Turn up the positives and turn down the 'fat talk'

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According to psychology professor Renee Engeln-Maddox, the booty shorts-outfitted, rough 'n' tumble roller derby skaters should be models for female positive body image.



The Northwestern University researcher talked on the topic "'OMG, I'm so fat!' How Fat Talk Hurts Women and What You Can Do to Stop It" for the <u>Wirtz-Costello Lecture</u> on Thursday (April 18) in the Freeman Auditorium at the Woldenberg Art Center on the Tulane University uptown campus. She focused on how to stop the spread of the body hatred that proliferates in some women's lives.

Women involved in roller derby are one group she has studied that seems to exist outside of this self-objectification thought process. They strive to develop "meat legs," their term for powerful, muscular quadriceps.

The skaters' thoughts about their bodies were a far cry from "My thighs are too big" or "I have so much cellulite." Instead, projected onto a screen behind Engeln-Maddox were positive affirmations such as "We think our muscles are cool," "We think our bruises are cool," and "[Your body is] a vessel, to do what you love."

Engeln-Maddox's research focuses specifically on college-aged women, 93 percent

of whom engage in "fat talk" regularly and 29 percent of whom "fat talk" on a very frequent basis.

Fat talking has no correlation with actual body weight or body mass index, she said. Those most prone to fat talking also show high levels of body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, body shame, body surveillance, thin ideal internalization and appearance comparison.

"When you're living in a culture like this, you tend to internalize it and take a thirdperson objective view of yourself," said Engeln-Maddox. "When you're walking down the street, you're imagining yourself from the perspective of someone else looking at you."

She encourages women to think about their bodies "in terms of what it does, not what it looks like," valuing body parts in terms of their flexibility, strength and endurance instead of skinniness or prettiness.

Johanna Gretschel received a bachelor's degree with an English major from Tulane in 2012, and she is in the master's degree program.