



Effects of Weight, Lifestyle, and Gender on Attractiveness, Healthiness, and Friendliness

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Background

According to Cash & Pruzinsky (1990, as cited in Rieves & Cash, 1996) body image is defined as our perception/views about our own bodies, as well as our appearance. In recent years, there has been an increase in negative body image/dissatisfaction among college women and men (Rieves & Cash, 1996). A number of studies have been conducted concerning body image in an attempt to identify the factors that cause a negative self perception. Critics agree that there is a strong correlation between peers, media, environment, lifestyle, and a negative view of our body. The current study will focus on the following:

- ✓ Attractiveness; Tovee and Cornelius (2001) found that males tend to be attracted to women who have reached reproductive potential with regard to body type.
- ✓ Healthiness; can be defined taking care of one's body by being cautious about what is eaten and being involved in some type of regular exercise.
- ✓ Friendliness; describes a person who is approachable and easy going around others. Wilson and Gerner (2005) found that adolescent males and females both feel pressure to conform to the ideal body type.

Design and Hypotheses

A 3 (Lifestyle) x 2 (Weight) x 2 (Participant Gender) between design was used to determine the influences of weight, and participant gender. The three dependent variables were perceived attractiveness, healthiness, and friendliness of a character in the scenarios.

The first independent variable, lifestyle was manipulated in all the scenarios, which had three levels: active (a person who is involved in physical activities), average (a person who is involved in regular activities/daily routine), and stagnant (a person who is involved in very little/no daily activities).

The second independent variable, weight, had two levels which was thin and heavy as indicated by line drawings.

The third independent variable, participant gender, had two levels which was female and male.

In accordance with Tovee and Cornelissen (2001), I predicted with regard to attractiveness, men would lean more toward the ideal/thinner body type, more so than women. With regard to friendliness, I predicted women would lean more toward the body type that compliments their own body type when it comes to friendships (Wilson & Gerner, 2001). In addition, with regard to healthiness I predicted that both females and males would rate the thin body type with an increase in muscle definition as healthier than the other two lifestyle conditions (Russell & Cox, 2003).

Method

Participants

One hundred sixty-one participants were used in the current experiment. The participants ages ranged from 18 to 76 (mean age=20 and median age=19). The participants were acquired from Sociology classes and face-to-face.

Materials and Procedure

The study was performed on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University. Prior to the experiment I separated the survey into two sections: males and females. Participants were given one of the six different scenarios describing a woman's lifestyle corresponding figures varied by indicated muscle tone and posture. The line drawings, modified from those created by Dr. Singh (1993, as cited in Tassinari & Hansen, 1998) were used as an example of the body types. For each scenario the participants rated the woman on attractiveness, healthiness, and friendliness. The answer to the lifestyle scenarios were reported on a 5 pt-Likert scale with (1) indicating not at all and (5) indicating absolutely. The study took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

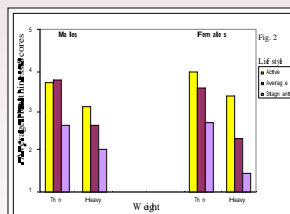
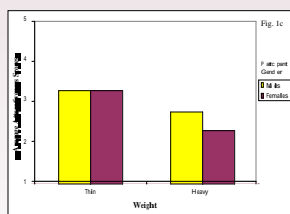
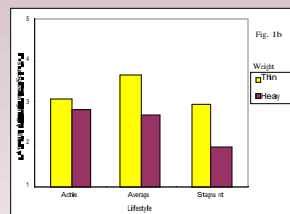
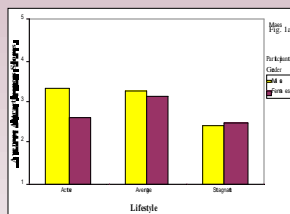


Results

For each of the three dependent variables: attractiveness, healthiness, and friendliness a 3 (lifestyle) x 2 (weight) x 2 (participant gender) between ANOVA was used to determine the influence of lifestyle, weight, and participant gender. Each participant's response to one question comprised each the dependent variable (N=161). A correlation was performed to investigate possible covariates; however there were no significant correlations for age, sex, and classification.

There were three significant main effects; however modified by three significant two-way interactions. There was a significant interaction between lifestyle and weight. Refer to Figure 1a. There was a significant interaction between lifestyle and participant gender. With regard to lifestyle and participant gender, males and females responses were similar when determining attractiveness. Refer to Figure 1b. Lastly, there was a significant interaction between weight and participant gender. With regard to weight and participant gender, males and females rated the thin body type as more attractive than the heavy body type.

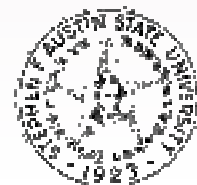
When analyzing for perceived healthiness, there were significant main effect for lifestyle and weight. Participants reported the thin body type (M=3.4), as healthier than the heavy body type (M=2.5), however, there was no main effect for participant gender nor were there any significant interactions. Refer to Figures 2.



Discussion

As predicted, males and females rated the thin (active/average) body type, which had a higher muscle definition and better posture were believed to be healthier than the stagnant thin, active heavy, average heavy, and stagnant heavy combinations. Russell and Cox (2003) found that women and men who showed an increase in muscle tone and posture were seen as being healthier. Contrary to prediction, both males and females, not just males, rated the thin body type as more attractive than the heavy body type. Tovee and Cornelissen (2001) found that males tended to perceive a thin woman as being more attractive than an average body type. Unlike what was predicted, no influence on any of the conditions regarding to friendliness. This could have been attributed to the participants not understanding the question with regard to friendliness, which could have resulted insufficient data.

In our society, there is a heavy emphasis on obtaining the perfect body. Weiner (2006) reported that 80% of women around the world are dissatisfied with their body. This is tragic to see, that even with the development of women in our society, they are still struggling not being good enough. As a result, the increase of maladaptive behaviors, negative body image, and eating disorders will continue to escalate. By doing this experiment I want people to realize how unrealistic and judgmental we can be based on appearance. We need to understand that there is more to a person, than just appearance.



References

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