

Here is an example of the basic components of a Methods Section adapted from: Bui, N. (2000). *Body size, ethnicity and gender: The effects of target and perceiver variables on impressions of figures*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

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## Method

### *Participants*

Twenty-three Asian (7 males and 16 females, mean age = 24.0 years) and 23 White (10 males and 13 females, mean age = 24.9 years) participants were studied. All participants were students at a mid-sized Midwestern U.S. university and surrounding colleges. Recruitment of all participants was made from the university psychology subject pool, department bulletin boards, and student organizations.

### *Materials*

*Stimulus Figures.* Twelve stimulus figures were used this study (See Appendix G). These figures were based on 12 photographs of real people who varied in body shape, ethnicity, age, and gender. Two computer programs were used to manipulate the photographs (Morph 2.5, Kai's SuperGoo) and produce a new set of 12 head-to-waist photos of male or female, and either Asian or White, and overweight, underweight, or average weight figures. Each participant rated the following twelve stimulus figures presented on a computer screen in random order:

- 1) overweight, White, male
- 2) overweight, White, female
- 3) underweight, White, male
- 4) underweight, White, female
- 5) overweight, Asian, male
- 6) overweight, Asian, female
- 7) underweight, Asian, male
- 8) underweight, Asian, female
- 9) average weight, White, female

- 10) average weight, White, male
- 11) average weight, Asian American, male
- 12) average weight, Asian American, female.

*Demographic Questionnaire.* Participants completed an 8-item demographic questionnaire pertaining to their ethnicity, gender, age, year in school, major in school, and annual household income (See Appendix C).

*Social Perception Questionnaire.* Participants rated the twelve stimulus figures on 12 items assessing three main dimensions: likeability, social competence, and attractiveness (See Appendix D). These dimensions were chosen based on past studies which have discovered similar dimensions used in the perception of targets. The physical attractiveness stereotype contends that more positive perceptions are given for thin women and muscular men. This stereotype has a high association to the dimension of social competence (Eagly et al., 1991) and attractiveness ratings. Social competence is the perception that the target has proficiency with interpersonal relationships, as well as establishing and maintaining relationships. In addition, researchers have shown that the likeability judgements of a target are related to the body weight or body size of targets (Cohen et al., 1997). Items were rated on a 7-point response scale, ranging from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (7). Likeability, social competence, and attractiveness have been used individually and separately in other studies on impression formation and social perception (Cohen et al., 1997; Eagly et al., 1991; Friedland, Crockett, and Laird, 1973). However, these three dimensions on the social perception questionnaire were analyzed as one mean score for positive or negative perceptions of the stimuli because of their high correlation with one another (See Table 1) and high subscale reliability ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Means and standard deviations for likeability, sociability, and attractiveness social perception dimensions are shown in Table 2. In the present research social perception was conceptualized as an average positive or negative impression of the stimulus figures and the three dimensions contribute to the general impression or social perception of the stimuli.

*Body Esteem Scale.* All participants completed the Body Esteem Scale (BES), (Franzoi & Shields, 1984) (Appendix E). The BES is based on the Body Cathexis Scale (Secord & Jourard, 1953)

and consists of 35 items assessing how respondents feel about and perceive their bodies. The scale is based on a 5-point response scale from "have strong negative feelings" (1) to "have strong positive feelings" (5). Despite Franzoi and Shields' intention for the BES to only tap into perception of dimensions of the body, the scale explores dimensions of body image as defined by Slade (1994). According to Slade, body image includes individuals' estimation of their body size and the feelings and attitudes that they have toward their own bodies. The BES measures these two body image components: estimation of body size and feelings and attitudes about the body. Franzoi and Shields (1984) established norms and reliability and validity data for their BES measure among males and females in their development of the Body Esteem Scale. They showed that although there were different dimensions for men and women, these dimensions shared similar characteristics across the sexes and that the BES was a highly reliable and valid measure. The authors of the BES summed scores for men and women, however, for this study, means for body image was used in order to be consistent with other measures used in the study (e.g., the social perception questionnaire). The 35 items on the Body Esteem Scale were analyzed as one mean score because of high inter-item reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ). The average BES score for all 35 items was  $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .54$ .

Table 1

*Pearson's Correlation for Social, Likeability and Attractiveness Subscales on Social Perception Questionnaire*

	<u>Subscale</u>	1	2	3
1.	Likeability	--		
2.	Social Competence	.79	--	
3.	Attractiveness	.65	.69	--

Note. n = 124

Table 2

*Means of Social Perception Dimensions*

Dimension	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Likeability	4.43	.63	127
Sociability	4.40	.51	126
Attractiveness	4.36	.60	128

*Procedure*

*Pilot Test.* In order to determine whether or not participants could differentiate among stimulus figures generated by computer, a pilot test was conducted. Two participants representing each ethnic group under investigation (White and Asian) were asked to judge 24 photographs for differences in the target effects (body size, ethnicity, and gender). The pilot study participants determined whether the figures were different in body size by sorting average, overweight and underweight sizes. The participants were also asked to determine whether the figures could be distinguished as White or Asian, and whether or not gender of the figures could be determined. The final set of photos (the 12 stimulus figures) chosen by the pilot study participants was used in the main study. Finally, the participants completed a sample study packet consisting of the demographic questionnaire, perception measures, and body esteem scale. This was done to determine the approximate length of time needed for viewing of the stimuli and completion of the materials. Data from the participants in the pilot study were not included in the analyses in this research.

Participants were exposed to all conditions (within-group) and were grouped by gender (male or female) and by ethnicity (White or Asian). All the perceiver effects used were non-manipulated independent variables. There were three manipulated independent variables: target weight (overweight,

normal, and underweight), target ethnicity (White and Asian), and target gender (male and female).

Twelve manipulated independent variable conditions for each participant were generated.

Prior to beginning the study, each participant signed an informed consent form and those under the age of 19 also had parents complete a parental consent form (See Appendices A and B). Participants then completed the demographic questionnaire. Each participant was given a written packet containing 12 social perception questionnaires and the Body Esteem Scale. The researcher told participants that the goal of the study was to understand impression formation and that the study pertained to the effects of learning words on their impressions of various figures. The researcher informed participants that they needed to learn various words while at the same time viewing photos and making judgments about the photos. The participants were told to memorize each word without writing it down. Then they were told to complete a social perception questionnaire for each figure that appeared after the presentation of the learning word.

The word learning task was designed to be a distraction task so that participants would not focus on the variation of ethnicity, gender, or body size of the target figures they saw on the computer screen and guess the hypotheses of the study. Due to the repetitiveness of the task of rating each photo, the distraction task (memory words) was used in this research based on prior research and based upon recommendation of the pilot study participants. Stangor (1998) suggests that distracters can help increase reliability and validity in studies due to the fact that some participants “react” to certain items or tasks that bias their responses. Such reactions can be due to the way questions are worded or the way figures are shown in an experiment. The memory recall task distracter used in the present research was used to reduce biases in responses to the stimuli and social perception items. It was a concern that participants might focus entirely on the stimulus figures’ variations in body size, ethnicity, and gender, and by doing so bias their responses. If they had ruminated on the figures, participants might have rated figures according to their expectations of what they thought the researcher wanted to find and not what they truly perceived.

Participants were randomly assigned to individual computers. All participants were asked to wear headphones located at each computer. The study began with a presentation of a random word (not related to the study's variables or hypotheses) on the participant's computer screen for 5 seconds using presentation software (Microsoft PowerPoint 97). Following the presentation of each distraction task word, one of the twelve stimulus photos appeared in random order. The participant was given 90 seconds to complete the social perception questionnaire for that figure. After the 90 seconds a warning bell sounded through the headphones indicating that the next random word was going to be presented. Participants had been told that the computer program was timed and that the warning signal they heard would indicate to them when to pay attention to the computer screen.

The presentation of each set of stimuli (word and photo) was given twelve times, once for each of the twelve different stimulus photos. When the last photo was seen, the computer screen displayed a slide that told participants to stop and remove the headphones. Participants were then given 1 minute to write down on a blank sheet of paper provided to them as many of the words that were presented as they could remember. Following completion of this task, the participants were asked to complete the Body Esteem Scale. Upon completion of the study, the participants were debriefed (See Appendix F).