



# Negotiating Masculinity and Body Image: Body Size May Cue Male Responses to Fat Talk

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## BACKGROUND: FAT TALK

- **“Fat Talk”** is self-deprecating talk about the body and body weight that is frequently associated with women.
- Replies to fat talk are unexamined.
- We hypothesize that fat talk follows a cultural script. We are particularly interested in how men engage in fat talk.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- *What are the responses men make to fat talk utterances from other men?*
- *Does the response to fat talk change if the size of the speaker is larger or smaller than the man uttering the fat talk?*

Our goal is to understand the range of culturally appropriate replies reported when two men engage in fat talk interactions.

## DATA COLLECTION/ DATA

Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) capture culturally normative replies. We used DCT based scenarios to create 4 different response prompts. Only adult men over 18 were surveyed.

Scenario Type	N = 357
25-to-25 (speaker and interlocutor BMI=25, the boundary of normal to overweight)	111
30-to-30 (speaker and interlocutor BMI=30, the boundary of overweight to obese)	104
25-to-30 (speaker BMI=25, interlocutor BMI= 30)	54
30-to- 25 (speaker BMI=30, interlocutor BMI=25)	88

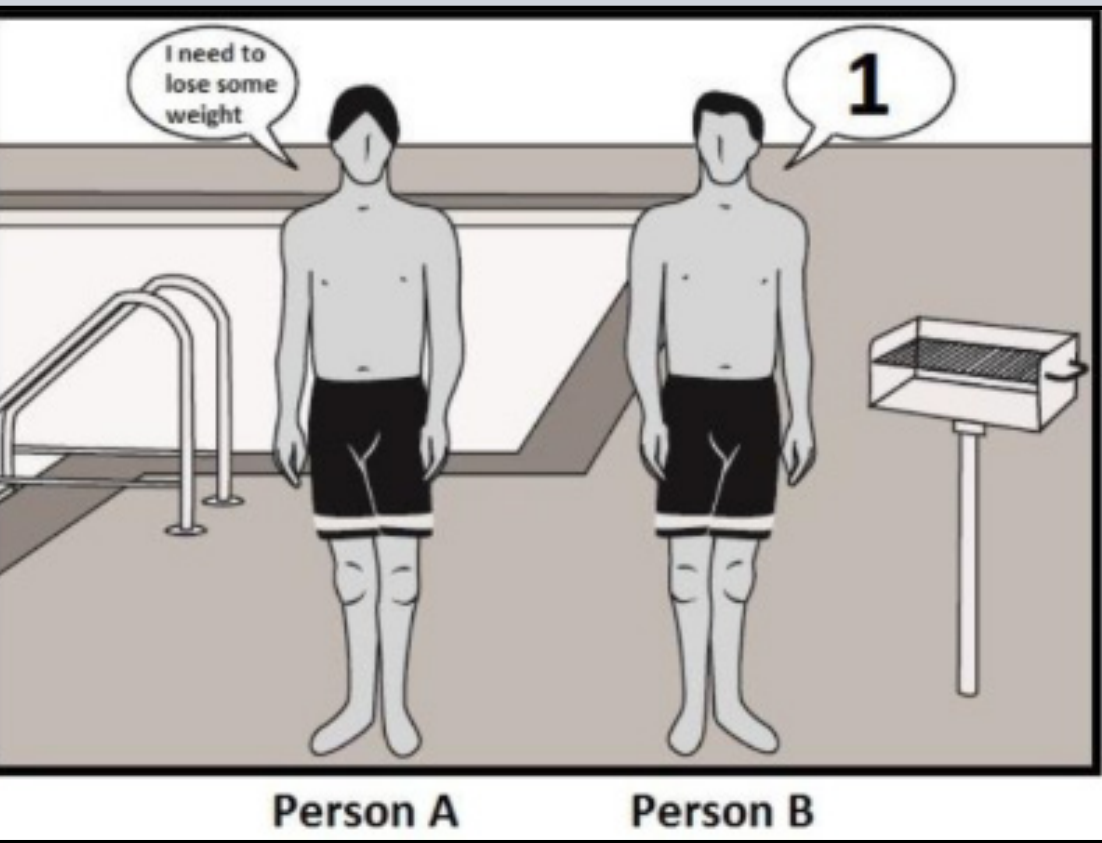
Respondent Mean age: 35.20 years old, SD = 16; mean BMI: 26.5 (‘overweight’), SD=5.25

## CODE DEVELOPMENT/ IMPLEMENTATION

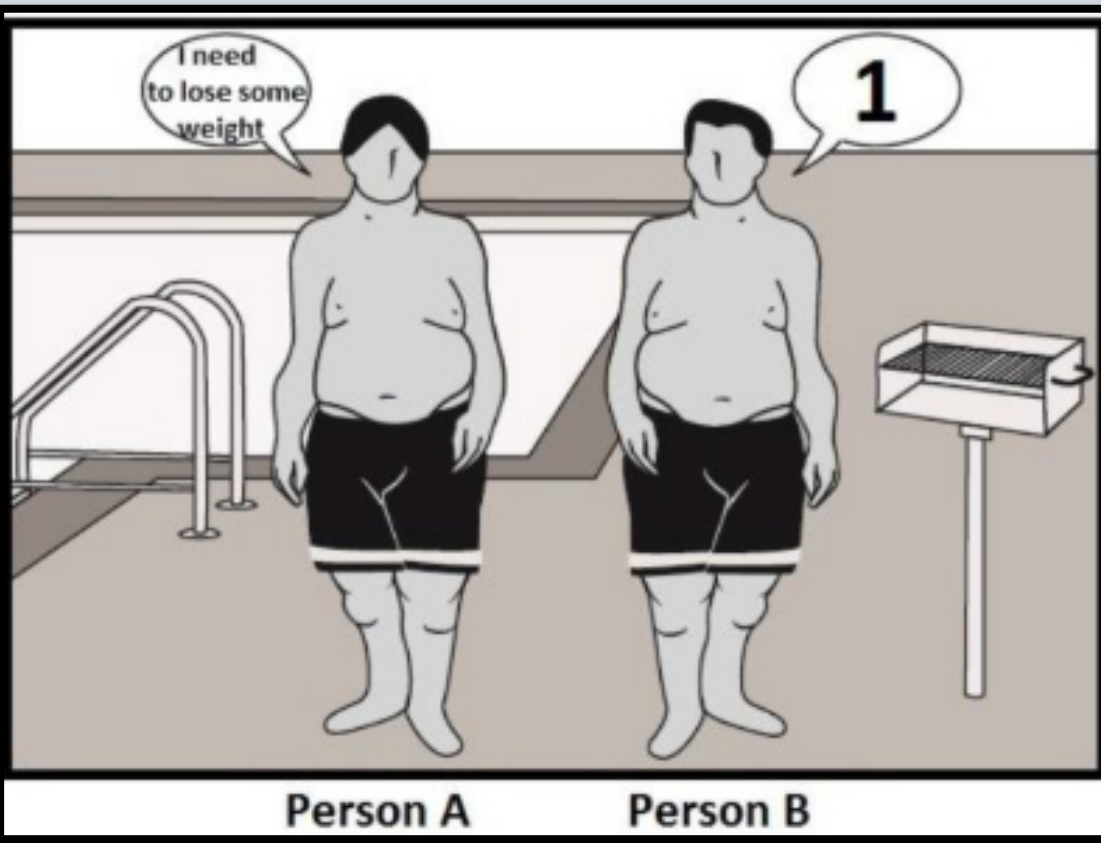
- Thematic analysis developed using MacQueen et al (1998)
- Thematic domain was used to establish “Manner of Reply.”
- Coding Segments are the reply given to the prompt.
- Codes/codebook were developed following Krippendorff (2012)
- Interrater reliability = High level of agreement achieved ( $k \geq 0.8$ )

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** We are grateful for the support of the Virginia G Piper Foundation and the Obesity Solutions. Data analyzed here was collected by students in ASB 452, Fall 2017

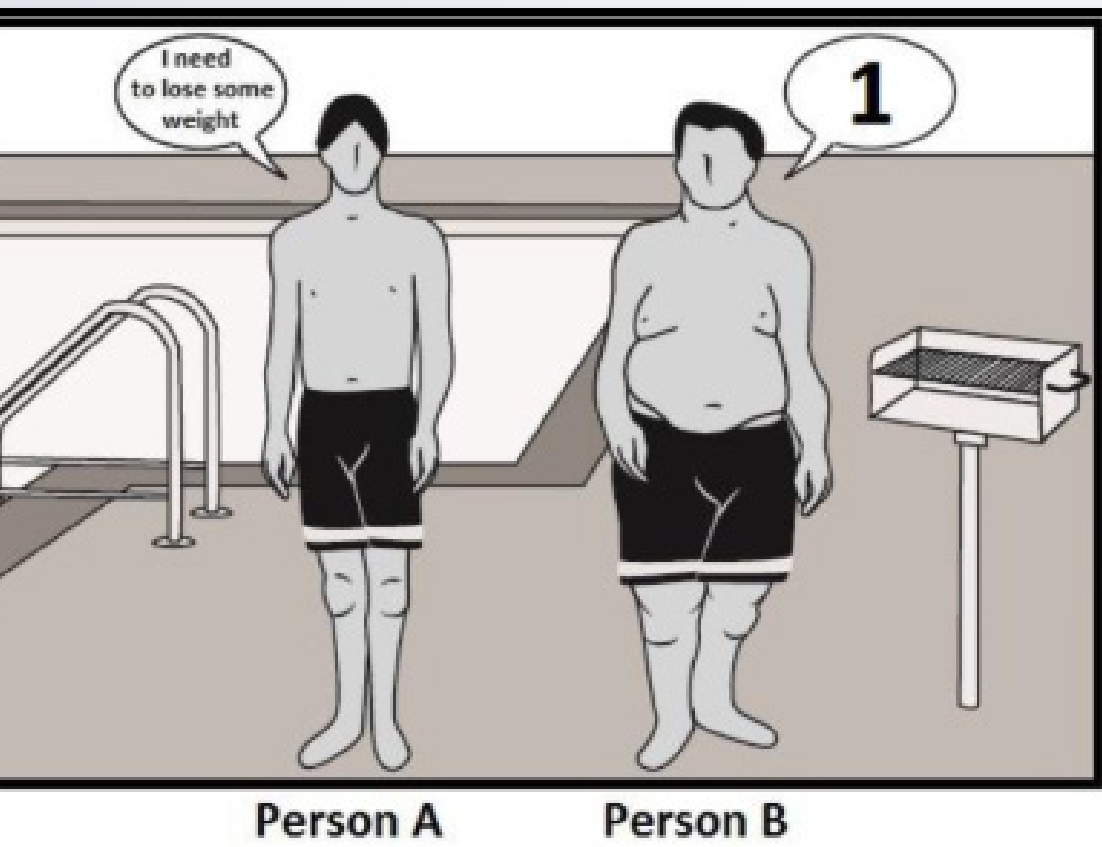
## DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASKS AND VIGNETTES



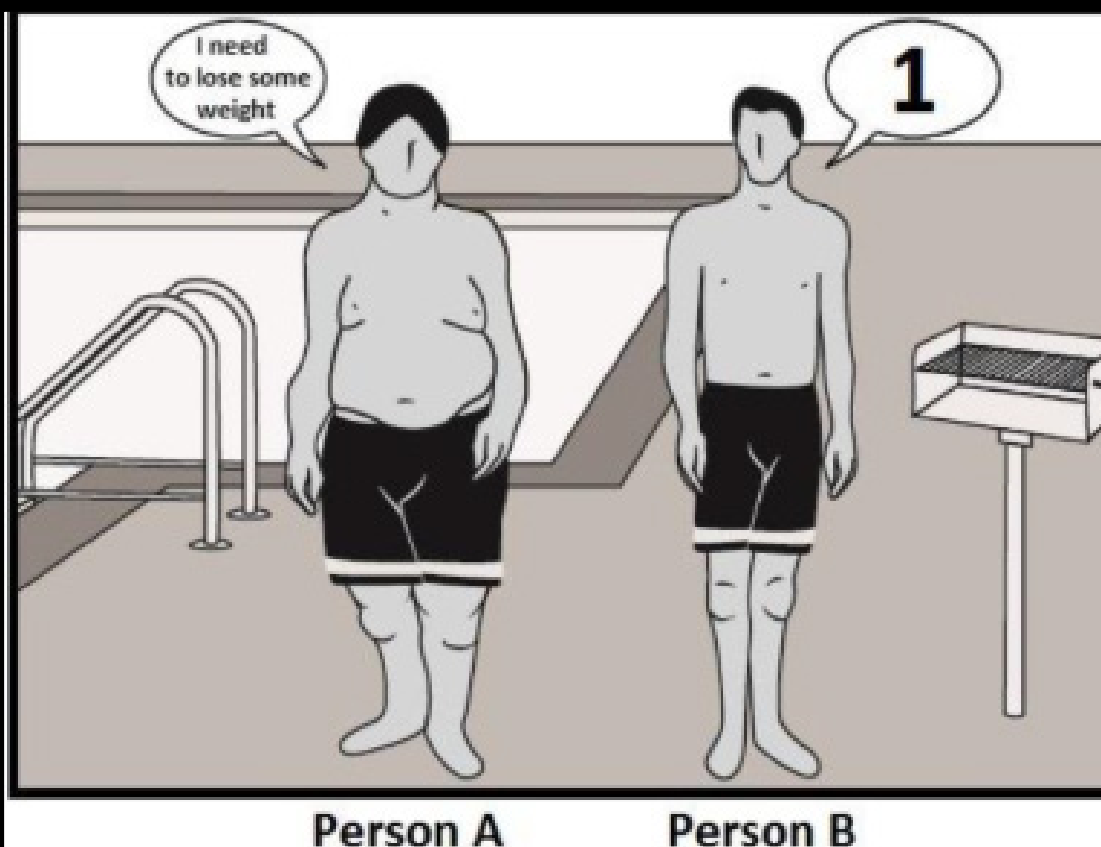
**Scenario 1:** Both figures depicted at a BMI of 25 or “normal” weight<sup>1</sup>



**Scenario 2:** Both figures depicted at a BMI of 30 or class 1 “obese”



**Scenario 3:** Figure A depicted at a BMI of 25 and Figure B at a BMI of 30



**Scenario 4:** Figure A depicted at a BMI of 30 and Figure B at a BMI of 25

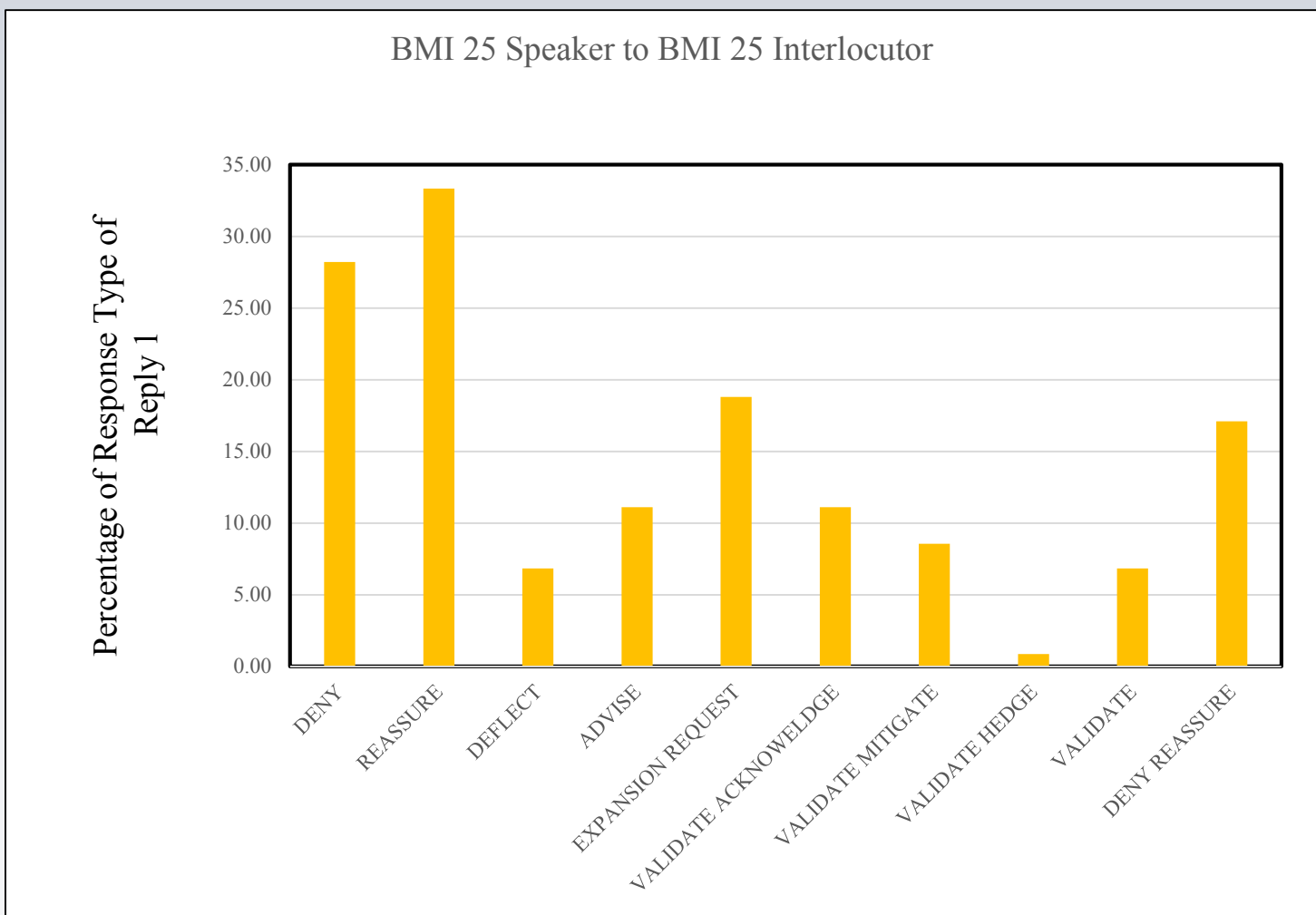
## MANNER OF RESPONSE CODES AND TYPICAL EXEMPLARS

CODE NAME	DEFINING CRITERIA	EXEMPLARS
<u>Deny</u>	Addresses proposition directly with negation.	“Nah man, you’re fine.” “I don’t see it.”
<u>Reassure</u>	Addresses proposition indirectly; answers the presumed implicit question.	“You look great.”
<u>Deflect</u>	Does not address proposition; shifts focus away from speaker.	“Interesting.” “Look at me!”
<u>Advise</u>	Does not address proposition directly; provides suggestion or advice.	“Well, if you start eating a little healthier “ “Try eating less fatty foods.”
<u>Expansion Request</u>	Request for more information.	“What do you mean?” “Why?”
<u>Validate with Acknowledgement</u>	Confirms proposition; acknowledges speaker’s utterance.	“If that’s how you feel, I support you.”
<u>Validate with Mitigation</u>	Confirms proposition with a qualifier (e.g., hedge).	“Maybe just a little.” “Yeah, you need to. No offense.”
<u>Validate</u>	Confirms the proposition without any mitigation.	“Yeah, you’re right.”
<u>No Code</u>	Response present but uninterpretable.	

## RESULTS

### Scenario 1: Speaker and Interlocutor are ‘normal’ weight

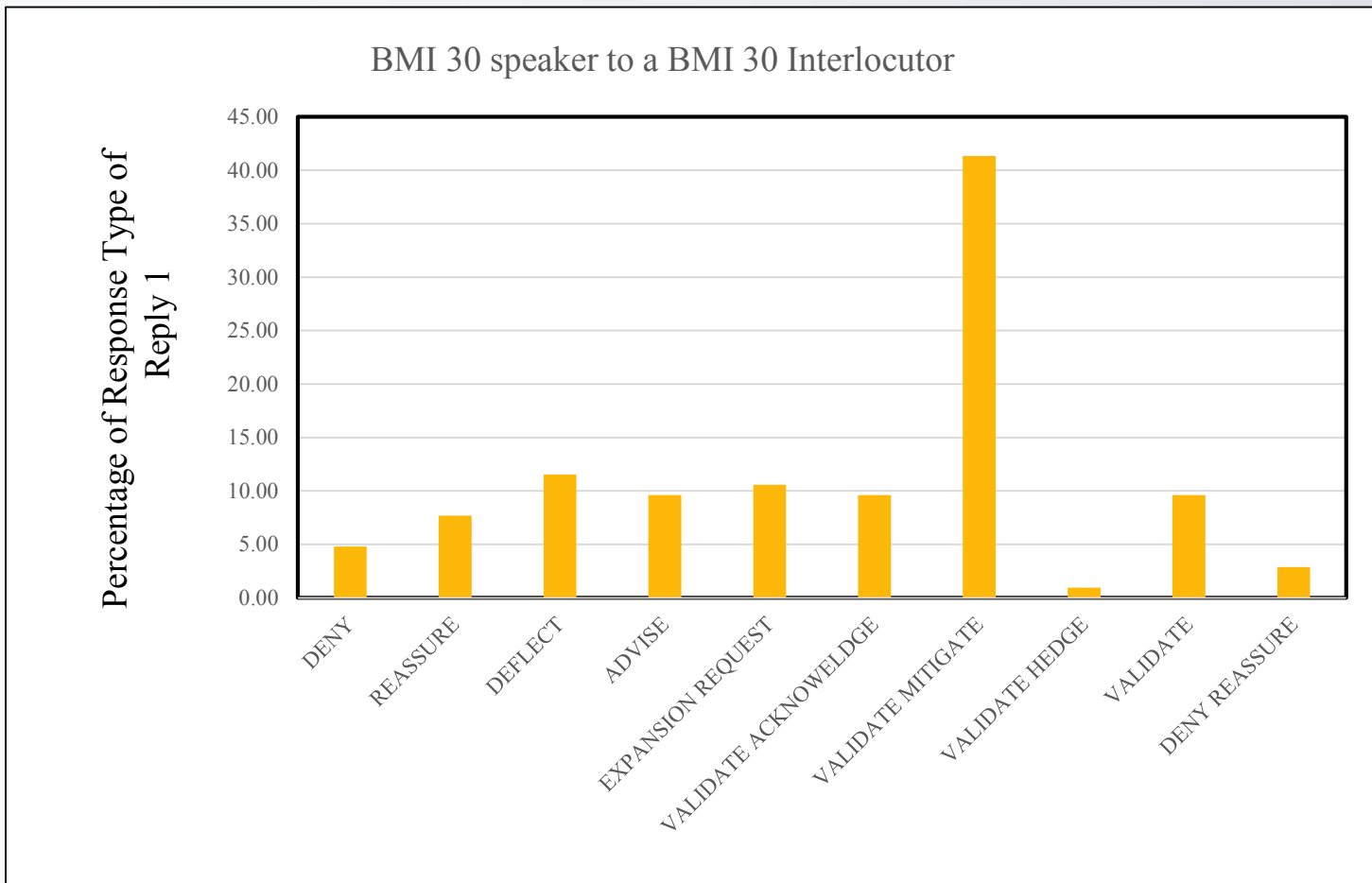
I need to lose some weight



No, you look great man

### Scenario 2: Speaker and Interlocutor are ‘obese’ weight

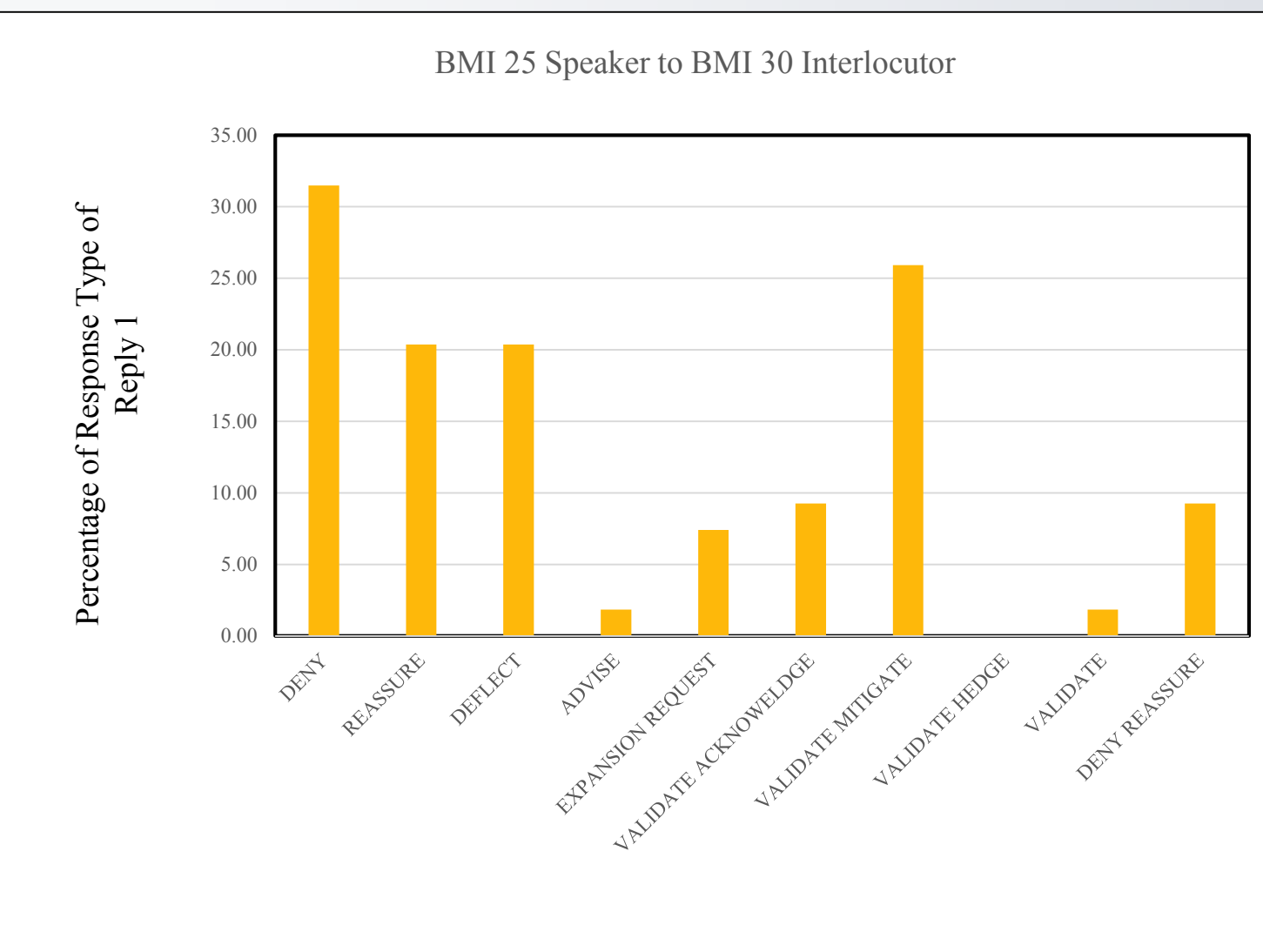
I need to lose some weight



Yeah, I know. I could lose some, too.

### Scenario 3: Speaker is ‘normal’ weight and Interlocutor is ‘obese’ weight

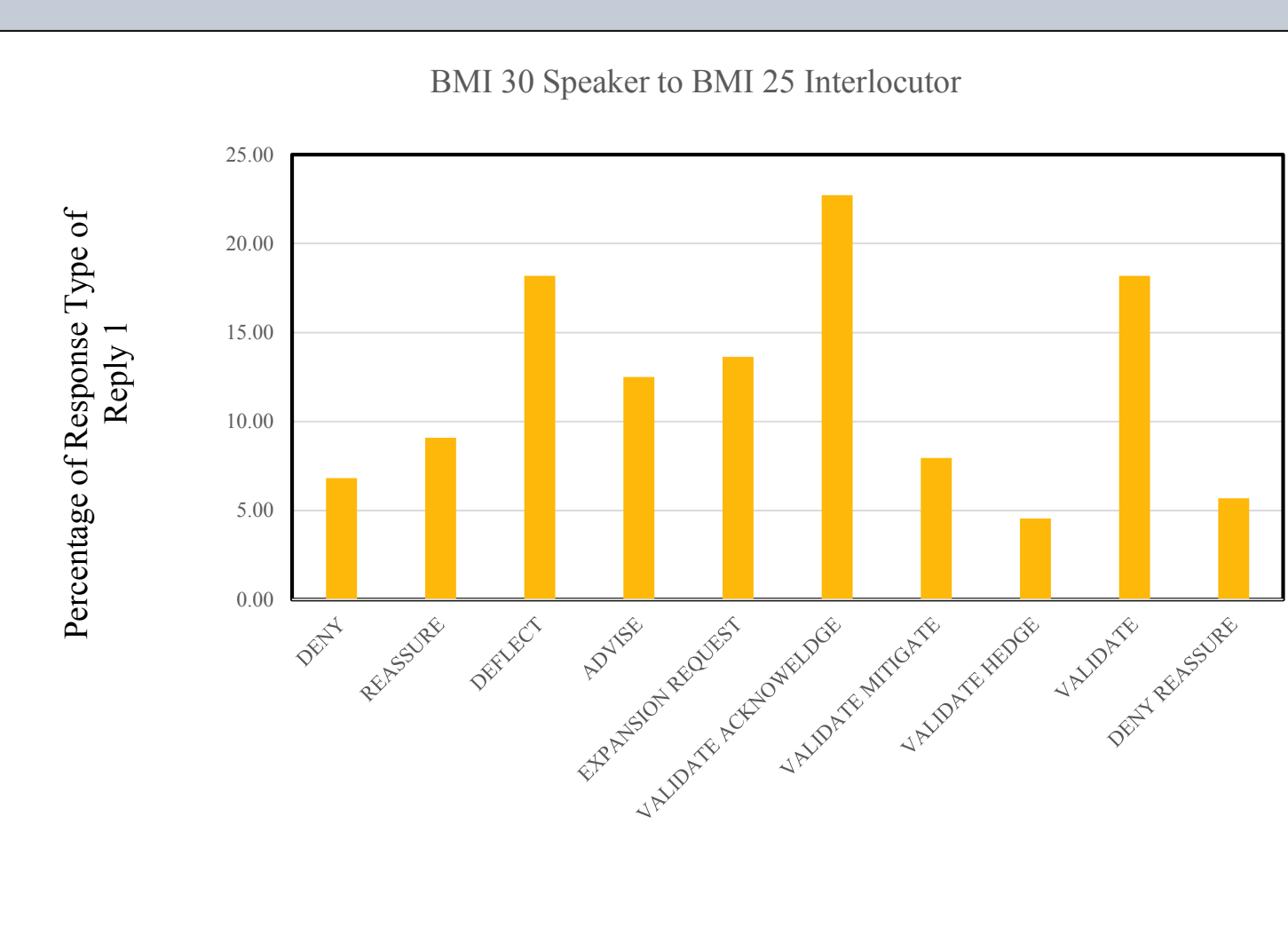
I need to lose some weight



Man seriously? Look at me! You’re crazy, that’s nothing!

### Scenario 4: Speaker is ‘obese’ weight and Interlocutor is ‘normal’ weight

I need to lose some weight



If that’s what you think is best, then I support you

## FINDINGS

**DENY** is the most typical response to Fat Talk initiated by a ‘normal’ weight speaker.

**DENY** typically co-occurred with **REASSURE**.

**VALIDATION** of some kind is the most typical response to Fat Talk initiated by an ‘obese’ speaker.

Lowest instance of **DENY** and **REASSURE** occur when **both** speakers are BMI-30, suggesting that respondents view these two body shapes as knowing/accepting the idea that losing weight is a sensible course of action.

**VALIDATE ACKNOWLEDGE** occurs when speaker 1 is ‘obese’ and speaker 2 is smaller. This kind of reply is the least challenging to the speaker. It accepts the speakers self-assessment but does not challenge it.

**Fat Talk** initiated by ‘obese’ speaker to a ‘normal’ interlocutor risks offending the speaker; normative response doesn’t exist.

## CONCLUSIONS

Interactions between men with similar body sizes suggest fat talk can build solidarity.

- ‘Normal’ sized speakers deny and reassure
- ‘Obese’ sized speakers validate and identify the need to lose weight.

Interactions between men of different body sizes suggest fat talk can create discomfort.

- ‘Normal’ sized speakers try to find “the right answer” by either denying/ reassuring or validating responder.
- ‘Obese’ sized speaker responses indicate there is no good/ or “right answer.”

## REFERENCES

- Krippendorff, K. (2013) Content Analysis. An Introduction to Its Methodology (3rd ed). California, CA: Sage Publications
- MacQueen, K. et al. (1998). Codebook development for team-based qualitative analysis. *Field Methods* 10(2).