale. This indicates that the degree to which one feels fat was not related to the ability to attend to one's emotions. Significant negative relationships were found between the BSQ total score and the Clarity of Feelings and Emotional Regulation or Repair subscales. These results indicate the women who experienced feeling fat to a greater degree also tended to have more difficulty with understanding and moderating their emotions.
Standard Multiple Regression Analyses Results

A series of standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine whether all the inhibited emotional expression variables that had shown a significant bivariate relationship with feeling fat are needed to explain a significant percentage of the variance in the feeling fat variables. Prior to reporting the regression results, assumptions regarding sample size, multicollinearity and singularity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals were observed.

Frequency per day.
Six inhibited emotional expression variables showed a significant bivariate relationship with frequency of feeling fat per day. Results of the standard regression analysis showed that these variables together explained 13% of the variance, $F(6,134)= 3.41, p<.01$. According to the Relative Pratt Index (RPI)$^5$, and a cut-off score of .083 for six predictors, STSS Divided Self (RPI= .54) and Externalized Self Perception (RPI= .37) made the most important contributions to the variance explained in frequency of feeling fat per day. The other four variables did not make important contributions to the explained variance. None of the variables made a significant, unique contribution to frequency of feeling fat per day over and above the other variables. For a summary of the regression results, see Table 5.

Given that all of these variables measure one construct, the regression was rerun using only one variable, STSS Divided Self, which was the variable that contributed the most to the variance in frequency of feeling fat per day. No other

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$^5$ A Relative Pratt Index (RPI; Thomas, Hughes, & Zumbo, 1998) was computed to determine the relative contribution of each variable to the model. The RPI partitions the model $R^2$ into that proportion attributable to each variable, thus quantifying the contribution that each variable makes to the model. The formula for the RPI is $(\beta)^2 / R^2$, where $\beta$ is the Beta coefficient for the variable of interest, $r$ is the zero-order correlation for the variable of interest, and $R^2$ is for the overall model. Variables are considered to make an important contribution to the variability explained by the model if their RPI values are greater than the appropriate cut-off value of $1/(2)(p)$, where $p= # $ of predictors.
variables were added because they did not make a unique contribution above and beyond the other variables. This additional analysis found that STSS Divided Self alone explained 11% of the variance in frequency of feeling fat per day, $F(2,140)=10.29, p<.001 (\beta=0.062, \ SE=.015, \beta=.337, \ p<.001, \ r=.34)$

Table 5

Regression for Six Inhibited Emotional Expression Variables on Frequency of Feeling Fat Per Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Zero Order Correlation</th>
<th>Relative Pratt Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TMM Mood Repair</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMM Clarity of Feelings</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAXI-2 Anger Expression-Anger In</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Externalized Self Perception</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Silencing the Self</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.582</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Divided Self</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* TMMS= Trait Meta-Mood Scale. STAXI-2= State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2, STSS= Silencing the Self Scale.

*Frequency per week.*

Five inhibited emotional expression variables showed a significant bivariate relationship with frequency of feeling fat per week. Results of the standard multiple regression analysis showed that these variables explained 10% of the variance,
F(5,134)= 2.82, p<.05. According to the Relative Pratt Index, and a cut-off score of .10 for five predictors, STSS Divided Self (RPI=.49), TMM Attention to Feelings (RPI=.23), and TMM Clarity of Feelings (RPI=.22) made the most important contributions to the variance explained in frequency of feeling fat per week. The other two variables did not make important contributions to the explained variance. None of the variables made a significant, unique contribution to frequency of feeling fat per week over and above the other variables. For a summary of the regression analysis results, see Table 6.

As was done for the previous feeling fat variable, the regression was rerun using only one variable, STSS Divided Self, which was the variable that contributed the most to the variance in frequency of feeling fat per week. No other variables were added because they did not make a unique contribution above and beyond the other variables. This additional analysis found that STSS Divided Self explained 7% of the variance in frequency of feeling fat per week, F(3,138)= 4.80, p<.01 (B=0.042, SE=.013, \( \beta=.262, p<.01, r=.26 \)).

**Intensity.**

Two inhibited emotional expression variables showed a significant bivariate relationship with intensity of feeling fat. Results of the standard multiple regression analysis showed that these variables explained 5% of the variance, F(2,140)= 3.67, p<.05. According to the Relative Pratt Index, and a cut-off score of .25 for two predictors, STSS Externalized Self Perception (RPI=.88) made the most important contribution to the variance in intensity of feeling fat. The other variable did not make an important contribution to the explained variance. Neither of the variables made a significant, unique contribution to intensity of feeling fat over and above the other variable. For a summary of the regression of the two variables, see Table 7.
As was done for the previous feeling fat variables, the regression was rerun using only STSS Externalized Self Perception. This additional analysis found that STSS Externalized Self Perception alone explained 5% of the variance in intensity of feeling fat, $F(1,141)= 7.32, p<.01 (B=0.042, SE=.016, \beta=.222, p<.01, r=.22)$.

Table 6

*Regression for Five Inhibited Emotional Expression Variables on Frequency of Feeling Fat Per Week*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Zero Order Correlation</th>
<th>Relative Pratt Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TMM Clarity of Feelings</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMM Attention to Feelings</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.128</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAXI-2 Anger Expression</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger In</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Externalized Self</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Divided Self</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Trait Meta-Mood Scale. STAXI-2= State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2, STSS= Silencing the Self Scale.

*Degree.*

Seven inhibited emotional expression variables showed a significant bivariate relationship with degree of feeling fat. Results of the standard multiple regression analysis showed that these variables explained 24% of the variance, $F (7,129)= 5.78$, $p<.001$. According to the Relative Pratt Index, and a cut-off value of .071 for seven predictors, STSS Externalized Self Perception (RPI=.38), STSS Divided Self
(RPI=.27), STAXI-2 AX/Out (RPI=.18), and TMM Clarity of Feelings (RPI=.13) made the most important contributions to the variance in degree of feeling fat. The other three variables did not make important contributions to the explained variance. It is worth noting that the STAXI-2 AX/Out subscale was the only variable to make a significant, unique contribution to degree of feeling fat over and above the other variables, suggesting that it is explaining unique variance from the other variables. For a summary of the regression analysis results, see Table 8.

The regression was rerun using only two variables, STSS Externalized Self Perception, which was the variable that contributed the most, and STAXI-2 AX/Out, the only variable that contributed uniquely to the variability in degree of feeling fat. No other variables were added because they did not make a unique contribution above and beyond the other variables. This additional regression found that these two variables explained 21% of the variance in degree of feeling fat, \( F(3,135) = 13.58, p < .001 \). While both of these variables made a significant contribution to the model, the RPI cut-off value of .25 for two predictors indicates that only Externalized Self Perception made an important contribution to the variance in degree of feeling fat in this model. See Table 9 for a summary of this regression analysis.
Table 7

*Regression for Two Inhibited Emotional Expression Variables on Intensity of Feeling Fat*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Zero Order Correlation</th>
<th>Relative Pratt Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STSS Externalized Self Perception</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Divided Self</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* STSS= Silencing the Self Scale.

Table 8

*Regression for Seven Inhibited Emotional Expression Variables on Degree of Feeling Fat*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Zero Order Correlation</th>
<th>Relative Pratt Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TMM Mood Repair</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>.562</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.981</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMM Clarity of Feelings</td>
<td>-0.296</td>
<td>.379</td>
<td>-.085</td>
<td>.436</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAXI-2 Anger Expression-Anger Out</td>
<td>1.702</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAXI-2 Anger Expression-Anger In</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Externalized Self Perception</td>
<td>1.159</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Silencing the Self</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS Divided Self</td>
<td>.761</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>.193</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Trait Meta-Mood Scale. STAXI-2= State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2, STSS= Silencing the Self Scale.
Table 9

*Regression for Two Inhibited Emotional Expression Variables on Degree of Feeling Fat Per Week*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Zero Order Correlation</th>
<th>Relative Pratt Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAXI-2 Anger Expression- Anger Out</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.706</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STSS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalized Self Perception</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.401</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. STAXI-2= State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2, STSS= Silencing the Self Scale.*

**Meaning of Feeling Fat**

The purpose of asking the question, "What do you mean when you say or think 'I feel fat'?" was to a) provide a better understanding of what feeling fat means, b) give some indication of whether it is similar for all women, and c) determine if issues involving emotion and inhibited emotional expression would be mentioned spontaneously by women when asked about their own experience of feeling fat. The responses to this question were wide-ranging, and provided information not only regarding the definition of feeling fat, but also circumstances surrounding this experience.

Analysis of the responses began with the development of broad codes (e.g., body size/shape, clothing related, and emotions). The responses were then reviewed several more times, and smaller, more detailed sub-codes were developed. For example, the broad code of 'clothing related' was broken down into the smaller sub-codes of 'feeling fat means that my clothes feel too tight or don't fit right', 'feeling fat
means my clothes don’t look right or look good’, and ‘feeling fat affects what I can
wear’. This process continued until all of the participants’ responses were placed
under one or more codes. To capture as many discrete themes as possible, each
idea was coded separately. For example, the following participant’s response
contained more than one discrete idea; “my body isn’t the same shape it used to be, I
don’t like the way I look in clothes, there is too much flesh between the fat and
muscle”, so each of these ideas was placed separately under a corresponding code.
At this point, a second, independent coder (a female with a Masters’ degree in
Counselling Psychology) was provided with the list of codes and the participants’
complete responses and asked to assign discrete ideas to a code. Once this was
completed, any disagreements between the coders were discussed. Three codes
were modified or collapsed as a result of this process. For example, because actual
weight was not recorded as part of this study, all comments by the women about their
weight was a matter of their own perceptions rather than fact. Therefore, the code
‘feeling overweight’ was combined with the code ‘being overweight’ and renamed
‘perception of being overweight’. The coders also agreed that the code ‘feeling fat
means that I have a judgement about what I see of my body’ should be changed to
‘perceptions I have of my body based on visual cues’ because while judgement of
their bodies was implied, it was not explicit in the women’s responses.

Finally, the codes were examined to identify only those that provided some sort
of definition of feeling fat. As not all of the responses fit into the ‘defining feeling fat’
category, several other broad categories were developed. These categories were
labelled (a) emotions related to feeling fat, (b) stimuli that leads to feeling fat, and (c)
responses to feeling fat. Once each code was placed in one of these categories, a
summary of each category was prepared.
Defining feeling fat.

In response to the question "What do you mean when you think or say 'I feel fat'?", only 60% of the participants gave a response that actually reflected some sort of definition of their experience. Of that 60%, the majority (85%) defined feeling fat as a physical experience, although there were differences in the way that these women experienced this physicality. For some women (40%), the physical experience of feeling fat was very concrete and appeared to be primarily about the body's physical shape and size. For example, some participants (16%) defined feeling fat as having extra weight on their bodies, either all over or in particular areas (e.g., "just have a little extra around the middle"), whereas others (24%) focused on the perceived fitness of their bodies, defining feeling fat as being out of shape or having a body that was not toned enough (e.g., "means I have excess flab, 2 or 3 inches...things need to be tightened up"). A variation on the physicality of feeling fat was offered by women (11%) who referred to how their bodies felt to them rather than its actual shape. Some of these women (7%) defined feeling fat as feeling bloated whereas others (4%) talked about it as a heaviness of the body, "like there is a density, that there isn't the lightness or easy movement that I would like". The third variation of feeling fat as a physical experience was that some women (18%) defined feeling fat was more abstract; that is, it was a physical sense of the body that was somewhat vague. For example, some respondents (7%) described feeling fat as a discomfort in their own body, "not feeling right in my own skin", whereas others defined (7%) feeling fat as being more aware of one's body and body parts, particularly parts that were deemed as problem areas (e.g. "mainly around my middle...feeling fat means really being aware of that area of my body). A few women (4%) also noted that, for them, feeling fat meant feeling as though they were taking up too much space.
For those women who did not describe feeling fat as a physical experience, a small number (9%) defined it as a broader experience that extended beyond just their bodies to their sense of their own attractiveness. In these cases, feeling fat meant “I am unattractive, will be seen as unattractive”. And finally, the remainder of the participants (7%) defined feeling fat as a vague emotion that was difficult to describe. For example, one woman defined feeling fat as “just a feeling”, another spoke of a “yucky feeling”, while yet another replied that feeling fat meant “feel[ing] kinda blah”.

The research question related to the meaning of feeling fat was concerned with whether the experience of feeling fat would be the same for each participant. These results indicate that there was a general similarity in the women’s definitions of what feeling fat meant to them, in that most women described it as a physical experience. However, it is noteworthy that there were slightly different emphasis placed on that physical experience (i.e., size, shape, sensation).

Emotions related to feeling fat.

As noted earlier, some responses that were given to the definition question did not actually define feeling fat but, rather, reflected issues and experiences that were related to this experience. While vague feelings were mentioned by some women in their definition of what feeling fat meant to them, a number of women (18%) also spoke of emotions that were connected to their experience of feeling fat. For example, women indicated that they felt “very negative about myself”, “disappointed in myself”, “self-conscious”, and were “not happy with how I am” in relation to feeling fat. One women said feeling fat made her feel “sad”, while another said she felt “disgusting or self loathing”.

It is noteworthy that a number of the participants (16%) gave responses that reflected how emotions and their feelings about themselves affected their feelings of
fatness. These women appeared to have an awareness that feeling fat was not entirely about their bodies but rather that internal factors influenced or caused their feelings of fatness. For example, respondents spoke of their awareness that feeling fat was related to low self-esteem, lack of confidence, negative self concept as a result of making poor decisions, insecurity, and stress. One woman indicated that she felt dissatisfied in general and that this "comes out as being dissatisfied with my body".

Another area that was addressed by the research question related to the meaning of feeling fat was whether women would make spontaneous responses related to issues around emotions and inhibited emotional expression. As can be seen from these results, emotions were mentioned spontaneously by a number of women, both in terms of defining their experience with feeling fat and in discussion of issues related to this phenomenon. None of the participants gave responses that spoke about inhibited emotional expression in relation to feeling fat.

Stimuli that lead to feeling fat.

It was evident from the women's responses to the question about the meaning of "I feel fat" that there were several stimuli that were very much linked to this experience. Similar to the emotional triggers, in some cases, these women had the awareness that these stimuli triggered feeling fat for them, while in others, this awareness was not made explicit. One of the most compelling themes was related to clothing and how it looked and felt on the body. A large number of respondents (33%) indicated that feeling fat meant that their clothing felt tight, did not fit right, or did not look right. Another theme that was common with respect to factors related to feeling fat involved comparing oneself to (a) other people and images (13%; e.g., "When I am in places around thin people, I measure myself against them and that makes me feel..."
fat"), (b) the size/shape they thought they should be (13%; e.g., “bigger than I want to be or should be”), and (c) what they used to look like (9%, e.g., “incongruence between how I did look and how I look now and am capable of looking”). Feeling fat also seemed to be linked to perceptions that women had of their body based on visual cues (9%; e.g., “hits me when I see myself naked, like before a shower”;), and to lifestyle habits, such as not exercising or eating large meals, or “eating wrong” (13%).

Responses to feeling fat.

Finally, the last theme that was apparent in women’s responses to the definition question were potential outcomes in response to feeling fat (9%). For example, several women noted that feeling as though they needed to lose weight was related to feeling fat. Feeling fat also seemed to affect what some women wore (e.g., I can’t wear what’s in style”).
Chapter Five: Discussion

The primary purpose of the current research was to examine empirically whether women’s experience of feeling fat was related to inhibited emotional expression. The research question stemmed from the conclusion reached by several clinicians in the body image field, based on their therapeutic work with women struggling with these issues. These clinicians hypothesized that the experience of feeling fat has developed as a response by women who are unable to recognize and express their feelings authentically, and subsequently transpose these emotions onto their bodies as ‘feeling fat’ (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Friedman, 1993, 1997; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995). To date, only two previous studies have begun to explore this hypothesis by examining relationships between women’s body image and inhibited emotional expression (Geller et al., 2000, Hayaki et al., 2002). The current study aims to further our knowledge of the relationships between women’s ability to recognize and express emotions authentically and the experience of feeling fat, using multiple feeling fat measures and a variety of indicators of inhibited emotional expression.

The current study used three instruments to measure inhibited emotional expression: Silencing the Self Scale (STSS), State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2), and Trait Meta Mood Scale (TMMS). Feeling fat was measured using four variables: frequency of feeling fat per day and per week and intensity of feeling fat were measured using a single item each, and degree of feeling fat was measured by the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ). Overall, it was found that there was a relationship between women’s experience of feeling fat and inhibited emotional expression. Women in this study who had a greater frequency, intensity, and degree of feeling fat did show an increased tendency to inhibit themselves to some degree in
each area of inhibited emotional expression that was explored (i.e., silencing the self, anger suppression, and emotional understanding). However, there were some areas of discrepancy within these findings that merit further discussion in terms of their implications for the research literature, counselling, and future research directions.

**Relationships Between Feeling Fat and Silencing The Self**

The current research found that women's experience of feeling fat was related to some aspects of silencing the self in relationships, as measured by the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS). Specifically, all four variables of feeling fat (frequency per day and per week, intensity, and degree) were related to the tendency of women to judge themselves by external standards and to present a compliant self while inwardly they felt angry. Relationships were also found between both the frequency of feeling fat per day and degree of feeling fat and the tendency to silence one's self expression in order to avoid conflict. No relationship was found between the experience of feeling fat and the tendency to put the needs of others ahead of one's own.

These findings partially support the second research question, in which it was predicted that women who had a greater frequency, intensity, and degree of feeling fat would also tend to silence themselves in relationships by suppressing thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to fit with societally imposed gender roles. It was found that the women in this study who had greater experiences of feeling fat did silence themselves in some ways, but not in others. For example, while these women indicated that they did silence themselves by judging themselves by the external rather than internal standards, presenting a compliant, false self while feeling angry inside, and inhibiting their self-expression to avoid conflict, they did not silence themselves by putting other's needs ahead of their own.
These findings are interesting given the research literature. Feeling fat has been identified as an affective component of body image dissatisfaction. Similar to the current study, Geller et al. (2000) found that the affective component of body image dissatisfaction (this involved selecting a female body picture that reflected the way the woman felt in her body) to be related to the Silencing the Self and Divided Self subscales. However, unlike the current results, they reported no significant relationship with Externalized Self Perception. It is possible that this difference may be an effect of the different samples that were examined in each study. Geller et al. used a sample that included women with clinically diagnosed anorexia and psychiatric patients, as well as control subjects, whereas the present study examined women from the general community and excluded women with eating disorders. It is possible that women with eating disorders and psychiatric issues, as a result of possible cognitive distortions that result from these conditions, do tend to judge themselves less by external standards. Alternatively, this difference could be an effect of the measures that were selected (i.e., the difference between the affective component of body dissatisfaction being measured with the Perceived Body Image Scale in the Geller et al. study and the measures of feeling fat used in the present study). However, it is also a possibility that this difference simply reflects a relative lack of power in Geller et al's study. Geller et al. reported a correlation of $r=.26$ for a sample size of roughly 63 participants. Based on these numbers, the magnitude of the correlation is similar to that of the current study, indicating that the results are possibly closer than it would first appear. With a larger sample, Geller et al. would have also found a statistically significant relationship between the affective component of body image and the Externalized Self Perception subscale.
Another difference between the Geller et al. (2000) results and the findings of the current study is that Geller et al. found a statistically significant relationship between their affective body image variable and the Care as Self Sacrifice subscale, whereas the current study found no evidence of such a relationship. Again, this difference may have been a result of the different sample groups or measures that were used in each study. Alternatively, it could be that women with eating disorder and psychiatric issues may have a greater tendency to sacrifice their own needs for the sake of the needs of others than women within the normal population. As was noted in an earlier chapter, it is unfortunate that Geller et al. did not examine these relationships separately for the women of their control group as they did for the anorexia group. This would have shown whether their finding of a significant relationship with the Care as Self Sacrifice subscale would have persisted when the anorexia and psychiatric groups were removed. It could be that removal of these participants may have resulted in a decrease in the magnitude of this correlation, which may then have been more consistent with the results of the current study. Further research should be done in this area to explore this possibility.

The results of the current study do fit with Friedman's (1993, 1997) hypothesis about the relationship between feeling fat and women's tendency to silence themselves in relationships to fit with the socially constructed role of women in our culture. Indeed, several of the concepts that she discusses in her work on this issue are supported by the results of this study. Friedman believed that feeling fat is a response to women's tendency to give up their authentic relationship with themselves to be able to form and maintain relationships with others and that they begin to censor and repress their natural thoughts and feelings to fit in this 'man's world'. Friedman was not specific in terms of the ways in which women would exhibit this silencing of
themselves, apart from noting that women and girls censor and repress their natural thoughts and feelings and look outside themselves for definition. The current results support these ideas in that the women in this study did show an increased tendency to censor their thoughts and feelings, specifically by presenting a compliant, inauthentic self while feeling angry inside and by silencing their thoughts, feelings, and actions to avoid conflict. Friedman also believed that women in our culture experience a loss of self because they no longer are able to trust and believe in themselves and what they know about the world. This loss of self results in women looking outside themselves for definition. Again, this idea fits with the finding of the current research that women who had a greater experience of feeling fat were more likely to judge themselves by external standards. If a woman has lost her sense of self, she cannot trust her own sense of standards and values, so indeed, would have to look outside herself to determine what these standards and values should be.

It would seem from the results of the current study that the most important aspects of silencing the self, in relation to feeling fat, are judging oneself by external standards and presenting a false self to the world while feeling angry inside. From this, it appears that therapy or treatment for body image dissatisfaction and reducing women's experience of feeling fat could be aimed at these areas. Increasing a woman's sense of self, her trust in her own judgement and values, and her ability to express her feelings authentically could be useful in increasing her positive feelings related to her body, and reducing her experience of feeling fat. Of course, the correlational design of this study only allows for speculation of such mechanisms and does not allow for questions of causality to be answered.


Relationships Between Feeling Fat and Anger Expression

The current study found that the experience of feeling fat was positively correlated with the tendency to direct anger inwardly but, with one aspect of feeling fat, was also positively related to directing anger outwardly. Specifically, inwardly expressed anger was positively related to the frequency of feeling fat per day and per week as well as the degree of feeling fat, whereas the outward expression of anger was positively related to the degree of feeling fat only. There was no relationship, positive or negative, found between the outward expression of anger and the other three feeling fat measures. This finding supports the first part of the third research question, which predicted that women who felt fat would direct anger inwardly, but not the second part, which predicted that women who felt fat would not express anger outwardly.

There were several similarities and differences between the current findings and those found by Geller et al. (2000). The current study found significant positive relationships between the inward expression of anger and several of the feeling fat measures. These findings support the results of the Geller et al. study, which also found a positive relationship between the affective component of body image dissatisfaction and inwardly expressed anger, although the magnitude of the Geller et al. results was much stronger than that found in the current study. With regards to the Anger/Out subscale, Geller et al. did not find any significant relationship between the affective component of body image dissatisfaction and Anger/Out. Similarly, in the current study, no significant relationships were found between the three single item feeling fat measures (frequency per day, per week, and intensity) and outwardly expressed anger. In fact, the magnitude of the correlations in this research were almost identical to those reported by Geller et al. However, the current research did
find a significant positive relationship between Anger/Out and the degree of feeling fat, a finding that was contrary to both the original hypothesis and the Geller et al. results. Again, it is possible that these differences may have been related to the different sample group. Alternatively, it is possible that these results are due to the fact that there are more similarities between the measure that Geller et al. used, which explored the affective component of body image dissatisfaction, and the single item feeling fat measures used in the current study than with the Body Shape Questionnaire. Future research could explore this possibility further.

Theories from the feeling fat literature suggest that women direct their anger inward for two reasons. First, it is believed that suppressing anger allows women to continue to fit with society’s image of how women should behave in our culture; that is, that they should take on the role of ‘good and nice’ and avoid causing conflict. Suppressed anger is also believed to be a result of women not being able to direct their anger outwardly at the society that devalues them (Friedman, 1993;1997). Anger that cannot be directed outwardly must have a target. Friedman suggested that the target is a woman’s body. The fact that the current study found some evidence that the experience of feeling fat is related to the suppression of anger expression indicates that there may be some validity to this theory. Again, causality cannot be determined, but it is possible that these women were directing anger that they could not express outwardly onto themselves and their bodies by transposing this emotion into feeling fat. Future research could explore the relationship between these two variables more closely, perhaps using an experimental design that involves manipulating women’s ability to express their anger and administering pre and post measures of their experience of feeling fat.
It was expected that women who expressed their anger outwardly rather than suppressing it and directing it inward upon themselves and their bodies, would have a decreased frequency, intensity, and degree of feeling fat. The finding of the current study that women who had increased degree of feeling fat tended to express their anger outwardly seems to run counter to this hypothesis and the research literature. One possible explanation for this contradictory result could be related to the construct that was being measured by the STAXI-2 AX/Out subscale questions. This scale explores how often angry feelings are expressed outwardly, specifically in verbally or physically aggressive behaviour. For example, this subscale of the STAXI-2 included items such as, “I make sarcastic remarks”, “I do things like slam doors”, and “I say nasty things”. These are actions that might be considered more indicative of passive-aggressive behaviour rather than assertive, genuine expressions of anger. While women engaging in these behaviours are expressing their anger outwardly, they may still be suppressing their authentic feelings to some degree. Instead of directly and clearly stating their anger in a way that would serve to reduce the problem causing these feelings, they appear to be acting out their anger in ways that do not acknowledge and honour those feelings, and indeed, deny their true experience. It could be that this form of anger expression, albeit an outward one, is also related to feeling fat because women might still be suppressing their true feelings which, in turn, become transposed into the experience of feeling fat. Future research could examine this further by using an anger expression scale that uses questions that explore more healthy outward expressions of anger.

*Relationships Between Feeling Fat and Emotional Expression*

The fourth hypothesis of the current research was that women’s experience of feeling fat would be negatively related to their ability to attend to, distinguish among,
and regulate their emotions. The results of this study partially support this hypothesis. It was found that frequency of feeling fat per day and per week and degree of feeling fat were negatively related to the ability to distinguish among emotions. In other words, women who had greater frequency and degree of feeling fat were less able to recognize what emotion or feeling that they were having at any given time. Degree of feeling fat was also negatively related to the ability to regulate or repair emotions (e.g., trying to make oneself feel better when having an unpleasant emotional response or trying to maintain pleasant moods or emotions) as was frequency of feeling fat per day to a lesser degree. A small negative relationship was also found between the frequency of feeling fat per week and the ability to attend to, or pay attention to, emotions. Notably, the intensity of feeling fat was not significantly related to any of the TMMS subscales.

With respect to the research literature, Hayaki et al. (2002) found a significant negative relationship between body dissatisfaction and emotional expression, indicating that women who were dissatisfied with their bodies were less likely to acknowledge and express emotions. While the current study examined different aspects of emotional expression, its exploration of the 'attention to feeling' component of emotional expression supports Hayaki et al.’s results to some degree. That is, there was some evidence that frequency of feeling fat per week was negatively related to the ability to attend to, or acknowledge, emotions.

One of the most compelling findings of the current study was that women who had a greater frequency and degree of feeling fat also had more difficulty distinguishing among their emotions, or recognizing what they were feeling at any given time. This result provides support for Friedman's theory (1993, 1997) of feeling fat. She believed that girls and women lose a secure sense of self as they move into
a male culture of relationships because they give up their means of connection and
their sense of what they know and value. This loss of self results in a lessened ability
to distinguish and identify emotions. Friedman believed that emotions that are
confusing or indistinguishable are transferred onto women's bodies, causing the
experience of feeling fat. While the current study is again not able to imply causality,
the fact that women who had a greater experience of feeling fat also had more
difficulty distinguishing among their emotions provides some support for this theory. It
may be that women who have difficulty recognizing their emotions transfer these
feelings onto their body as a means of dealing with them. The underlying idea here is
that 'I don't know what I am feeling, but it doesn't feel good. I know that fat is not
good, and that my body is not good enough the way it is, so I must feel fat'. Cultural
images and expectations and pressures to be thin that are placed on women in our
society may support and normalize this 'leap in logic'.

Feeling Fat Variables

The relative lack of research about women's experience of feeling fat made it
important to explore this variable as widely as possible, so as to have a starting point
for future research. To date, the only available instrument that has been used to
measure feeling fat was the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ), which measures the
degree to which one feels fat. The current research also measured the construct of
feeling fat in terms of frequency per day and per week, as well as the intensity of this
experience. Interestingly, it was found that while these four components of feeling fat
were significantly related to one another, they were not so highly correlated that they
could be viewed as exchangeable. This result raises several interesting points of
consideration.
Of particular interest was the difference in the results for the frequency variables. It was found that the frequency of feeling fat per day and per week variables were measuring somewhat different things in that the correlation between the two variables was less than .75, and there were differences in how they correlated with the inhibited emotional expression variables. The per day correlations were almost always higher (with the exception of the Attention to Feeling variable). While the design of the current study did not permit further exploration of this difference, there are several possible explanations. One possibility is that the per day and per week variable may have produced different degrees of relationship with the inhibited emotional expression variables because one was a more accurate assessment of women's experience of their frequency of feeling fat. That is, when asked how frequently they felt fat per day, the women in the study may have thought back upon the current day in order to determine their response. This more recent, 'in the moment', assessment of frequency may then have produced a more accurate result than the per week variable, which relied to a greater extent on memory, and perhaps produced a more general, less accurate, sense of frequency. Alternatively, it could be that there is some important element of time being measured here, so that 'per day' and 'per week' represent some important distinction in the persistence of feeling fat. As previously noted, given the current study's design, there is no way to determine what was at play to produce the differences between these two frequency variables. In retrospect, an additional interview type question could have been added, asking each participant how she interpreted the frequency questions and why she thought that she answered the way that she did. Future research could explore this discrepancy further.
Results related to the intensity of feeling fat variable were also noteworthy. The intensity variable was significantly correlated with the other feeling fat variables (frequency per day and per week, and degree of feeling fat), suggesting that it was both a meaningful variable of feeling fat, but also a somewhat different measure. This variable did not correlate significantly with the majority of the inhibited emotional expression variables. In fact, of the inhibited emotional expression variables, only two of the STSS subscales, Externalized Self Perception and Divided Self, were found to be related to the intensity of these women’s feelings of fatness. Again, there is a possible explanation for this result. It could be that, while intensity is a significant component of feeling fat, it is not meaningful in relation to the aspects of inhibited emotional expression that are related to the ability to express and understand emotions. The lack of significant relationships between the intensity variable and anger expression or the ability to attend to, recognize, or repair feelings would support this idea. In fact, if feeling fat is related to a difficulty in recognizing, distinguishing and, indeed, understanding emotions, it makes sense that intensity would be less meaningful as a variable. Women who are unable to understand their emotions may not be able to get a good sense of their ‘feeling’ of fat; that is, of how intense it may or may not be. The current study could have gained more clarity around this issue, and this variable, by asking participants whether or not they are able to recognize ‘intense’ versus ‘not intense’ feelings, as well as what ‘intensity of feeling fat’ actually means to them. Further research should be done to explore this variable further.

Regression Analyses

The purpose of conducting the regression analyses was to determine whether all the inhibited emotional expression variables that had shown a significant bivariate
relationship with feeling fat were needed to explain a significant percentage of the variance in the feeling fat variables. Two of the inhibited emotional expression variables, STSS Externalized Self Perception and STSS Divided Self, contributed the most to the explained variance in the feeling fat measures. Divided Self contributed the most to frequency of feeling fat per day and per week and Externalized Self Perception contributed the most to intensity and degree of feeling fat. This finding indicates that, in future research, use of all seven of the inhibited emotional expression variables that showed significant bivariate relationships with feeling fat may not be necessary.

It is also noteworthy that these two variables, Divided Self and Externalized Self Perception, ranged from explaining only 5% of the variance in intensity of feeling fat to explaining 21% of the variance in degree of feeling fat. This result is again indicative of the differences between the measures of feeling fat that were used in this research. Further research is needed to explore the questions of what the differences are between these measures and why the inhibited emotional expression variables are contributing different amounts to each of the feeling fat variables.

The finding that up to 21% of the variance in degree of feeling fat is explained by Divided Self and Externalized Self Perception provides some direction for possible treatment and counselling approaches for women who struggle with feeling fat and its emotional implications. This finding supports the idea that these women could benefit from interventions that assist them in recognizing and trusting their own judgement and values, and learning to honour and express their true feelings. However, it is also interesting to note that the results of the regression analyses show that 79-95% of the variance in feeling fat is left unaccounted for, indicating that there are other variables that are contributing to this experience as well. Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) offered
some evidence of what these variables might be (e.g., perfectionism, the tendency to compare self with others, societal pressure toward thinness, and being adversely affected by experiences of failure). It will be important for future researchers to explore these variables further and to determine how they can be integrated into counselling and treatment approaches to best benefit the women who struggle with this issue.

Finally, it is important to note that the STAXI-2 Anger Expression-Anger Out subscale was the only inhibited emotional expression variable that made a significant, unique contribution to the variance in degree of feeling fat. This indicates that Anger Out is a somewhat different construct than the other inhibited emotional expression variables. This finding makes sense, in that expressing one’s anger outwardly is usually not indicative of inhibiting one’s emotions. The fact that a significant bivariate relationship was also found between this variable and degree of feeling fat indicates that outwardly expressed anger is a variable that should be considered more closely in relation to women’s experience of feeling fat.

*Meaning of Feeling Fat*

Responses to the question, “What do you mean when you say or think ‘I feel fat’?” prompted some interesting points to consider. First, it is noteworthy that many of the women in this study had difficulty answering this question strictly in terms of providing definitional information, instead giving answers that reflected a more general picture of how this experience affected them. These ‘unfocused’ responses could have been a reflection of the question and the way that it was asked. However, it is also possible that these participants had difficulty defining their experience of feeling fat because they do not have a good sense of what it is or what they mean when they make the statement ‘I feel fat’. This finding may offer some support for
Friedman's (1993, 1997) theory that one reason women transpose negative emotions into feeling fat is because they are unsure of what they are feeling. The diversity, and sometimes vagueness, of these women's responses could be indicative of this. It also confirms that feeling fat is a complex construct, and one that warrants more attention. Further research that explores the meaning of feeling fat could benefit from more in-depth questioning of women about what feeling fat means to them, with additional probes and prompts based on the insights gained from the current research.

The responses to the meaning of fat question also provided support for the feeling fat research literature. Past researchers (Roth & Armstrong, 1993; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986) found that variables such as comparison to others, lack of control over eating, affective states, self consciousness, and performance evaluation were related to feeling fat. The participants' responses support these findings. Furthermore, in some cases, these women indicated that they believed that there was a causal relationship between these factors and their feelings of fatness.

With respect to the meaning of feeling fat, to date there has seemed to be a general assumption in the literature that feeling fat is the same for every woman. Based on the responses of the participants of this study, it appears that there was the commonality among many of the participants that feeling fat was a physical experience. However, there also appeared to be some differences in how the women experienced and described this physicality. For some women, it was about their body's size or shape while, for others, it was more related to physical sensations within their bodies. For others still, it was much more vague. Furthermore, the additional information that the women gave regarding stimuli surrounding their experience also reflected some differences. This is an important fact to consider with respect to future research. Because the experience of feeling fat appears to affect
women in different ways, there needs to be careful consideration of what instruments might be used to measure this construct to ensure that all women’s experiences are taken into account and measured appropriately.

Finally, the question about the meaning of feeling fat was also concerned with whether participants would mention emotions and/or inhibiting emotional expression spontaneously in describing their own experience of feeling fat. Indeed, a number of the participants did refer to emotions in their responses, sometimes in terms of providing a definition of what feeling fat meant, and in some cases as a reaction to feeling fat. However, the most compelling finding in terms of providing a connection to the literature was that, in some cases, the women were aware that feeling fat was not about one’s body and its size or shape, and furthermore, were able to identify emotional states that triggered their experience of feeling fat. The fact that some women could connect anxiety, stress, and feeling negatively about themselves to their experience of feeling fat provides support for the idea that feeling fat is related to emotions or feelings that seem to be transferred onto the body and into the experience of feeling fat (Friedman 1993, 1997). Furthermore, these women stated explicitly that such things as low confidence, anxiety, and feeling negatively about oneself caused them to feel fat, indicating that they believe that there is a causal relationship between these internal triggers and their feelings of fatness. Whether such a causal link exists would need to be explored in future research.

Finally, while none of these responses indicated that women felt fat when they were inhibiting their emotional expression, it is possible that the emotions that they did experience may have arose as a result of such inhibition. For example, a woman may feel a lack of confidence in herself because she is judging herself by external standards or not expression her emotions authentically. Future research might
explore this possibility further through a design that would permit a more 'in the moment' examination of women’s experience of feeling fat; one that would allow a closer examination of the circumstances that precede feeling fat in an attempt to get a clearer picture of the mechanisms at work related to this experience. Such a study could use a 'daily diary' design that would allow women to answer questions about emotional expression, as well as describe the circumstances that surround their feeling of fatness in the moment that they become aware that they feel fat. A study of this sort would certainly extend the knowledge that has been gained from the current research, as well as provide a more in-depth examination of women's experience of feeling fat.

**Strengths of the Study**

The current research has several strengths. The first strength is that this study explores an aspect of body image that has not yet been well examined within the research literature. The phenomenon of feeling fat is widespread among females in our society, and yet very little is known about it. Furthermore, feeling fat lies on the same continuum of body image dissatisfaction as clinical eating disorders, which continue to increase in prevalence among girls and women. Given these facts, it is important that more research be done to explore this issue; to gain a greater understanding of its causes, its effects, and possible treatment options that could help women to minimize its negative effect on their physical and emotional well-being. The current study provides a starting point for future research, opening up many areas for further exploration that could assist toward these ends.

A second strength of the current research is that the responses that the participants provided related to their own experience of feeling fat served to 'flesh out' the correlational data. To date, the literature on this issue has assumed that the
experience of feeling fat is the same for all women. Furthermore, there has been no attempt to date to operationalize the variable, to define the construct of feeling fat, or address what it means to the women who experience it. The preliminary definition information provided here allows for a more three-dimensional picture of this experience as well as providing some additional data to support and strengthen the correlational results. In addition, these responses have provided some support for the research and clinical work that has already been done in this area.

A third strength is found in the sample that was used. Rather than limiting the sample to students, this study included women of different ages and with different backgrounds. This allows for greater generalizability of the results. Another strength is the use of a variety of emotional expression measures that allow for comparisons with previous research as well as the ability to extend previous findings.

Finally, this research provides the first empirical evidence regarding clinical theorizing that has taken place in this area. Practitioners and educators who are addressing issues related to feeling fat by assisting girls and women in improving their ability to recognize and express their emotions can feel somewhat confident that they are on the right track. This research also provides a more specific picture of which areas of emotional expression are important to address; an advance that could be very helpful to the development of future treatment options.

Limitations of the Study

As with all research, the current study also has limitations. One limitation is the relative lack of validity evidence for the feeling fat measures, which may decrease the confidence that can be placed in the results, given that it is difficult to know if these instruments are measuring what they purport to measure. The Body Shape Questionnaire does provide some convergent validity evidence. Given the limited
options that were available for measures of feeling fat and given that this is exploratory research, there is little that could have been done to eliminate this problem. Future research could focus on assessing the validity of feeling fat measures. The current study provides a starting point for this work.

Several other limitations of this research are related to the design of the study. Firstly, from the current design there is no way to determine why some of the differences exist. For example, it is impossible to tell why there are such pointed differences between the frequency variables, or why the intensity variable did not produce significant relationships with the majority of the inhibited emotional expression variables. In hindsight, this limitation could have been overcome through the addition of several questions that would have clarified what the frequency and intensity variables were measuring, and what meaning participants were assigning to them. Secondly, the study was limited by the use of a correlational design as this does not allow one to make causal inferences. In other words, it is impossible to determine the direction of influence. Again, future research could address this issue through an experimental design that allows exploration of the causal nature of these relationships.

While there are benefits to the sample that has been chosen, there are a few limitations with relation to this as well. For instance, excluding older women and adolescent girls limits the ability to obtain a more complete picture as to how feeling fat is experienced for all women across the life span. Another limitation of the sample was that the decision not to limit ethnicity of the participants may have resulted in culturally based differences, which might have had some effect on the findings of the research. However, it is believed that the decisions made regarding the sample outweigh the limitations. Again, this research provides a starting point upon which
future research can be based, and variables of age and ethnicity may warrant further exploration.

Finally, it should be noted that the qualitative component of this research was meant to provide only preliminary, exploratory information about how women understand and define their experience of feeling fat. Because there has been no previous research that explored this issue, it was important to develop a starting point upon which future research could build. As such, no probes or further questions were asked to explore the women's responses in more depth. The limitation in terms of this research is that there is a limit to how much interpretation can be made from the responses, and how much meaning one can take from them. However, this study does provide important information for future researchers with respect to where to start and how to proceed in the exploration of this issue. As such, it is an important contribution to the research literature.
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