**Introduction**

While more traditional forms of prejudice (e.g., race or gender) are increasingly being frowned upon, obesity stigma is on the rise. Research shows that weight stigma has negative consequences for the target including depression, isolation, and social withdrawal (Bannon et al., 2009; Miller et al., 1990). Due to this negative stigma, many overweight women are sensitive to weight-based rejection in their day to day experiences. Brenchley and Quinn (2012) suggest that overweight people may be so anxious about the stigma that they may actively anticipate and react to the stigma.

To combat the negative stigma, overweight/obese women engage in compensatory behaviors (Miller et al., 1995) such as attempting to present themselves as more sociable and likable. We suggest that women compensate because of the human need to belong to social groups and engage in interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) posits that people seek to balance their need to fit in and stand out when attempting to gain social acceptance. This may suggest that overweight women may try to both fit in and stand out at the same time, in order to be remembered and valued for things separate from their body size.

**AIM OF PROJECT:** The study aimed to examine overweight and weight-conscious women’s experiences with appearance based (e.g., showing cleavage) and non-appearance based (e.g., appearing humorous) strategies of compensation.

**HYPOTHESES**

I. Among women primed with assimilation (i.e., made to feel the need to fit in), compensatory behaviors will increase as BMI increases.

II. Among women primed with differentiation (i.e., made to feel the need to stand out), compensatory behaviors will decrease as BMI increases.

III. An interaction between body size and distinctiveness will exist in which the effect of the distinctiveness manipulation depends on body size.

IV. Women higher in weight-based rejection sensitivity (vs. lower) will engage in more compensatory behaviors in reaction to belonging threats.

**Methods**

### QUASI-IV: BODY SIZE

Using self-reported height and weight information, BMI scores were calculated and used to create the weight categories:

- BMIs 25.0 and above: obese/overweight category
- BMIs 24.99 and below: average/underweight category (Major et al., 2012).

### QUASI-IV: WEIGHT-BASED REJECTION SENSITIVITY

Assesses reactions to weight stigma in everyday situations (Brenchley & Quinn, 2012).

**CONSTANT:****

All participants were given three minutes to recall and write about a time when they felt rejected or excluded by others.

**DV:** Four Categories of Compensatory Strategies (consisted of importance and corresponding damage items):

- Appearance-based compensation (7 items, \( \alpha = .84 \)): styling hair fashionably, showing cleavage, wearing designer clothing or accessories, and 5% of sexy products chosen from the shopping task.
- Social competence compensation (4 items, \( \alpha = .70 \)): appearing extroverted and humorous.
- Personal competence compensation (3 items, \( \alpha = .77 \)): establishing credibility and talking about educational and/or professional achievements.
- Food-related compensation (8 items, \( \alpha = .73 \)): making healthy food choices, avoiding eating in the presence of others, and coded meal selections.

"Imagine that you are at the grocery store, and you are purchasing chips, ice cream, and soda for a party you are throwing. How concerned/anxious would you be over whether the cashier would be judging your purchases because of your weight?"

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**Results**

### Appearance-Based Compensation

- W-RS X OD prime interaction (\( \beta = .01, SE = .01, t = -2.02, p = .04 \))

**ME of body size on appearance-based compensation**

Overweight/Obese (\( M = 25.9, SD = 1.04 \)) < Average/Underweight (\( M = 2.82, SD = 1.16 \))

### Social Competence Compensation

- W-RS X OD prime interaction (\( \beta = .02, SE = .01, t = 2.21, p = .03 \))

### Personal Competence & Food-Related Compensation

Neither body size, weight-based rejection sensitivity, nor their interactions with optimal distinctiveness predicted these compensatory strategies.

**Discussion**

Some compensatory strategies may have different intended effects:

- To fit in: Appearance-based compensation (conform to cultural expectations: be beautiful or sexy)
- To stand out: Social Competence Compensation (less subtle: be loud or funny)

Weight-based rejection sensitivity also plays a role in determining whether compensation is necessary.

Future research may explore:

- Other individual differences (e.g., interpersonal competition, personality factors)
- How gender, age, and race may affect compensation strategies
- Whether compensatory strategies differ when presenting to a peer (e.g., co-worker) or superior (e.g., boss).