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Fat Chance! Experiences and Expectations of Antifat Bias in the Gay Male Community

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Although popular culture suggests that weight-based prejudice is especially common among gay men, no studies have examined this issue empirically. In Study 1, we explored experiences of antifat bias among gay men and the body image correlates of these experiences. Participants (215 gay men, ranging in age from 18 to 78) completed measures of antifat bias, body image disturbance, and open-ended questions about their experience with antifat bias. Over one third of gay men (many of whom were not overweight using common body mass index [BMI] guidelines) reported directly experiencing antifat bias. The most common type of antifat bias reported was rejection by potential romantic partners on the basis of weight. Both experiencing and witnessing antifat bias was associated with several types of body image disturbance. As a follow-up to Study 1, Study 2 compared gay and heterosexual college men's expectations of antifat bias from a potential romantic partner. Participants rated how likely certain outcomes would be if they saw an overweight man hit on an attractive target (a man for gay participants or a woman for heterosexual participants). Gay men reported greater likelihood that the overweight man would be blatantly ignored, treated rudely, or mocked behind his back if he approached an attractive potential romantic partner. These studies suggest that antifat bias is a challenge for many members of the gay community, even those who are not technically overweight. Additionally, gay men expect other gay men to show these antifat biases when looking for a romantic partner.

Keywords: antifat bias, gay men, body image

In October 2013, *Buzzfeed* published an article titled, "It Gets Better . . . Unless You're Fat," (Peitzman, 2013) which claimed that overweight gay men are not accepted by other members of the gay community. This article generated over half a million views and spawned similar headlines in a variety of media outlets. Researchers have documented high rates of body image disturbance among gay men (Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003), a finding generally attributed to the particularly unattainable body ideal espoused by many gay men (Duncan, 2007). This body ideal may both fuel and reflect antifat bias in the gay community. Nonetheless, claims of rampant antifat bias among gay men have not been addressed directly with empirical data.

The current article presents two studies of antifat bias among gay men. Study 1 was an exploratory study examining the experiences of antifat bias among gay men and the body image-related correlates of these experiences. Study 2 used vignettes to compare gay and heterosexual college men's expectations of antifat bias in a scenario where an overweight man approached a thinner and potential romantic partner.

Though Western cultures tend to disapprove of most overt forms of prejudice, there is often a tacit acceptance of antifat prejudice (Burmeister & Carels, 2014), a bias that has substantially increased in the United States over the last decade (Daníelsdóttir, O'Brien, & Ciao, 2010). Even individuals who do not report explicit antifat prejudice often implicitly endorse stereotypes of those who are overweight as lazy, stupid, and worthless (Teachman, Gapinski, Brownell, Rawlins, & Jeyaram, 2003).

Antifat attitudes in the broader culture can be internalized by those who struggle with their weight (Vartanian & Novak, 2011). Overweight individuals often show antifat bias (Lewis, Cash, Jacobi, & Bubb-Lewis, 1997; Puhl & Brownell, 2003). For example, many overweight individuals report negative associations with being overweight and may view themselves as lazy or unmotivated (Wang, Brownell, & Wadden, 2004). This has the potential to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Puhl & Brownell, 2003). When someone who is overweight tries to lose weight and fails, it reinforces the stereotype that they lack willpower (Wang et al., 2004). Unlike race or gender, there are few identity-affirming groups based on overweight status (Crandall, 1994; Wang et al., 2004), leaving most who are overweight without a community to help buffer against societal disapproval.

There are many reasons to be concerned about the prevalence of antifat bias. Weight-related critiques and antifat bias may actually make it harder for individuals to manage their weight in a healthy way (Puhl & Brownell, 2003). Weight-related social pressures and teasing predict extreme (and thus generally ineffective or dangerous) weight control measures, along with

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future overweight status, disordered eating, and binge eating 5 years later (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2007).

Though no studies have examined antifat bias in the gay community specifically, popular media points toward the possibility that gay men are especially likely to hold antifat attitudes and to be the targets of weight-based prejudice. Peitzman (2013), the author of the article cited above, argued that being both fat and gay is significantly more difficult than just one or the other, claiming that his own experiences of weight-based prejudice from other gay man are examples of a much more widespread phenomenon. Mark Joseph Stern of *Slate* (Stern & Waldman, 2013) argued that overweight gay men are often not seen as a viable romantic partners because of the importance of fitness and attractiveness in the gay male community. Whitesel (2014) came to a similar conclusion after studying "Girth and Mirthers," a national group for overweight gay men. He found that overweight gay men were rejected socially and sexually by other gay men and often excluded from the mainstream gay male community. These arguments are consistent with research on gay men's body ideals and body image disturbance in the gay community.

In general, male body image can be complicated by the fact that the male body ideal involves striking a balance between both thinness and muscularity (Blashill, 2010; Tiggemann, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007; Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003). Muscularity is considered an essential component of masculinity, making drive for muscularity an important factor in male body image (Duggan & McCreary, 2004). However, fear of fatness is still an issue for men, with one study finding 14% of men reporting that they were terrified of being fat (Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007). Gay men are particularly vulnerable to body image concerns, reporting greater overall body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men (Levesque & Vichesky, 2006; McArdle & Hill, 2009; Morrison, Morrison, & Sager, 2004; Smith, Hawkeswood, Bodell, & Joiner, 2011). Gay men also show higher levels of disordered eating than do heterosexual men (Smith et al., 2011; Strong, Williamson, Netemeyer, & Geer, 2000), with some studies reporting that gay men account for up to 30% of men diagnosed with eating disorders (Carlat, Camargo, & Herzog, 1997). Gay men report more pressure to be thin and lean compared with the pressure experienced by heterosexual men (Duggan & McCreary, 2004) and greater overall drive for thinness than heterosexual men (Herzog, Newman, & Warshaw, 1991). Gay men also show greater body fat dissatisfaction than do heterosexual men (Smith et al., 2011) and report a significantly lower ideal weight than do heterosexual men (McArdle & Hill, 2009). In studies in which participants indicate their ideal figure, gay men report preferring thinner figures than do heterosexual men (Tiggemann et al., 2007). This drive for thinness may contribute to antifat attitudes.

Unlike heterosexual men, gay men show similar levels of body shame and dissatisfaction as heterosexual women (Beren, Hayden, Wilfley, & Grilo, 1996; Engeln-Maddox, Miller, & Doyle, 2011; Levesque & Vichesky, 2006), perhaps because both groups are trying to attract male partners, for whom physical attractiveness tends to be more important (Blashill, 2010; Duggan & McCreary, 2004; Legenbauer et al., 2009; Martins et al., 2007; Siever, 1994). In women, the internalization of sexual objectification by men has been implicated in the development of body dissatisfaction (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). From this perspective, gay men may also be at risk as the targets of objectification by other men (Engeln-Maddox et al., 2011). Indeed, many have argued that gay men report higher levels of body image disturbance because they are a part of a subculture that places extreme emphasis on physical attractiveness (Beren et al., 1996; Hospers & Jansen, 2005; Tiggemann et al., 2007; Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003). Compared with heterosexual men, gay men report higher concern for their own physical appearance and believe that their physical appearance is more important to potential romantic partners (Siever, 1994). Appearance ideals for gay men tend to be particularly stringent (Duncan, 2007). Images of men in magazines targeted toward gay men have significantly lower body fat percentage than images of men in magazines targeted toward heterosexual men (Lanzieri & Cook, 2013).

This cultural focus on appearance and stereotypes surrounding the ideal gay body may also lead gay men to judge other gay men more harshly based on appearance. Internalization of stereotypes about thinness has been shown to predict gay men's preferences for a thinner, more attractive romantic partner, more so than for heterosexual men (Legenbauer et al., 2009). Gay men also report experiencing more weight-related teasing than heterosexual men (Beren et al., 1996; McArdle & Hill, 2009) and weight-related teasing is shown to have a greater impact on self-esteem for gay men than heterosexual men (McArdle & Hill, 2009).

Taken together, previous research suggests that due to an extremely rigid body ideal, an intense focus on physical appearance, and social pressure regarding thinness, gay men may be especially likely both to promote and experience antifat bias. The current research explored several questions surrounding antifat bias among gay men in the United States. Study 1 examined gay men's self-reported experiences of antifat bias in the gay community and the extent to which these experiences were linked with body image disturbance.

Study 1

In Study 1, we used an online survey of gay men to explore subjective experiences with antifat prejudice. Several self-report measures were included in order to examine correlations between experiences of antifat bias and body image. Though Study 1 was primarily exploratory, we made two specific a priori hypotheses. We predicted that those with higher BMIs would be more likely to report both having experienced weight-based prejudice and having witnessed others affected by this prejudice. We also predicted that those who reported being the target of antifat bias would report higher levels of eating disordered behavior, body dissatisfaction, and drive for muscularity.

Method

Participants. Participants were 215 gay men ranging in age from 18 to 78 ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 10.40$). Participants were recruited from the Chicago Pride Parade (25%), social media (18%), flyers posted in businesses around the Chicago area (11%), postings on online blogs/message boards (8%), e-mails to gay community groups (4%), and snowball sampling through participants who already completed the study (34%). The research was described as a study on body attitudes in the gay community. Participants represented 33 different U.S. states. The majority of participants identified as White (73%), 8% as Hispanic, 7% as multiracial, 6% as Black, 4% as Asian American, and 2% as Native American. Self-reported height and weight was used to calculate BMI. On the basis of Centers for Disease Control guidelines (2015), 4% of the sample fell into the underweight

category, 56% in the normal/healthy weight category, 30% in the overweight category, and 9% in the obese category (but see Nevill, Stewart, Olds, & Holder, 2006, for a critique of relying on BMI for these categorizations). Participants were compensated with a $5 Amazon.com gift card.

Procedure and measures. Participants completed an online survey containing the measures below. Order of measures was counterbalanced. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alphas for all measures.

Body dissatisfaction. The Body Dissatisfaction Scale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI-2; Garner, 1991) measures participants' discontent with specific aspects of their bodies (e.g., "I think that my stomach is too big"). The measure is focused on feelings of fatness rather than lack of muscularity. Respondents rate items on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). After reverse scoring appropriate items, participants were assigned 0 points for each item to which they responded *sometimes*, *rarely*, or *never*; 1 point for *often*, 2 points for *usually*, and 3 points for *always* (following the scoring recommended by Garner, Olmstead, & Polivy, 1983), with higher scores indicating greater dissatisfaction. Cronbach's alpha for this measure has been reported as .89 in samples of gay and heterosexual men (Yelland & Tiggeman, 2003).

Drive for muscularity. The Drive for Muscularity Scale (McCreary & Sasse, 2000) is a 15-item measure used to determine the degree to which men desire more or larger muscles. This measure can be split into two subscales: Drive for Muscularity Attitudes (e.g., "I think I would feel more confident if I had more muscle mass") and Drive for Muscularity Behaviors (e.g., "I lift weights to build up muscle"). Respondents rate items on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Total scores are the mean of appropriate items (after reverse scoring). McCreary, Sasse, Saucier, and Dorsch (2004) reported a Cronbach's alpha for this measure as .87 in a sample of men.

Eating disordered behavior. The Eating Attitudes Test (Garner, Olmsted, Bohr, & Garfinkel, 1982) measures negative eating attitudes and behaviors, many of which are closely related to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Respondents rate items on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). To score this measure, items receiving a 4, 5, or 6 are coded as a 1, 2, or 3. Any item receiving a score of 1, 2, or 3 is given a 0. After recoding items, the total score is obtained by taking the mean of the new items. Cronbach's alpha for this measure has been reported as .87 in a sample of men (Duggan & McCreary, 2004).

Additional questions. Participants answered the following questions about their experiences of antifat bias within the gay community:

1. When interacting with other gay men, do you feel you have ever been treated differently because someone thought you were overweight or too fat? If yes, please briefly describe what happened.

2. If yes, how often, when interacting with other gay men, do you feel you are treated differently because someone thought you were overweight or too fat? (on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 [*never*] to 6 [*always*])

3. Have you ever seen another gay man treated differently while interacting with gay men because someone thought he was overweight or too fat? If yes, please briefly describe what happened.

4. If yes, how often do you see another gay man treated differently while interacting with gay men because someone thought he was overweight or too fat? (on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 [*never*] to 6 [*always*])

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Measures In Study 1

Measure	α	Possible range	*M* (*SD*)
Body dissatisfaction	.86	1–26	6.62 (6.00)
Drive for muscularity attitudes	.90	1–6	3.78 (1.18)
Drive for muscularity behaviors	.84	1–6	2.31 (.97)
Eating disordered behavior	.97	1–6	.26 (.31)

Note. $N = 181$.

Results

Validity checks. We included two validity checks. The check first required respondents to select a specific response ("If you are reading this, please select *strongly agree*"). We eliminated 22 participants (10%) because they did not pass this check. A second check involved examining open-ended responses for coherence and relevance. An additional 12 participants (5%) were eliminated from analyses because their open-ended responses were nonsensical. Thus, the final sample included 181 participants.

Primary analyses.

Experiences with antifat bias and correlates of these experiences. One of our research goals was to understand gay men's perceptions of the prevalence and nature of antifat bias in the gay community. Participants indicated whether they had ever been treated differently by gay men because someone thought they were too fat. Thirty-four percent of participants indicated that they had experienced this type of bias. Those who indicated they had experienced antifat bias were significantly older ($M = 31.66$, $SD = 12.58$) than those who indicated they had not ($M = 28.17$, $SD = 8.80$), $t(93.52) = 1.95$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.40$. Similarly, those who indicated they had experienced antifat bias were significantly heavier ($M = 27.64$, $SD = 4.72$) than those who indicated that they had not ($M = 22.97$, $SD = 2.93$), $t(86.09) = 7.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.53$. However, 17% percent of those who were in the underweight or healthy weight BMI categories (as defined by the Centers for Disease Control, 2015) still reported being the targets of antifat bias.

Using BMI and age as covariates, we examined whether those who reported experiencing bias scored differently on measures of body image disturbance (compared with those who indicated that they had not experienced such bias). See Table 2 for descriptive statistics. Those who indicated having experienced bias reported higher levels of eating disordered behavior, $F(1, 173) = 10.79$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; body dissatisfaction, $F(1, 173) = 54.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$; and drive for muscularity attitudes, $F(1, 173) = 6.33$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$.

Participants who indicated that they had experienced antifat bias reported how often they experienced it on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). The mean response was 3.48 ($SD = 1.08$). Thirty-nine percent reported experiencing this bias *often, usually,* or *always*. Among the 34% who indicated they had experienced bias, higher reported frequency of experiencing bias

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Variables Examined in Analyses of Covariance (Controlling for Age and Body Mass Index)

Variable	Experiences of antifat bias (n = 61)	No experiences of antifat bias (n = 116)	Witnessing antifat bias (n = 114)	No witnessing antifat bias (n = 63)
Body dissatisfaction	11.48 (5.94)***	4.15 (4.32)	7.28 (6.01)	5.55 (5.95)
Drive for muscularity attitudes	3.96 (1.13)**	3.70 (1.19)	3.95 (1.21)***	3.51 (1.06)
Drive for muscularity behaviors	2.23 (1.02)	2.36 (.95)	2.19 (.99)*	2.53 (.91)
Eating disordered behavior	.35 (.42)***	.22 (.23)	.25 (.24)	.30 (.41)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

was significantly associated with drive for muscularity attitudes, eating disordered behavior, and body dissatisfaction (see Table 3 for all correlations).

Participants also responded to the question, "Have you ever seen another gay man treated differently among gay men because someone thought he was overweight or too fat?" Sixty-five percent of participants indicated that they had witnessed another gay man experience weight-based bias. These participants also reported how often they witnessed others experiencing bias on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Forty percent of participants reported witnessing this bias *often, usually,* or *always*. The mean response was 3.40 (SD = 1.08). Those who indicated they had experienced bias were more likely to also indicate they had witnessed bias, $\chi^2(1) = 6.73$, $p = .01$. Higher reported frequency of witnessing others experiencing bias was significantly positively correlated with drive for muscularity attitudes and behaviors and eating disordered behaviors (see Table 3).

Using an analysis of covariance with age and BMI as covariates again, we examined differences between those who reported witnessing bias compared to those who did not report witnessing bias on measures of body image disturbance. See Table 2 for descriptive statistics. Those who indicated they had witnessed other gay men experience weight-based bias reported higher drive for muscularity attitudes, $F(1, 173) = 11.45$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, but lower drive for muscularity behaviors, $F(1, 173) = 4.10$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. These two group did not differ on body dissatisfaction or eating disordered behavior.

Open-ended data. Because responses varied greatly in terms of length and detail, a specific coding scheme was not developed. Instead, responses to the two open-ended questions were read by multiple research assistants to identify common themes, which are reported here in general terms.

For men who reported being treated differently by other gay men because of their weight, the most common type of responses were those indicating the respondent had been ignored or judged by his size by potential romantic partners (e.g., "At a gay bar I tried to hit on a guy and he ignored me. When I tried talking to him, he told me I was not his type and walked away"). Men who reported witnessing others experience bias described seeing more explicit incidents, such as overweight gay men being insulted both to their face and behind their backs. For example, one participant wrote, "This attractive but overweight man had bought a younger and thin man a drink. The younger man had returned the drink and told him that he didn't accept drinks from fatties." Another wrote, "At a bar I saw an overweight guy get rejected immediately by a much thinner guy. As the guy walked away, the thinner guy started laughing with his friends at the bar." Although participants were not asked specifically where these experiences were occurring, 28% of participants who reported experiencing bias and 31% of participants who reported witnessing bias mentioned that it had happened in a bar, club, or at a party with other gay men.

Discussion

Our goal in this study was to empirically explore gay men's experiences of antifat bias from other gay men. Findings from Study 1 support the assertion that many gay men who are seen as overweight regularly encounter prejudice from other gay men. Nearly one third of gay men surveyed reported experiencing antifat bias from other gay men. Two-thirds reported witnessing other gay men experience antifat bias. As predicted, those who experienced bias were older and had higher BMIs, although many nonoverweight men still reported being the target of antifat bias. This finding is consistent with arguments that the body ideal for gay men is frequently enforced in social settings. Supporting our initial hypothesis, we found that both witnessing and experiencing antifat bias were associated with several indices of negative body image. When gay men consistently witness other gay men become the targets

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients for Frequency of Experiencing/Witnessing Bias

Variable	Reported frequency of experiencing bias	Reported frequency of witnessing others experiencing bias
Age	−.25	−.05
Body mass index	.09	.07
Drive for muscularity attitudes	.26*	.32***
Drive for muscularity behaviors	.13	.26**
Eating disordered behavior	.42**	.31**
Body dissatisfaction	.32*	.11

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

of antifat bias, it may reinforce the already stringent body ideal and contribute to body image concerns—especially when the targets of antifat bias are not notably overweight. Although directly experiencing bias more consistently predicted body image variables, men who are not directly targets of antifat bias may still be affected through a general culture of antifat discrimination.

The open-ended data from Study 1 provides some insight into gay men's specific experiences of antifat bias. Participants reported that antifat bias was most visible in bars or clubs and at parties. Consistent with arguments by Whitesel (2014), the most commonly reported experiences of antifat bias occurred when overweight gay men were not seen as potential romantic partners in settings where flirting and seeking out partners is common.

Although Study 1 provided key qualitative data about gay men's experiences with antifat bias, there were limitations to doing a primarily exploratory study. Because we surveyed gay men exclusively, we were unable to address directly the frequent contention that antifat bias is a more common problem for gay men than for heterosexual men. Although Study 1 results indicated experiences of antifat bias were common among gay men, heterosexual men may be equally as likely to experience such bias in these settings. We conducted Study 2 to compare gay and heterosexual men's expectations of antifat bias from potential romantic partners, as this was the type of antifat bias most commonly reported by men in Study 1. Specifically, we assessed how participants believed an attractive, thin person would treat an overweight person as a potential romantic partner when approached at a bar or party. We based the materials developed for Study 2 on the experiences gay men reported in Study 1.

Study 2

We limited our sample to college men (ages 18 to 23). Though focusing exclusively on college students limits the generalizability of the findings, this sampling strategy was chosen to increase the likelihood that the two sets of men surveyed in this study (gay men and heterosexual men) would be similar in age and BMI (the covariates from Study 1), thus making comparisons more meaningful. The age range of the sample was also chosen to increase the likelihood that participants would be actively dating and familiar with the types of interactions likely at bars or parties. We hypothesized that gay men would anticipate more antifat bias in a social interaction between an overweight gay man and an attractive gay man, compared to what heterosexual men would anticipate in an interaction between an overweight heterosexual man and an attractive heterosexual woman. In other words, when it comes to typical dating scenarios, we predicted that gay men would anticipate a greater social penalty for being overweight.

Method

Participants. 197 college men (100 identified as heterosexual and 97 identified as gay) were recruited from social media, university student groups throughout the United States, and snowball sampling to participate in a study on "attitudes toward different social interactions." The majority of participants identified as White (65%), 20% as Asian, 10% as mixed/multiracial, 4% as Hispanic/Latino, and 2% as Black. There were no significant differences between gay and heterosexual participants on ethnicity, $\chi^2(4) = 3.43$, $p = .49$. The study was completed online and participants were compensated with a $5 Amazon.com gift card.

Materials. Participants read about an interaction in which an overweight man approached a potential romantic partner. The interaction was described differently on the basis of the respondent's sexual orientation. For gay men, the overweight man approached an attractive man. For heterosexual men, he approached an attractive woman. Both the male and female attractive targets were thin.

In Study 1, the majority of participants who reported experiencing or witnessing antifat bias described the most common type of bias as rejection by a potential romantic partner at bars, clubs, or parties. Therefore, we set the vignette at a "bar or large party." Participants rated how likely a variety of outcomes were. These outcomes were also based on participants' open-ended data from Study 1. In Study 1, gay men who witnessed other gay men experiencing antifat bias reported that men who were perceived as overweight were completely ignored, blatantly insulted, or talked about behind their backs, so we included these as potential outcomes. Additionally, we included potential positive outcomes of the interaction and outcomes involving reactions by those witnessing the encounter. See Table 5 for all potential outcomes.

Both gay and heterosexual men first were shown a picture of a man's body (shirtless, with no face visible) who was introduced as John. The image used for John was a somewhat overweight and not muscularly toned young man. Next, participants were shown an image of a shirtless man's body with no face showing (if they identified as gay) or an image of a woman in a bikini with no face showing (if they identified as heterosexual). This person was introduced as either Dan or Danielle, depending on their gender. The image used for Dan was a muscularly toned and not overweight young man. Both targets were described as 22-year-old college students. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to rate John and Dan (or Danielle) on thinness and attractiveness. Participants were then asked to imagine that they were at a bar or a large party with their friends and that they saw John approach Dan (or Danielle), as if John were going to hit on him/her. They were asked to rate how likely they thought a series of outcomes would be (see Table 5), on a scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*).

Results

Manipulation checks and equivalence of groups. An independent samples *t* test indicated no significant difference in BMI between gay and heterosexual participants, $t(194) = 0.49$, $p = .63$. Additional analyses compared gay and heterosexual men's ratings of both the overweight target and attractive target (see Table 4). First, we examined ratings within groups as a manipulation check. Paired samples *t* tests indicated that both heterosexual men and gay men found the attractive target significantly thinner than the overweight target. Both groups also found the overweight target significantly less attractive than the attractive target. We then examined thinness and attractiveness ratings between groups, using independent samples *t* tests. Compared with gay men, heterosexual men rated the overweight target as significantly heavier and less attractive. Heterosexual men also rated the attractive woman as significantly thinner and more attractive (compared to gay men's ratings of the attractive man). Although the manipulation was successful for both groups of men, heterosexual men perceived a larger discrepancy between the two targets in terms of attractiveness and thinness.

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for Target Thinness and Attractiveness

Variable	Heterosexual men (n = 100)	Gay men (n = 97)	t	df	p	d
Between-groups comparisons						
John's weight	5.79 (.67)	5.35 (.71)	4.43***	194	.00	.64
John's attractiveness	2.82 (.90)	3.16 (1.22)	−2.26*	195	.03	−.32
Dan/Danielle's weight	2.73 (.92)	3.44 (.80)	−5.79***	194	.00	−.83
Dan/Danielle's attractiveness	6.22 (.84)	5.78 (.88)	3.57***	195	.00	.51
Within-groups comparisons	John	Dan/Danielle				
Weight (gay)	5.35 (.71)	3.44 (.80)	18.39***	96	.00	3.75
Weight (heterosexual)	5.80 (.67)	2.72 (.93)	25.09***	97	.00	5.10
Attractiveness (gay)	3.16 (1.22)	5.78 (.88)	−14.57***	96	.00	−2.97
Attractiveness (heterosexual)	2.82 (.90)	6.22 (.84)	−25.65***	99	.00	−5.16

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Primary analyses. See Table 5 for primary analyses. Heterosexual men perceived a larger discrepancy in attractiveness between the overweight and attractive targets than did gay men. However, compared with gay men, they still reported that it was more likely that the attractive target would give the overweight man a phone number, $t(192) = 2.37$, $p = .02$, $d = .34$. Compared with heterosexual men, gay men were significantly more likely to expect an overweight man to be blatantly ignored, $t(192) = -2.28$, $p = .02$, $d = -.33$; insulted behind his back, $t(192) = -2.64$, $p = .01$, $d = -.38$; or explicitly rejected by an attractive potential partner, $t(192) = -4.90$, $p < .001$, $d = -.71$. Gay men were also more likely than heterosexual men to expect that other people at the bar or party would comment negatively on the fact that an overweight man was trying to hit on an attractive potential partner, $t(192) = -2.06$, $p = .04$, $d = -.30$ and more likely to expect that an overweight man would attribute rejection by an attractive potential partner to his weight, $t(192) = -2.96$, $p = .003$, $d = -.43$.

Discussion

Study 2 allowed us to compare gay and heterosexual men's expectations of antifat bias in a scenario in which an overweight target approached a thin/attractive target. It is interesting to note that heterosexual men found the overweight male target heavier and less attractive than gay men. This finding was unexpected, and may have emerged because heterosexual men are less accustomed to (or less comfortable) rating the sexual attractiveness of other men. Heterosexual men also found the attractive female target more attractive and thinner than gay men found the attractive male target. This is consistent with different standards of attractiveness for men and women; women should be thin, whereas men should be both thin and muscular.

Though heterosexual men reported a bigger discrepancy in the attractiveness of the two targets, they nonetheless believed an attractive woman would be more likely to give a heavier, less attractive man her phone number (compared with gay men rating a similar scenario with an attractive male target). Likewise, compared to heterosexual men, gay men were more likely to report expecting an attractive man to be rude to an overweight suitor—by pretending he does not exist, calling him fat to his face, or commenting about his weight behind his back. These findings indicate that the experiences of antifat bias reported in Study 1 are seen as more typical among gay men than among heterosexual men, at least in the arena of dating.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Vignette Outcomes

Outcome	Heterosexual men (n = 100)	Gay men (n = 94)	Total (n = 194)
Dan/Danielle would end up giving John his/her phone number.*	3.01 (1.13)	2.62 (1.17)	2.82 (1.17)
Dan/Danielle would end up hooking up with John.	2.30 (1.17)	2.38 (1.18)	2.34 (1.17)
Dan/Danielle and John would eventually end up in a long-term romantic relationship.	2.44 (1.20)	2.35 (1.23)	2.40 (1.21)
Dan/Danielle politely but firmly indicates that he/she isn't interested.	5.21 (.91)	5.11 (1.17)	5.16 (1.04)
Dan/Danielle ignores John. He/she acts like John isn't even there.*	3.65 (1.57)	4.18 (1.69)	3.91 (1.64)
Dan/Danielle complains to his friends that "Only fat guys are interested in me."**	3.25 (1.54)	3.85 (1.63)	3.54 (1.61)
Dan/Danielle tells John, "Sorry, I don't date fat guys."***	2.27 (1.46)	3.32 (1.53)	2.78 (1.58)
John and Dan/Danielle make conversation for a while. Dan/Danielle lets John get him a drink.	4.49 (1.14)	4.46 (1.06)	4.47 (1.10)
John gets rejected and his friends tease him, saying, "Too bad Dan/Danielle wasn't a chubby chaser!"	3.31 (1.63)	3.73 (1.63)	3.52 (1.64)
A group of guys across the room see John approach Dan/Danielle. They say, "No way would that ever happen. That guy/girl is totally out of his league."*	5.18 (1.27)	5.54 (1.18)	5.36 (1.24)
John is turned down. He can't help but think that if he were a little thinner, Dan/Danielle might have reacted more positively to his advances.**	5.51 (1.13)	5.96 (.96)	5.73 (1.07)

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Gay and heterosexual men did not differ in terms of perceived likelihood that an attractive target would hook up with or enter a long-term relationship with the overweight man, probably because both groups rated these possibilities as unlikely (a mean of less than 4 on a scale of 1 to 7). However, gay men reported expecting other gay men to show greater explicit antifat bias than heterosexual men expected from women.

General Discussion

The purpose of these two studies was to explore the popular contention that antifat bias is a frequent problem in the gay community and that it contributes to body image disturbance in gay men. On the basis of previous research about antifat prejudice (Daníelsdóttir et al., 2010; O'Brien, Hunter, Halberstadt, & Anderson, 2007; Puhl & Brownell, 2003) and body image disturbance in gay men (Duncan, 2007; Tiggemann et al., 2007), we expected that antifat bias would be a commonly reported experience for gay men. Our findings supported this expectation. The majority of gay men reported experiencing antifat bias and/or witnessing another gay man experience antifat bias. Consistent with previous research on the effects of experiencing antifat prejudice (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Haines, & Wall, 2006; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2007), reported experiences of antifat bias were associated with body dissatisfaction, drive for muscularity, and eating disordered behavior. Based on our open-ended data, we found that these experiences were most common where one might be approaching potential romantic partners.

In Study 2, we explored men's expectations that a target would show antifat bias toward an overweight man. Due to the study design, we can only examine how gay and heterosexual men expected an overweight man to be treated by a potential romantic partner. Because of this, the study compared heterosexual men's perceptions of heterosexual women to gay men's perceptions of other gay men.

Gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to expect an attractive target to reject an overweight suitor as a romantic partner and treat him rudely (either explicitly or behind his back). They were also more likely to expect an overweight man to attribute a romantic rejection to his weight. Heterosexual men may expect less antifat bias from potential partners than gay men do because women generally report lower levels of antifat bias than men (Lewis et al., 1997). However, these data cannot reveal whether the heterosexual men in our sample truly believed women are unlikely to show weight-based bias toward an overweight suitor or if they simply believed women are unlikely to overtly reveal such bias. Undoubtedly, our results were likely influenced by variations in gender and dating roles between heterosexual couples and gay male couples. Nonetheless, the fact that gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to expect these explicit incidents suggests experiences of blatant antifat bias in dating scenarios are likely more common for gay men than for heterosexual men. The fact that this pattern emerged when comparing two samples that did not differ in body size makes these results especially compelling. Experiencing antifat bias has been shown to lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, disordered eating, and depression and anxiety (Daníelsdóttir et al., 2010; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2007). Though we cannot pinpoint the reason for this discrepancy, our results clearly indicated that in dating scenarios, gay men expect more antifat bias. The correlational data from Study 1 suggest the possibility that high rates of body image disturbance among gay men may be related to these experiences of explicit antifat bias from other gay men.

There are several limitations to the current studies. Study 1 data did not allow for causal inferences or to directly compare gay men to heterosexual men. Future research is necessary to examine whether the associations between experiences of antifat bias and body image disturbance differ in samples of gay men compared to other populations. In Study 2, we chose to use a sample of college men in order to limit demographic variability and increase the relevance of the dating scenario. However, additional studies could attempt to replicate these results with samples outside of college men. Future research should also consider how these types of biases vary in gay men who identify with a subgroup of the gay community like "bears", who may be more likely to prize larger body types (Doyle & Engeln, 2014).

In his popular *Buzzfeed* article, Louis Peitzman (2013) explained his struggle as an overweight gay man and how he felt other gay men frequently treated him poorly because of his weight. On the basis of the findings of our study, it seems likely that Peitzman is in good company. Our findings indicate that overweight gay men may have trouble being seen as viable romantic partners and that most gay men predict that their gay peers will treat overweight gay men with both explicit and subtler forms of bias. These findings pave the way for future research to discover strategies and interventions that reduce antifat biases, potentially improving body image satisfaction in gay men.

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