

**PERSON PERCEPTION AS A FUNCTION OF  
BODY WEIGHT**



**CONSTANCE SUZANNE WYSE**

PERSON PERCEPTION AS A FUNCTION OF BODY WEIGHT

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An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Psychology

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by  
Constance Suzanne Wyse

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was done to test to what extent overweight subjects will attribute personality characteristics to overweight persons in slides, and also to what extent overweight subjects will attribute personality characteristics to normal-weight persons in slides. The two converse conditions were also investigated: normal-weight subjects rating overweight persons in slides and normal-weight subjects rating other normal-weight persons in slides.

A total of 23 subjects participated in this study. According to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company chart for ideal weight (1959), 15 of the subjects were overweight and eight of the subjects were normal-weight. The Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI) was administered to all 23 subjects to determine their level of self-esteem. The subjects were shown slides of six overweight persons and three normal-weight persons and then asked to rate these slides on the 14 items that constitute the Social Desirability Index (SDI) formulated by Dion et al. (1972).

The results of the TSBI indicated that all subjects scored in the average self-esteem category. An analysis between different weight classifications on the mean SDI scores was conducted. No significant differences were

found. Analyses between mean slide scores and several individual personality traits were also performed. The analysis for the trait "vanity" revealed that, disregarding the weight of the subject, persons classified as overweight in the slides were perceived as significantly more vain than normal-weight persons in the slides. The analysis for the trait "poise" revealed that, disregarding the weight of the subjects, persons classified as normal-weight in the slides were perceived as significantly more poised than overweight persons in the slides.

Dion et al. (1972) had predicted that physically attractive stimulus persons, male and female, would be perceived as possessing more socially desirable personality traits than unattractive stimulus persons. The present study does not support this prediction. Normal-weight stimulus persons in this investigation were not perceived as possessing more socially desirable personalities overall than overweight stimulus persons.

The present study presents speculations concerning the lack of differences between normal-weight and overweight subjects in the perceptions of normal or overweight individuals in slides. Suggestions for design changes were given in an effort to improve research in this area.

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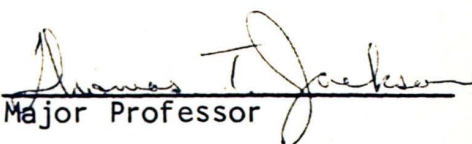
by

Constance Suzanne Wyse

June, 1976

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Constance Suzanne Wyse entitled "Person Perception as a Function of Body Weight." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

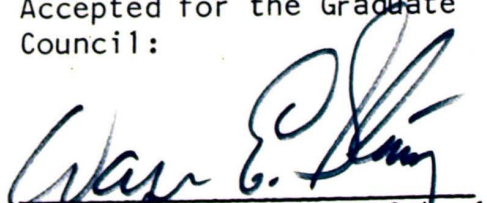
  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

  
Second Committee Member

  
Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate  
Council:

  
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Appreciation must be expressed to my parents for making my education possible. They have given me moral support and encouragement every step of the way.

Friends are special and mine have stood by me throughout graduate school. When there was temptation to quit, reassurance was forthcoming. Recognition must be given to two very special friends, Ray Daniel and John Libretto. Without them, this endeavor would have been unbearable. They remain my soul-mates.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. METHOD . . . . .	27
Subjects . . . . .	27
Apparatus . . . . .	27
Procedure . . . . .	29
III. RESULTS. . . . .	31
IV. DISCUSSION . . . . .	34
REFERENCES. . . . .	39
APPENDIX A: TEXAS SOCIAL BEHAVIOR INDEX. . . . .	45
APPENDIX B: SOCIAL DESIRABILITY INDEX. . . . .	46
APPENDIX C: FIVE ADDITIONAL PERSONALITY TRAITS . . . .	47
APPENDIX D: INSTRUCTIONS: WEIGHT CONTROL GROUP. . . .	48
APPENDIX E: INSTRUCTIONS: CLASSROOM GROUP . . . . .	51
APPENDIX F: TABLES . . . . .	54

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Obesity and overweight have become topics of public interest in recent years. The number of popular diets that are available has increased drastically. Examples are Dr. Stillman's diet, the drinking man's diet, and the grapefruit diet. In popular magazines, such as Redbook and Ladies Home Journal, articles such as the following may be found: "The Quick-and-Easy Diet by Neil Solomon, M.D., Ph.D.," "Dr. Atkin's 14-Day Diet," and "The Psychiatrists' 20-Minute Diet."

If the prospect of dieting alone is distasteful, there are several group organizations of which Weight Watcher's and TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) are perhaps the two best-known groups. These groups for weight control do offer the benefit of mutual support, much like Alcoholics Anonymous (Cappon, 1973).

It would appear that the purpose of diets and the increased interest in them is two-fold: basic good health and physical attractiveness. Common sense would dictate that persons who are obese are asking their bodies to work overtime (Mayer, 1968). Respiratory difficulties are among

the more important and frequent problems of the obese, as well as heart disease, hypertension, and arteriosclerosis (Mayer, 1968).

In the Friedman and Rosenman (1974) book on the heart and behavior patterns, the authors discuss the relationship between obesity and diabetes and the subsequent relationship between diabetes and coronary artery disease. These authors state that: "If no clear-cut relationship exists between moderate degree of obesity (uncomplicated by diabetes) and coronary artery disease, there may well be such a relationship between extreme obesity and the disorder" (p. 139).

In the professional journals, it appears as if the majority of the research in the area of obesity has been concerned with the dietary issue. In addition, this work has been conducted with animals. Ahlskog and Hoebel (1973) conducted a rat study on obesity involving damage to the noradrenergic system in the brain. The authors found that damage to this area of the brain resulted in increased eating activity in the rats which led to obesity. Griffin, Medearis, and Hughes (1973) used pigeons to study food deprivation and avoidance response. It was found that the response rate was an increasing function of body weight.

The purpose of the present paper is not to discern why animal research has been the primary means of studying obesity, but perhaps to bring this fact to the attention of the reader and point out the difficulty in obtaining scientific reports, using human subjects, pertaining to the relationships between obesity and other variables, especially interpersonal relationships.

### Discrimination

One interesting facet of the overweight problem brought to light during the literature research was the discrimination against overweight persons reported by several sources. Newsweek (March 31, 1975) quoted a personnel director in Oregon as stating that it was much easier to place a black person than someone who is fat. The reason given was one of appearance. Most offices did not want a fat person at the front desk because it did not create a good impression.

Newsweek also cited Mayer's (1968) study with college applicants. Discrimination against obese persons was prevalent when college applications involved personal interviews. "Fat" (Mayer's word) men had only half the chance of being admitted to college as did those of normal weight; "fat" women had only one-third the chance. Newsweek went on to say that although some disappointed job seekers have filed

suit in court, it is very difficult to prove discrimination on the basis of weight.

Mayer (1968), when asked about discrimination against obese persons, replied:

There have been a number of instances of individuals threatened with dismissal from their jobs unless they lost weight. This has been true even in such tenured positions as the armed forces. We have found that there is real discrimination against obese subjects, particularly against girls. It seems reasonable, though hard to document, that there is fairly widespread discrimination in employment against obese people. (p. 202)

Cappon (1973) states that the corporate image demands adherence to an ideal weight and that one's weight often becomes a measure of one's fitness for work. Cappon also indicates that:

The obese person is regarded as slovenly and is often rejected out of hand as an employee. The fat person also is often looked upon by management as more accident prone than his thinner companion; and, should an accident occur, the fat man is considered more likely to develop complications. All in all, the fat person is not considered a first-rate prospect for employment. (p. 4)

### Physical Attractiveness<sup>1</sup>

Physical attractiveness is also a part of the overweight problem. Usually overweight people are not considered very attractive. Even though the majority of individuals may consciously or unconsciously know that body

weight is an aspect of physical attractiveness, scientific studies are not available to substantiate the relationship between body weight and physical attractiveness. Therefore, inferences have to be made from existing pertinent studies. Pertinent studies are defined as those involving attribution of personality traits, one of which is physical attractiveness.

Until recently, social scientists have shown a reluctance to research the area of physical attractiveness. Aronson (1969) suggests that one reason for this hesitation might be that scientists would be loath to find that beautiful women are better liked than homely women because this somehow seems undemocratic. The general population likes to think that with hard work anyone can achieve his/her goal, but it is almost impossible to make an ugly woman beautiful.

In a recent study by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972), it was found that a physical attractiveness stereotype exists and lends itself to the "what is beautiful is good" thesis. These authors predicted that physically attractive stimulus persons, male and female, would be perceived as possessing a higher degree of socially desirable personality characteristics than unattractive stimulus

persons. The attractive stimulus persons would also be expected to lead more successful lives than unattractive persons. In order to test these predictions, 30 men and 30 women were asked to view photographs and rate them on the 27 personality characteristics that constitute the Social Desirability Index (SDI). The subjects' ratings were made on six-point scales, the ends of which were labeled by polar opposites (e.g., exciting-dull). The subjects were also asked to rate the photographs on a second set of five personality traits (e.g., friendliness, trustworthiness, etc.), ranging from the "most" to the "least" of a given trait. Half of the subjects rated pictures of women that varied in attractiveness and the other half rated pictures of men that varied in attractiveness. The authors found that the stereotype did not differ significantly for men and women. Physically attractive individuals in the photographs were perceived as more likely to be warm, kind, interesting, strong, sensitive, poised, responsive, modest, sociable, and outgoing than unattractive individuals in the photographs.

Subjects were also asked to assess these photographs as to what they believed would be the future of the person in the photograph. The subjects were asked to estimate which of the stimulus persons would be most likely to have a

number of life experiences. Subjects gave estimations of the stimulus person's future happiness in four areas: marital happiness, parenthood, social and professional happiness, and total happiness (the sum of the preceding three). The analyses indicated that the subjects predicted more successful and happier lives for the physically attractive persons in all areas except as parents. The subjects predicted that the attractive persons in the photographs would be the least competent parents and that the unattractive persons in the photographs would be the most competent parents.

In a footnote, Aronson (1969) expresses his agreement with the idea Dion et al. (1972) tested:

I can't let this parenthetical discussion go by without mentioning one of my pet ideas--that our visual perception exercises a terribly conservative influence on our feelings and behavior. We are wedded to our eyes--especially as a means of determining physical attractiveness. Moreover, once we have categorized a person as pretty or homely, we tend to attribute other qualities to these people; i.e., pretty people are more likely to strike us as being warm, sexy, exciting, and delightful than homely people. (p. 160)

In a partial replication of the Dion et al. (1972) study, Dermer and Thiel (1975) explored the "what is beautiful is good" thesis. Prior to the experiment, in a survey session, 108 students had been observed by hidden

assistants and rated on their physical attractiveness. The assistants rated the students as "very attractive," "attractive," "just above average in attractiveness," "just below average in attractiveness," "unattractive," and "very unattractive." Out of these 108 students, 40 female students responded and agreed to serve as subjects in the experiment. These respondents were classified as: least attractive (10 respondents), average in attractiveness (20 respondents), and most attractive (10 respondents). The Dion et al. (1972) SDI was used to obtain the personality characteristics attributed to the stimulus persons by the subjects. The authors found that the unattractive subjects did not rate the beautiful stimulus persons as having more desirable personalities than unattractive stimulus persons, while the attractive subjects did so. In this instance, the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype appeared not to hold up for the unattractive subjects.

The parental competency reversal found by the Dion et al. (1972) study was confirmed by this study also. Unattractive subjects expected the most beautiful stimulus persons to be the least competent parents. The attractive subjects' expectations were not affected by the physical attractiveness levels of the stimulus persons. Dermer and

Thiel (1975) state: "Thus the beauty implies goodness stereotype may best describe attributions made by women of average and high physical attractiveness." (p. 1173)

The authors state that general effects associated with the attractiveness of the stimulus person are consistent with previous findings. The attractive stimulus persons are expected to (a) have more socially desirable personalities; (b) be better spouses and sexual partners; (c) marry men of higher occupational status; and (d) experience greater social and professional happiness than unattractive stimulus persons.

Attractive stimulus persons were also expected to be more vain, egotistical, and more likely to request a divorce and have extramarital affairs. They were also expected to be unsympathetic to oppressed peoples, materialistic, and snobbish as compared to unattractive stimulus persons. These expectations were ascertained through questions the subjects were asked to answer about each stimulus person.

In their summary, Dermer and Thiel (1975) state that this study has supported previous research (e.g., Dion et al. 1972) indicating that attractive women are expected to be more sociable, heterosexually alluring, professionally

successful, and personally happy in comparison to unattractive women. According to data feedback from subjects (questionnaire answers), there is a difference in this study from previous findings in that attractive women are expected to be more conceited, likely to engage in adultery, and be bourgeois as compared to unattractive women. Due to the somewhat negative connotations also presented, the authors feel that a physical attractiveness stereotype exists; its content, however, did not appear to be perfectly compatible with the "what is beautiful is good" thesis.

The Dermer and Thiel (1975) study does substantiate some of the evidence in the Dion et al. (1972) review. However, it also presents a negative side of the issue. The attractive women were also seen to possess a few undesirable personality characteristics; i.e., vanity, snobbishness, promiscuity, and unsympathetic feelings toward oppressed peoples. Being beautiful may carry a double meaning.

It can be implied that physical attractiveness influences personality characteristics attributed to another person. Since personality characteristics would seem to be involved in liking or not liking, physical attractiveness may influence liking also.

In a study by Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, and Rottman

(1966), it was found that sheer physical attractiveness was the overriding determinant of liking between couples attending a bogus "computer dance." All of the men and women who signed up to attend the dance were randomly paired with the one restriction being that the male had to be as tall or taller than the female. The authors suspected that physical attractiveness would be an element of the subjects' social desirability. The study found that regardless of the subject's own physical attractiveness, by far the largest determinant of how much his partner was liked, how much he wanted to date the partner again, and how often he actually asked the partner out was based simply on how attractive the partner was.

Thus far, most of the studies reviewed have measured physical attractiveness through subjective ratings by assistants or by having subjects judge stimulus persons as attractive or unattractive. Berscheid and Walster (1974) point out that it is almost impossible to state absolutely what constitutes physical attractiveness. What may appear attractive to one person may not appear attractive to another. The authors did offer one individual characteristic which has implications for both sexes, but especially for men. The characteristic is height. Berscheid and

Walster (1974) state that most studies have neglected the height factor since no height information about the stimulus person is given. However, Berscheid and Walster (1974) do cite a study in which Feldman (1971) reported two surveys from the Wall Street Journal which indicated that the short man is penalized along economic lines. One of the surveys revealed that graduates of the University of Pittsburgh who were 6'2" and over were earning 12.4% more than those under 6' in height. In the other survey, a hypothetical job applicant situation was set up. The results indicated that between two equally qualified applicants, one 6'1" tall and the other 5' tall, 72% of the bogus job interviewers "hired" the tall man, 27% of the interviewers expressed no preference, and 1% of the bogus interviewers chose the short applicant.

Additionally, Feldman (1971) points out that short men have special social and dating problems. Berscheid and Walster (1974) support his conclusion by relating that no investigations have been done on height as a factor in courtship and dating. These authors say that a primary rule of dating is that the male be as tall or taller than the female (see the Walster et al. (1966) study previously reviewed in this paper), which could narrow the field of

eligibles and present problems for short men or very tall women.

The review of the literature on physical attractiveness pertinent to this paper indicates the following: (a) physical attractiveness is related to the personality characteristics attributed to others; (b) attractive women were seen as possessing the more desirable traits, with the exception of parenthood; (c) physically attractive women were also seen as possessing a few undesirable traits, such as being conceited, and egotistical, among others; (d) physical attractiveness is involved in liking; (e) what constitutes physical attractiveness is difficult to determine; (f) height may be one determinant of attractiveness for both sexes, but especially men.

### Self-esteem or Self-concept

The third area chosen for review as pertinent to this paper involves studies on self-esteem or self-concept. Every person has a concept of himself-herself, usually based on another's perceptions of that individual (Walster, 1965). A logical thought might be that being overweight could affect a person's self-esteem or self-concept. The articles reviewed were chosen because they could be generalized to the problems of the overweight. More specifically

these studies could shed light on situations that might prove more difficult for the overweight person than for the normal-weight person; for example, (a) situations involving self-esteem as related to romantic liking, (b) situations involving liking persons of different social desirabilities and (c) situations involving the relationship between liking and evaluation (as a function of the attractiveness of the evaluator).

In a study by Walster (1965) on romantic liking, the author investigated a person's momentary self-esteem and its relation to receptivity to love and affection offered by another. Walster reports that a small portion of the literature on self-esteem suggests that people low in self-esteem are in special need of affection, and are thus especially receptive to and prone to like others. The author predicted that when an individual's self-esteem was low, that individual would be more receptive to another person offering affection than when the individual's self-esteem was high. One of Walster's rationales for this prediction was that a lowering of one's self-esteem probably produces an increased need for the affection and regard of others. Essentially, she was looking at the effect of a momentary high or low self-esteem on liking for another when

that other was offering affection.

Subjects for Walster's study were 20 women from Stanford University and 17 women from Foothill Junior College. The mean age of the subjects was 18.5 years. The manipulation of the momentary self-esteem was accomplished through false reports of the results of the California Personality Inventory (CPI). Some of the subjects were given feedback from the CPI designed to raise their self-esteem. Some of the subjects were given feedback designed to lower their level of self-esteem. All reports were false. Before the self-esteem of the subjects was affected in any way, the author wanted to introduce the subjects to a male confederate, hoping the subject would perceive this confederate as an accepting, affectionate male. The male confederate came into the waiting room while the subject was awaiting the results of the CPI. They engaged in general conversation and before the subject entered the other room for her results, the male confederate asked her for a date and she gave him her answer. The subject then entered the room and was given a false report on the CPI. This report was either designed to raise or lower her momentary self-esteem. While in the room, the subject was asked to indicate her feelings for the male confederate.

The results of this study indicated that the subjects who were given a false report on the CPI designed to lower self-esteem expressed significantly more liking for the male confederate than did the subjects who were put into the high self-esteem condition. It appears that one's self-esteem can be related to liking, especially if the other person seems to be offering love and affection. Perhaps there is merit in Walster's speculation that those low in self-esteem are in need of affection and regard from others.

In the physical attractiveness literature, it has been found that physical attractiveness is related to social desirability and that physical attractiveness is related to liking. It seems logical that social desirability should be related, in some manner, to liking.

A study by Walster (1970) investigates this relationship. In this study, the effects of self-esteem on liking date partners of different social desirabilities was investigated. It was predicted that individuals prefer romantic partners of approximately equal social desirability. The subjects were given a battery of personality tests (e.g., The Janis and Field Personality Questionnaire, self-esteem items from the CPI) and also asked to rate themselves on their own social desirability. Subjects rated their own

social poise, intelligence, physical attractiveness, popularity with the opposite sex, prestige, athletic ability, and likability.

The study was divided into two experimental phases. In Experiment 1 there was one set of subjects, 85 college students, and one set of 15 "others." The "others" were unidentified persons in photographs. The 85 subjects ranked photographs of the 15 "others" on physical attractiveness. On the basis of the subjects' rankings, the experimenter prepared two identical booklets for each subject. Each booklet contained pictures, brief autobiographies, and presumably objective social desirability ratings for five out of the 15 "others." The "others" depicted in each booklet were classified as being either Extremely Desirable, Fairly Desirable, and Extremely Undesirable. (The subjects believed that the "others" depicted in the first booklet would soon be entering college.) After reading the booklet, the subjects were asked how much they liked each "other" romantically. The subjects were then given a break. When the subjects returned from the break they were given a second booklet, which contained the pictures, autobiographies, and the social desirability ratings of the same five "others." Again, subjects were

asked how much they liked each "other" romantically. The subjects then evaluated the social desirability of the five "others" as compared to their own social desirability. They were also asked how interested they would be in dating one another, and to guess how each "other" would rate them.

The authors had predicted that individuals would prefer romantic partners of approximately their own social desirability. This was not the case. Subjects at the highest and lowest levels of self-esteem preferred the most socially desirable date to the same extent. The authors speculated that there might be some weak trends in the predicted direction and that these trends might emerge if some design weaknesses (not specified) were remedied.

In Experiment 2, repeated by Walster (1970), a therapist was hired to be present during the time the subjects (34 men from a midwestern university) filled out their questionnaires. Instructions were simplified and a few questions were reworded. None of the changes had any effect on the results found in Experiment 2. The high and low self-esteem subjects still preferred the most socially desirable dates to the same extent. Evidently, an individual's assessment of his own social desirability, high or low, does not influence that individual's preference for the

most desirable dates.

As mentioned previously, Walster (1970) indicated that persons of high and low self-esteem preferred the most socially desirable date partners to the same extent. The subjects may have viewed these desirable persons as competent in the social area of dating. An individual might be more attracted to a seemingly competent person than to an incompetent person. Helmreich, Aronson, and LeFan (1970) studied the effects of self-esteem, competence, and a pratfall (e.g., spilling a cup of coffee) on interpersonal attraction. The subjects were 120 male students who were classified as being of low, average, or high self-esteem based on test scores from the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI). The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions: competent-pratfall, competent-no pratfall, incompetent-pratfall, and incompetent-no pratfall. The pratfall consisted of having the stimulus person spill a cup of coffee all over himself.

Each subject was escorted into an experimental room with a television monitor, and was told that he would view videotaped segments of interviews which he would be asked to evaluate. The subject was told that the person being interviewed was an applicant for the highest post a student

could hold on campus. The stimulus persons were made to appear competent or incompetent by their appearance and the qualifications they gave for the post being sought. In two of the conditions, the stimulus person spilled the cup of coffee.

After viewing the tapes, the subject was given an evaluation questionnaire to fill out. The items asked the subject to indicate on 7-point scales how much he liked the applicant, and how much he would like to spend a lot of time with the applicant. There was a total of 10 items on the questionnaire; other items asked for ratings of the applicant's sincerity, adjustment, intelligence, poise, and physical appearance.

The results indicated that subjects of average self-esteem experienced an increase in liking for the stimulus person in the competent-pratfall condition. This might be due to the apparent "humanizing" of the competent person. Low self-esteem subjects showed less liking for the stimulus person in the competent-pratfall condition than in the competent-no pratfall condition. The authors speculated that this might be due to the low self-esteem subjects' need for a perfect hero. If a low self-esteem person admires a superior, he may not be able to tolerate any flaws

in such a person. The authors made no speculations about high self-esteem subjects. One might think that a person high in self-esteem would not experience a need to idolize another, as he might have sufficient confidence in himself. The authors included a cautionary note which may have implications for future research. They found that low self-esteem subjects volunteered to participate to a greater extent than did average or high self-esteem subjects. This could lead to a disproportionate number of low self-esteem subjects in a sample and could affect conclusions drawn from data. It would be difficult to generalize to the whole population based only on data from low self-esteem subjects.

The review of the studies on self-esteem indicated the following: (a) persons with a momentary low self-esteem indicated more liking for a male confederate offering love and affection than did those persons with a momentary high self-esteem; (b) subjects at the highest and lowest levels of self-esteem preferred the most socially desirable dates to the same extent; (c) low self-esteem subjects showed less liking for a stimulus person perceived as competent but clumsy.

### Evaluation

Evaluation by another person is a subtle, subjective element involved in the assessment of the social desirability of the other person or even in the assessment of one's own social desirability. In the previous studies reviewed, the ratings of the stimulus persons have involved evaluation and/or judging the person on personality characteristics.

Sigall and Aronson (1969) investigated the relationship between liking and evaluation. These authors conducted a study on the liking for an attractive or unattractive female evaluator as a function of the nature of her evaluations. Their predictions were that when an attractive female evaluator positively evaluates a male subject, he will like her the most. The degrees of liking for a female evaluator will be next highest when she is unattractive and presents the male subject with a positive evaluation. This will be followed by a situation in which the unattractive female evaluator presents a negative evaluation to the male subject. Finally, liking will be least when the attractive female evaluator gives the male subject a negative evaluation.

The subjects were 48 male students in a university, randomly assigned to the four experimental conditions and tested individually. The same female confederate was used

in all four conditions. Her appearance was changed from attractive to unattractive by make-up and wigs. In the female confederate's positive evaluation of the male subject, she told him that he was well-adjusted, reasonably mature, earnest, and that he probably related well to others. He was also told that he was frank, insightful, and potentially creative. In her negative evaluation of the male subject, the female confederate told him that he was somewhat immature, shallow, lacking in insight, and although he was possibly creative, it was not likely. Later, an assistant told the subject that, as an assistant, he was interested in general reactions to testers and asked the subjects to rate the tester (the female confederate) anonymously. The questionnaire contained five items, each of which was to be answered on an 11-point scale from -5 to +5. The first question asked the subject was how much he liked the tester. Two other items asked for the subjects' assessment of the tester's intelligence and performance quality. The two remaining items were manipulation checks (physical attractiveness of the tester and the subject's own feelings when he left the experiment). The subjects were also asked if they would like to take another battery of tests administered by the same tester.

The results indicated that liking was by far greater when the female evaluator was attractive and positive in her evaluations. The next largest amount of liking was when the female evaluator was unattractive and evaluated the subject positively. The next condition was when the female evaluator was unattractive and negative in her evaluations. The condition involving the least liking was when the female evaluator was attractive and evaluated the male subject in a negative manner. The authors make the following comment:

Close inspection of Table 1 indicates that it does not make too much difference whether one receives a positive or a negative evaluation when the evaluator is unattractive, but that there is a world of difference between receiving negative and positive feedback from a pretty girl. This is congruent with the gain-loss notion that there is a greater drive aroused to please a pretty girl, and thus reward and punishments become magnified when compared with identical rewards and punishments meted out by an unattractive girl. Intimately tied to this is the possibility that subjects confronted with an attractive evaluator exert greater effort in trying to please her. Success may well lead to greater liking for the evaluator because of the increased amount of effort rewarded. (p. 98)

The self-esteem studies and evaluation study presented information that may be related to the problem of the overweight in the following manner: (a) if a poor self-concept is related to the body image, then an overweight person

might be expected to be more receptive to a person offering love and affection than a person with a good self-concept and body image; (b) regardless of the self-esteem level of an individual (overweight persons might have a lower self-esteem level), that individual still desires the most attractive dates; (c) if body weight is involved in classification as attractive or unattractive, the overweight person might be better liked in an evaluation situation where the overweight person has an opportunity to reinforce another; (d) low self-esteem persons (perhaps overweight) cannot tolerate clumsiness in an otherwise competent individual (perhaps normal weight).

As stated at the outset of this paper, inferences have to be made from existing studies. Research literature is not available on the relationship between weight and social variables. Physical attractiveness may involve body weight. Judgments (attractive or unattractive) are made of persons based on their bodies and appearance and these factors may be among the criteria employed in assessing the physical attractiveness of a person. As some of the studies reviewed point out, an individual will attribute personality characteristics to another individual he has never met on the basis of what is observed on a photograph. It is sus-

pected that body weight could be an influencing factor in similar situations.

The Dion et al. (1972) study inspired the idea of testing, in a somewhat similar situation, the attribution of personality characteristics as a function of body weight. The purpose was to test to what extent overweight subjects would attribute the SDI personality characteristics to overweight stimulus persons in slides. The investigation was also designed to test the extent to which overweight subjects attribute the SDI characteristics to normal-weight stimulus persons in slides. The two converse conditions were also investigated: normal-weight subjects rating overweight persons in slides and normal-weight subjects rating other normal-weight persons in slides.

## CHAPTER II

## METHOD

Subjects

A total of 23 subjects participated in this study. There were 17 female and 6 male participants. Five of the females were normal-weight and 12 were overweight. Three of the male subjects were normal-weight and three were overweight. Eleven of the overweight female subjects were from an organized weight control group. The one other female and all of the male subjects were volunteers from a general psychology class at Austin Peay State University. The subjects from the classroom were not offered credit for participating. Classification as overweight or normal-weight was based on the 1959 Metropolitan Life Insurance Company chart for desirable weight.

Apparatus

Participants were administered the 16-item (short form) TSBI (1972). The copies of the TSBI were accompanied by computer cards and special pencils for answering the questions. (A copy of the TSBI can be found in Appendix A.)

Subjects were shown nine slides, taken by the experimenter under the guise that a class would try to guess the occupation of the person by observing the picture. The

slides were shown on a 6' by 4-1/2' screen via a Kodak 350 slide projector. The slides consisted of males and females who were either overweight or normal-weight. There were six slides of overweight persons (three female, three male) and three slides of normal-weight persons (two female, one male).

Two graduate students volunteered to participate in a pilot study. These volunteers were asked to view the slides and rate them on the scales to be used in the experiment proper. The slides were shown again and this time the graduate students were asked to judge the persons in the slides as either overweight or normal-weight. The purpose of the pilot study was twofold: to determine the time needed to view and rate each slide, and also to determine which slides were to be classified as overweight and which as normal-weight.

The experimental subjects were given a list of 14 items which constitute the SDI formulated by Dion et al. (1972). These personality traits were rated on a six-point semantic differential scale (balanced for positive-negative effects). Directions for using the scale were clearly printed at the top of the scale. These directions were verbally explained by the experimenter. (An example of the SDI can be found in Appendix B.) Five additional

personality traits were also presented to the subjects. Instructions for rating these traits were also printed at the top of each scale. These instructions were also verbally explained by the experimenter. (An example is included as Appendix C.)

### Procedure

The experimenter attended two meetings of the organized weight control group. The director of this group had previously obtained permission for the experimenter to attend the meeting. The group also consented to participate as subjects for the study. The group members had been told that a guest speaker (the experimenter) would be present and would conduct a study using them as subjects. The complete story and instructions can be found in Appendix D.

That part of the study involving the organized weight control group had to be divided into two sessions due to a time factor. The subjects in the weight control group completed phase one (the TSBI) at the first meeting and phase two (viewing and rating the slides) at the second meeting. At the beginning of each session, the subjects were given an opportunity to leave if they did not wish to participate in the study. When the subjects had completed the last

phase of the study, they were debriefed as a group as to the true nature of the study. Afterward, the experimenter discussed obesity and answered questions on that topic as if she were, in fact, a guest speaker.

The same basic story and instructions were given to the classroom subjects. This set of subjects was able to complete the entire study in one session. The experimenter was not disguised as a guest speaker, but just introduced herself as a graduate student conducting a study. These subjects were also given the option of leaving or staying to participate. After completion of both phases, the college students were also debriefed.

At various points in the explanation of the procedure involved in the study, the experimenter asked for questions. These questions were answered carefully, in an effort to prevent subjects from picking up clues as to the true nature of the study.

## CHAPTER III

## RESULTS

Texas Social Behavior Inventory

A  $t$ -test for the difference between two independent means was performed comparing the normal-weight and overweight subjects using the data from the TSBI scores. This test was conducted to determine differences in self-esteem on the basis of the weight of the subjects. No significant differences were found,  $t(21) = .45$ ,  $p > .05$ .

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation ( $r$ ) was performed on scores from the TSBI and the SDI to find how these two measures were related. No relationship was found,  $r(21) = .03$ ,  $p > .05$ , which indicated that both measures were independent.

Another correlation was performed on TSBI scores and the mean scores from the SDI trait labeled "physical attractiveness" to ascertain what, if any, relationship existed between self-esteem and perception of physical attractiveness. No relationship was found,  $r(21) = .14$ ,  $p > .05$ .

Social Desirability Index

An analysis of variance for unweighted means (SPF 2.2; Kirk, 1968) was performed on each subject's mean score. The factors involved in this analysis were weight of the subjects

and classification of persons in the slides. No significant differences were found.

### Personality Traits

Analyses of variance (SPF 2.2) for unweighted means were performed on mean slide scores of specific personality traits. These analyses were performed to compare overweight and normal-weight subjects' ratings of the overweight and normal-weight persons in the slides. No significant differences were found for the following traits: physical attractiveness, enthusiasm, friendliness, or trustworthiness.

The personality trait "vanity" was analyzed by an ANOVA using mean slide scores as the dependent variable. The analysis indicated that disregarding the weight of the subject, persons classified as overweight in the slides were perceived as significantly more vain than normal-weight persons in the slides,  $F(1, 21) = 5.70, p < .05$ . This analysis is presented in Table 1.

An analysis of variance (SPF 2.2) was performed on the personality trait "poise." The analysis indicated that disregarding the weight of the subject, persons classified as normal-weight in the slides were perceived as significantly more poised than overweight persons in the slides,  $F(1, 21)$

$= 10.28$ ,  $p < .05$ . The analysis for "poise" is presented in Table 2.

## CHAPTER IV

## DISCUSSION

After the TSBI had been administered and scored, it was found that there were no subjects in the high or low self-esteem categories. The high and low categories were represented by a numerical score on the TSBI as specified by the instructions for scoring and analyzing the TSBI. All of the subjects fell into the average self-esteem level. This was surprising to the experimenter as it had been expected that the overweight subjects would be prone to fall into the low self-esteem category. As noted previously, the majority (11) of the overweight subjects came from the organized weight control group. One might speculate that the group effort to lose and control weight may have some effect on the self-esteem of the members.

Dion et al. (1972) had predicted that physically attractive stimulus persons, male and female, would be perceived as possessing more socially desirable personality characteristics than unattractive stimulus persons. If body weight is related to physical attractiveness, and one would think that it is, this study did not support the prediction of Dion et al. (1972). Normal-weight stimulus persons in this study were not perceived as possessing more socially

desirable personalities overall than overweight stimulus persons.

Another unusual finding in this study was that the overweight stimulus persons in the slides were perceived as significantly more vain than the normal-weight stimulus persons. The only logical explanation the experimenter has at this time is that the subjects in this study may have interpreted that overweight persons posing for the photographs in the first place committed an act of vanity. Therefore, when the overweight stimulus persons appeared in the slides, the subjects may have thought them vain. What the subjects did not know, of course, was that the experimenter had asked the stimulus persons to pose for a picture under the guise that she was going to have a class guess the person's occupation by observing the picture.

In addition, the overweight subjects rated all slides (whether of normal-weight or overweight persons) as less poised than did normal-weight subjects. This relationship was statistically non-significant,  $F(1, 21) = 4.32$ ,  $p < .06$ , but of sufficient interest to be discussed. (Table 2 includes this analysis.) No definite explanation is available for this finding, but a speculative explanation might be projection. If the overweight subjects did feel that

they lacked in poise, they might have projected their own lack of poise (or the feeling of a lack of poise) onto the stimulus persons in the slides. On the other hand, the normal-weight subjects might not have felt that they lacked in poise and were in turn more generous to those persons viewed in the slides. Again, this explanation is pure speculation since the subjects' perception of their own poise was not measured.

There are many weaknesses in this study that might be strengthened to affect the results. It is most difficult to obtain overweight volunteers to participate in studies. Perhaps part of the difficulty lies in getting a person to admit to himself-herself that they do have a weight problem and are in fact overweight. The next step is getting that person to volunteer for a study. This experimenter tried unsuccessfully to recruit volunteers from the campus community. When this effort failed, the experimenter went to the organized weight control group. This set of subjects from a specific population may have affected the results of this study. As noted before, none of the subjects from this weight-control group fell into the low self-esteem category. This may be due in part to positive feelings about themselves as a result of having taken

concrete steps toward dealing with the weight problem.

If some of the subjects had fallen into either the low or high self-esteem categories, correlations might have been made between level of self-esteem and attribution of the personality characteristics. No significant differences were found between the two weight groups (overweight and normal-weight) on the TSBI (self-esteem measure). Perhaps a more sensitive measure of self-esteem might have been used, could one have been found. Another measure might have revealed more subtle differences in the levels of self-esteem.

In summary, some suggestions for improving this study are: (a) a greater number of subjects, preferably obese and from the general population, (b) a number of subjects that fall into the low or high self-esteem category, and (c) a more sensitive measure of self-esteem. Another suggestion would be an improvement in the quality of the slides shown to the subjects. These slides need to be clear, have a neutral background, and contain stimulus persons who are definitely either obese or normal-weight (no ambiguous stimulus persons).

It is felt that with the above mentioned changes, more significant results might be found. As most of the research

literature is concerned with the dietary aspects of the obese problem, more research is needed on the social aspects of obesity. If body weight is involved in person perception, impression formation, physical attractiveness, evaluation of a person, and discrimination, then it is an area that needs research badly. At this point in time researchers seem to show a reluctance to pursue the social side of obesity. Perhaps there is a hesitation to admit that people do form impressions and opinions of others on the basis of their body weight. Admitting the above may be the first step to researching an area that could be beneficial, not only to obese persons but to those who do not have a weight problem, as understanding may come with the knowledge gained from research.

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## Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Many studies dealing with physical attractiveness were omitted because they simply were not applicable to the present research problem. In the present study, the time element was limited, and the degree of social interaction between subjects was almost nil. Examples of omitted studies are: Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968), "The effects of physical attractiveness, sex, and attitude similarity on interpersonal attraction." The Byrne et al. (1968) study was omitted because subjects in the present study did not have an opportunity to express aloud attitudes about any of the stimulus persons viewed in the present experiment. Another example is an article by Dittes (1959) entitled, "Attractiveness of group as function of self-esteem and acceptance by group." The Dittes (1959) study was not considered as pertinent because the subjects used in the present study had already accepted themselves as a group and the stimulus persons were only known through the slides. Another example of omitted material is an article by Brislin and Lewis (1968), "Dating and physical attractiveness." Dating was not involved in the present experimental situation. Murstein's (1972) "Physical attractiveness and marital choice" was also omitted inasmuch as marital choice

was also not a facet of the present study.

Questionnaire

1. I would describe myself as socially unskilled.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
2. I frequently find it difficult to defend my point of view when confronted with the opinions of others.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
3. I would be willing to describe myself as a pretty "strong" personality.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
4. When I work on a committee I like to take charge of things.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
5. I usually expect to succeed in the things I do.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
6. I feel comfortable approaching someone in a position of authority over me.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
7. I enjoy being around other people, and seek out social encounters frequently.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
8. I feel confident of my social behavior.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
9. I feel I can confidently approach and deal with anyone I meet.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
10. I would describe myself as happy.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
11. I enjoy being in front of large audiences.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
12. When I meet a stranger, I often think that he is better than I am.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
13. It is hard for me to start a conversation with strangers.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
14. People seem naturally to turn to me when decisions have to be made.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
15. I feel secure in social situations.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me
16. I like to exert my influence over other people.  

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Not at all	Not	Slightly	Fairly	Very much
character-	very			character-
istic of me				istic of me

# SOCIAL DESIRABILITY INDEX

46

The first 14 traits will be rated with a scale such as the one below. Maturity will be used as the example trait.

Example:

mature / / / / / / / immature

There are six spaces on the horizontal line between mature and immature. If you perceive the person to be relatively mature, you would mark an "X" in a space toward the left end of the scale. If you perceive a person to be relatively immature, you would mark an "X" toward the right end of the scale. And if you perceive a person to be average in maturity, you would mark an "X" toward the middle of the scale. Please place your "X" in the space between the lines.  
Remember, this is no time to be tactful. I am interested in your HONEST perceptions of these slides.

poised / / / / / / / awkward

strong / / / / / / / weak

boring / / / / / / / interesting

self-assertive / / / / / / / submissive

unsociable / / / / / / / sociable

independent / / / / / / / dependent

cold / / / / / / / warm

artificial / / / / / / / genuine

kind / / / / / / / cruel

exciting / / / / / / / dull

sexually warm / / / / / / / sexually cold

insincere / / / / / / / sincere

sensitive / / / / / / / insensitive

modest / / / / / / / vain

## FIVE ADDITIONAL PERSONALITY TRAITS

The last five traits will be rated in a different manner from the preceding set of traits. Below is an example.

## SOPHISTICATION

- \_\_\_\_\_ very sophisticated
- \_\_\_\_\_ sophisticated
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in sophistication
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in sophistication
- \_\_\_\_\_ unsophisticated
- \_\_\_\_\_ very unsophisticated

You are to put an "X" on the line beside the description you feel best fits the person as you perceive him/her.

## FRIENDLINESS

- \_\_\_\_\_ very friendly
- \_\_\_\_\_ friendly
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in friendliness
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in friendliness
- \_\_\_\_\_ unfriendly
- \_\_\_\_\_ very unfriendly

## ENTHUSIASM

- \_\_\_\_\_ very enthusiastic
- \_\_\_\_\_ enthusiastic
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in enthusiasm
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in enthusiasm
- \_\_\_\_\_ unenthusiastic
- \_\_\_\_\_ very unenthusiastic

## PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

- \_\_\_\_\_ very attractive
- \_\_\_\_\_ attractive
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in attractiveness
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in attractiveness
- \_\_\_\_\_ unattractive
- \_\_\_\_\_ very unattractive

## SOCIAL POISE

- \_\_\_\_\_ very socially poised
- \_\_\_\_\_ socially poised
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in social poise
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in social poise
- \_\_\_\_\_ socially unpoised
- \_\_\_\_\_ very socially unpoised

## TRUSTWORTHINESS

- \_\_\_\_\_ very trustworthy
- \_\_\_\_\_ trustworthy
- \_\_\_\_\_ just above average in trustworthiness
- \_\_\_\_\_ just below average in trustworthiness
- \_\_\_\_\_ untrustworthy
- \_\_\_\_\_ very untrustworthy

## APPENDIX D

## INSTRUCTIONS

## WEIGHT CONTROL GROUP

"Since you have graciously consented to participate in a study I am conducting, I suggest we proceed with the first phase of the study. As we are running short of time tonight, I also ask your permission to return in two weeks and conclude with phase two of the study. If there is anyone who does not wish to participate in the study, you may leave now or at any time during the study.

"I would like to explain what I will be doing and why. This is a study in person perception. While psychological studies have shown that people form detailed impressions of others on the basis of a few cues, the extent to which these impressions are correct is not known at this time. The purpose of this study is to correlate your impressions with what is actually known about those persons you will see in slides. Any questions so far?

"Phase one will consist of a written measure of person perception. I will now give you a copy of the person perception measure and accompanying computer cards on which to put your answers. (The experimenter then distributed the forms of the TSBI, along with computer cards and special

"Please turn your computer cards over and put your sex, age, height, and weight. (Weight was needed for the purpose of classification and it was hoped an accurate number of pounds would be recorded.) You have been given special pencils with which to mark these cards. Please look at your computer cards. I would like all of you to darken the bubble in the left-hand margin of the card. Note that there are 16 questions on the long sheet you have been given. There are 16 answer spaces on your computer card. Your choices are listed from one to five downward on the card. (The experimenter pointed to the first question as an example.) Please darken the bubble completely.

"You will be given 15 minutes to complete this phase of the study. Please keep your papers when you have finished and they will be collected. Any questions?

At the end of the two weeks, the experimenter returned to the group. The experimenter was reintroduced and addressed the group as before.

"If you will remember, the last time I was here we were conducting a study in person perception. Tonight we will conclude that study. In this phase of the study, you will be asked to view slides and rate them on the traits

you now have before you. (The experimenter had passed out the set of papers which had the personality traits on them. These papers had the subjects' identifying number on them.)

"Please allow me to explain the scale you will be using. For the first 14 traits you will be using an opposites scale. For example, mature/immature. Look on your sheet and you will see this example set out for you. There are six sections on the horizontal line between mature and immature. If you judge the person to be moderately mature, you would make an "X" between the two vertical lines that are closest to the middle of the entire horizontal line. Look at the example on your paper. Please mark between the short vertical lines. Any questions about this?

"For the last five traits, the scale is slightly different. Please keep your papers when you have finished and they will be collected. To prevent distractions, please hold the rest of your questions until we have finished. Also remember that this is no time to be tactful. I am interested in your HONEST perceptions of those you are about to see."

APPENDIX E  
INSTRUCTIONS  
CLASSROOM GROUP

"My name is Connie Wyse, and I am a graduate student in psychology. I have been given permission by your instructor to ask for volunteers to participate in a study I am conducting. If any of you are not interested and do not wish to participate, you may leave now.

"I would like to explain what I will be doing and why. This is a study in person perception. While psychological studies have shown that people form detailed impressions of others on the basis of a few cues, the extent of which these impressions are correct is not known at this time. The purpose of this study is to correlate your impressions with what is actually known about those persons you will see in slides. Any questions so far?

"Phase one will consist of a written measure of person perception. I will now give you a copy of the person perception measure and accompanying computer cards on which to put your answers. (The experimenter then distributed the forms of the TSBI, along with computer cards and special pencils.)

"Please turn your computer cards over and put your sex,

age, height, and weight. (Weight was needed for the purpose of classification and it was hoped that an accurate number of pounds would be recorded.) You have been given special pencils with which to mark these cards. Please look at your computer cards. I would like all of you to darken the bubble in the left-hand margin of the card. Note that there are 16 questions on the long sheet you have been given. There are 16 answer spaces on your computer card. Your choices are listed from one to five downward on the card. (The experimenter pointed to the first question as an example.) Please darken the bubble completely.

"You will be given 15 minutes to complete this phase of the study. Please keep your papers when you have finished and they will be collected. Any questions?

When the subjects had completed phase one of the study, the experimenter collected the papers. The subjects were handed another set of materials and told that phase two of the study was about to begin.

"In this phase of the study, you will be asked to view slides and rate them on the traits you now have before you. Please allow me to explain the scale you will be using. For the first 14 traits you will be using an opposites scale. For example, mature/immature. Look on your sheet

and you will see this example set out for you. There are six sections on the horizontal line between mature and immature. If you judge the person to be moderately mature, you would make an "X" between the two vertical lines that are closest to the middle of the entire horizontal line. Look at the example on your paper. Please mark between the short vertical lines. Any questions about this?

"For the last five traits, the scale is slightly different. Please look at the example on your paper. The trait is sophistication. Your scale is as follows: very sophisticated, sophisticated, just about average in sophistication, just below average in sophistication, unsophisticated, and very unsophisticated. You are to make your judgment and put an "X" on the small line beside your choice. Any questions? You will have three minutes to view each slide and mark the rating scale.

"Please keep your papers when you have finished and they will be collected. To prevent distractions, please hold the rest of your questions until we have finished. Also remember that this is no time to be tactful. I am interested in your HONEST perceptions of those you are about to see."

Table 1

Analysis of Variance: Mean Slide Scores  
For Trait Labeled "Vanity"

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
A (subjects)	.63	1	.63	.94
Subj. w. groups	14.06	21	.67	
B (slides)	2.11	1	2.11	5.70*
AB	.32	1	.32	.86
B x subj. w. groups	7.74	21	.37	

\* $p < .05$

Table 2  
 Analysis of Variance: Mean Slide Scores  
 For Trait Labeled "Poise"

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
A (subjects)	3.37	1	3.37	4.32
Subj. w. groups	16.47	21	.78	
B (slides)	4.42	1	4.42	10.28*
AB	.84	1	.84	1.95
B x subj. w. groups	9.09	21	.43	

\* $p < .05$