

Running Head: Height and Perception

The Role of Height, Gender and Self-Awareness in Character Perception: Who Benefits?

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### Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of gender, height, and awareness of height on person perception. Participants (39 male, 37 female) rated male and female silhouettes of short, average and tall height on seven personality dimensions: social attractiveness, professional success, personal adjustment, athleticism, masculinity, femininity and physical attractiveness. Overall, tall and average targets were rated significantly higher than short targets on all dimensions except for femininity, in which short targets were rated significantly higher. There was no main effect for awareness of height on personality ratings, but short and tall participants reported significantly higher height awareness than average height participants. The findings provided further support for the liabilities of being short and imply a need to further investigate the stereotypes of height.

### The Role of Height, Gender and Self-Awareness in Character Perception: Who Benefits?

Height has long been intricately embedded into society and language. We “look up” to those we admire, while “looking down” upon those who are shameful. The words “big” and “tall” are associated with greatness, while small is associated with lacking in ability, intellect or significance, such as “small-minded” (Lindeman, 1999). Psychologists discuss the possible evolutionary benefits of being tall. As Lindeman (1999) states, “the height effect is an ancient remainder which has served as an adaptive function throughout our evolutionary history” (p. 127). Height is a commanding physical feature; it communicates power and dominance, which can benefit someone – in particular a male – in several ways. First, greater height gives one a physical advantage when dealing with enemies. Women may have chosen taller males because of greater protection against predators, and in hopes of passing on a taller gene pool to her offspring (Sadalla, Kenrick & Vershure, 1987).

In today’s world, height stereotypes and judgments still persist. Yet, within psychology, there is a prevailing attitude that height is trivial or a non-issue (Judge & Cable, 2004). However, more researchers are starting to study height and its influence – both good and bad – in society. As Judge and Cable (2004) stated, “the topic of physical height deserves equal footing with other types of physical attributes that garner serious scholarly attention, such as attractiveness and weight” (p. 437).

In the past several decades, height has typically been studied in relation to attraction, personality and occupation. In regards to attraction, taller men are consistently rated as more attractive than shorter men (Shepard & Strathman, 1989; Melamed, 1992, Jackson and Ervin, 1994). Tall men go on dates more frequently and a majority of women prefer dating a man taller than themselves (Shepard & Strathman, 1989). The relation between height and attraction in

women is somewhat varied. While some researchers have found subjects rating shorter women as more attractive (Shepard & Strathman, 1989), others have either failed to find a difference (Melamed, 1994) or found subjects rating taller women as more attractive (Jackson & Ervin, 1994).

Additionally, height has been related to either personality itself or perceptions of one's personality. Shorter men have been found to be more anxious and less self-confident (Melamed, 1994). Shorter cops have also been found to be more aggressive, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "Napoleon complex" in psychology (Willoughby & Blount, 1985). In another study, Melamed (1992) found that subjects rated taller male targets as more dominant and independent. However, these stereotypes are not restricted to males. When asked to rate short or tall targets in a picture, tall women were rated as more intelligent, affluent, assertive and ambitious than shorter women. Males rated shorter females are more considerate. Average and tall males tend to be perceived as popular, athletic, well-adjusted and masculine than those of short stature (Jackson and Ervin, 1994).

Height and perceptions of height in the workplace have also been studied. In an early study on perceptions of height, Wilson (1968) found that height estimates of targets rose as the ascribed academic status (student, demonstrator, lecturer, senior lecturer and professor) of that person rose. Tall men and women are perceived to be more professionally successful than shorter men and women (Jackson & Ervin, 1994). There is some evidence that this might actually be the case – that height correlates with professional status and success in the real world. For example, for their age and gender, departmental chairpersons were found to be over an inch taller than assistant professors (Hensley, 1993). A large study done by Judge and Cable (2004) found that height was positively related to income, even after controlling for age, sex, and

weight. Height was also related more to subjective performance than objective performance, indicating that the perceptions of height may not accurately reflect that person's actual occupational abilities.

Jackson and Ervin (1994) examined the role of height stereotypes by merging the areas of attraction, personality and occupation into one study. After receiving a brief written description of the person, subjects rated male and female targets of short, average and tall height. Targets were rated on seven dimensions: social attractiveness, professional status, personal adjustment, athletic orientation, masculinity, femininity and physical attractiveness. Short male targets were rated significantly lower on all dimensions but femininity, while average and tall did not differ from one another. Additionally, short female targets were rated significantly lower on professional status and physical attraction, though average and tall female targets did not differ from one another. In other words, short targets were rated lower while tall targets were rated the same as average targets. Based on their findings, Jackson and Ervin (1994) concluded that "being short is more of a liability than being tall is an asset" (p. 442).

While rating the heights of others has gained more momentum in recent years, few studies have actively examined any role that the participant's *own* height may have stereotypes of height. However, Jackson and Ervin (1994) did look at this in their study mentioned above. While no overall effect was found, Jackson and Ervin found taller men rated tall female targets more positively on social attractiveness and athleticism than average or short participants. Taller women perceived taller female targets as more well-adjusted and athletic.

The present study builds off of Jackson and Ervin's (1994) research by examining the liabilities of being short. Participants rated targets of short, average and tall height on various personality traits. A shorter, modified version of Jackson and Ervin's (1994) Person Perception

Questionnaire (PPQ) was designed and used. Also, subjects received a visual figure in addition to written descriptions of the target, in attempt to make height more salient and ecologically valid. In the real world, people come to know others' height more often by *seeing* the person, not just reading about him or her. Few studies, if any, have examined the relationship between height satisfaction/awareness on perceptions of others. Therefore, height satisfaction and awareness scales were added to the end of the questionnaire. The researcher was interested in studying how awareness of one's own height may affect how they perceive others of the same or different height. Additionally, the researcher wanted to study how one's satisfaction with his or her own height affects how he or she perceives others of the same or different height.

It was predicted that, similar to Jackson and Ervin, short targets would be rated significantly lower than both average and tall targets on all dimensions but femininity, in which tall targets would be rated significantly lower than average and short targets. The researcher felt that people who are more aware of their height may then be more aware of height stereotypes in general and therefore try to resist adhering to these stereotypes. Therefore, it was also predicted that those who reported higher height awareness would rate targets more similarly, regardless of height. It has been shown that unattractive participants are less likely to attribute "halo effect" beauty stereotypes to physically attractive targets. Therefore, in the realm of height, it was also predicted that short targets – the least beneficial group in relation to height – would not show height stereotypes, and would rate targets more similarly, regardless of height.

It was also predicted that height satisfaction would be positively related to height. Finally, it was predicted that height would interact with awareness such that the tallest and shortest participants would rate the higher awareness than participants of average height.

## Method

### *Participants*

Subjects were 76 undergraduate students (39 male, 37 female) enrolled in a general psychology course at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. Data from six participants were excluded due failure to complete critical items in the packet. All participants signed a consent form and volunteered to sign up in exchange for extra credit. The average height was 70.6 inches for male participants and 65.2 inches for female participants, which falls within an inch or two of the national average.

### *Design*

A 2 (condition) x 3 (participant height) x 3 (target height) x 2 (participant gender) x 2 (target gender) mixed design was used. Condition, participant height, and participant gender were between-groups factors. Target height and target gender were within-groups factors. Six different packets were designed to randomize target height and gender. Subsequent analyses showed no significant differences between the packet groups.

### *Measures*

All participants completed a packet which comprised of six drawings, each followed by a Character Perception Scale (CPS). The black-and-white drawings depicted three male or female silhouettes standing next to each other. Silhouettes were used to control other variables such as facial attractiveness or clothing style. Figures were arranged so that there was one short, average and tall person – all of the same sex – in each drawing. The levels of target height for males were 5'4", 5'10" and 6'4"; for female targets, they were 4'10", 5'4" and 5'10". These heights were chosen based on Jackson and Ervin's study and reflect national averages for short, average, and tall, respectively.

| INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE |

A brief description of the person in the center was given below each drawing:

John/Jane is the man/woman in the center. He/she is home for the day and is walking into his/her house with a couple of friends. John/Jane is \_\_\_\_\_ tall and is of average weight for his/her height.

Following the drawing, the next page stated:

The items below inquire about the person you just saw. Based on the information given, rate how well the following adjectives describe that person.

The CPS, designed by the researcher, was a modified scale with items taken from Jackson and Ervin's Person Perception Questionnaire (1994) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The CPS consisted of 17 personality traits based on a 7-point bipolar scale and were categorized into seven main domains: social attractiveness (popular, socially successful), professional status (professionally successful, earns above average at job, has high status job), personal adjustment (well-adjusted, secure), athletic orientation (athletic, plays sports), masculinity (independent, assertive, dominant), femininity (understanding, warm, compassionate), and single item for physical attractiveness.

The last page of the CPS consisted of a brief questionnaire asking for the participant's height, and what height he or she considered to be average, short and tall for males and females. Three 5-point Likert scales were used to assess the participant's satisfaction with his or her own height, and awareness of his or her height on both a daily basis and today. This last item was used as a manipulation check for the experimental condition.

### *Procedure*



Up to five participants were tested per time slot. Time slots were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. In the experimental group – also referred to as the height group (HG) – participants walked in and were asked to be seated. After signing the consent forms, they were told that the researcher was studying people’s perceptions of others when given various or limited information about that person. They were told that various physical and mental attributes were being studied, and that for that particular day, their height was going to be measured. Subjects were asked to line up next to the poster on the wall. The poster was marked for every half inch up to 6’9.” The researcher marked their height with a black marker by measuring right above their head.

After being measured, the participants sat back down and the researcher handed out the Character Perception Scale packet. A brief description of the packet was given. In addition, the researcher briefly reviewed the concept of bipolar scales to avoid any confusion and ensure that participants’ ratings reflected their true feelings about that trait for that particular target. Participants then completed the CPS and questionnaire at the end.

The control group did the same procedure as the experimental group, except their heights were not measured and recorded at the beginning of the study.

## Results

*Target Height.* A repeated-measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test the ratings of targets as a function of their height. As predicted, there was a main effect for height on masculinity ( $F(2, 130) = 42.79, p < .001$ ), personal adjustment ( $F(2, 130) = 42.04, p < .001$ ), athletic orientation ( $F(2, 130) = 38.45, p < .001$ ), physical attractiveness ( $F(2, 130) = 31.17, p < .001$ ), social attractiveness ( $F(2, 130) = 26.90, p < .001$ ), professional status ( $F(2, 130) = 12.45, p < .001$ ), and femininity ( $F(2, 130) = 7.17, p < .01$ ). Short targets were rated significantly

lower than both average tall targets on all dimensions but femininity, with average and tall targets not differing significantly from one another. On the dimension of femininity, tall subjects were rated significantly lower than both average and short targets, with average and short targets not differing significantly from one another.

| INSERT TABLE 1 HERE |

*Target Gender.* A repeated measured multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed a main effect for target gender on athletic orientation,  $F(1, 65) = 22.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .26$ , masculinity,  $F(1, 65) = 5.79, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$ , and physical attractiveness,  $F(1, 65) = 12.11, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$ . Male targets were rated as more athletic ( $M = 4.92, SD = .10$ ) and masculine ( $M = 4.54, SD = .08$ ) than female targets ( $M = 4.49, SD = .09$  and  $M = 4.35, SD = .06$ , respectively). Female targets were perceived as more physically attractive ( $M = 4.87, SD = .09$ ) than male targets ( $M = 4.54, SD = .08$ ).

*Interactions.* On the dimension of social attractiveness, an interaction (Target Height X Target Gender) was found ( $F(2, 130) = 3.58, p < .05$ ). As Figure 2 shows, for male targets, the tall target was perceived as the most socially attractive ( $M = 5.52, SD = .11$ ), while the average female target was perceived as the most socially attractive ( $M = 5.44, SD = .10$ ).

| INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE |

Another interaction (Target Height X Target Gender) was found for physical attractiveness,  $F(2, 130) = 3.31, p < .05$ . Short males were rated lower ( $M = 3.70, SD = .13$ ) than short females ( $M = 4.34, SD = .15$ ), while average and tall targets did not differ from each other.

*Participant Height.* Heights of the participants were grouped into three categories for each gender. For women, height measurements of 58-63”, 64-67,” and 68-72” were labeled short, average, and tall, respectively. For men, height measurements of 60-68”, 69-72”, and 73-80” were labeled as short, average and tall.

A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed an interaction (Participant Height X Target Height) for social attractiveness,  $F(4,66) = 2.41, p = .06, \eta^2 = .07$ . As shown in Figure 3, tall participants’ ratings did not vary between target height, while short and average participants’ ratings did.

| INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE |

| INSERT TABLE 2 HERE |

There were no significant differences in target ratings between short, tall and average height participants on the dimensions of professional status,  $F(4, 66) = 0.37, p > .05, \eta^2 = .01$ , personal adjustment,  $F(4, 66) = .19, p > .05, \eta^2 = .01$ , athletic orientation,  $F(4, 66) = .50, p > .05, \eta^2 = .02$ , masculinity,  $F(4, 66) = .46, p > .05, \eta^2 = .01$ , femininity,  $F(4, 66) = .36, p > .05, \eta^2 = .03$ , and physical attractiveness,  $F(4,66) = 1.20, p > .05, \eta^2 = .04$ .

*Height Awareness.* A between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no significant effect of condition on awareness ratings. Those in the control condition and the height condition did not vary in their ratings of awareness for either today or on a daily basis. For this reason, awareness levels were not assessed in relation to condition group. Instead, condition groups were collapsed and were then categorized into low (1-2), average (3) and high (4-5) awareness levels, based on their rating from the 5-pt. Likert scale.

A between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed an interaction (Participant Height X Daily Awareness). Short participants rated the highest level of awareness of their

height on a daily basis ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), with tall participants rating second highest ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ). Participants of average height rated the lowest on daily awareness ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ).

ANOVA revealed an interaction (Awareness Group X Target Height) on the dimension of femininity on target ratings,  $F(4, 66) = 2.89$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ . Those in the lowest awareness group reported the greatest variability between short, average and tall targets.

| INSERT TABLE 3 HERE |

There was also a marginal interaction (Awareness Group X Target Height) on the dimension social attractiveness,  $F(4, 66) = 2.33$ ,  $p < .10$  ( $p = .07$ ),  $\eta^2 = .07$ . Those in the highest awareness group displayed the greatest variability between ratings of short, average and tall subjects. Those in the lowest awareness group reported the least amount of variability between ratings of short, average and tall subjects.

| INSERT TABLE 4 HERE |

There was no interaction between level of awareness and target ratings for professional status,  $F(4, 66) = .37$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ; personal adjustment,  $F(4, 66) = .44$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ ; athletic orientation,  $F(4, 66) = 2.00$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ ; masculinity,  $F(4, 66) = .51$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ ; or physical attractiveness,  $F(4, 66) = 2.89$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ .

*Height Satisfaction.* Although ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of height on height satisfaction,  $F(2, 66) = 1.96$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ , there was a trend in that direction. Short participants rated the lowest on height satisfaction ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), then average height ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = .81$ ), then tall participants ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = .88$ ).

## Discussion

The results show that the target's height influenced participants' ratings of him or her. Participants consistently rated short targets lower than average or tall targets on six of the seven dimensions, while rating average and tall targets the same. This is consistent with the researcher's hypothesis and with previous studies done on the stereotypes of height (Jackson & Ervin, 1994). This finding was quite robust, and provides important, additional support to the liabilities of being short. Contrary to previous studies showing stronger height stereotypes for males than females (Melamed, 1994; Jackson & Ervin, 1994; Judge & Cable, 2004), the present study shows equally strong height stereotypes for both men and women.

Contrary to the researcher's hypothesis, participant height did not influence target ratings except on social attractiveness, in which tall participants did not show any variability between target height and target ratings. These mixed results are consistent with Jackson and Ervin (1994), who found some effects for participant height on ratings, but failed to find any overarching, universal effect.

Participants who reported higher height awareness did not rate targets more similarly than those with low or average height awareness, except in the dimension of femininity, in which participants with the highest height awareness showed the least amount of variability in ratings of short, average, and tall targets.

Consistent with the researcher's hypothesis, the shortest and tallest participants reported the highest height awareness. Although not a significant finding, there was a trend for height and height satisfaction, with satisfaction increasing as height of the participant increases. In general, male were rated as more athletic, masculine and well-adjusted than female targets.

The present study attempted to look at characteristics of not only the target, but the rater and how it influences perception. Height is a complex physical trait that can have different

factors interacting with it. It is important to look at one's own height, as well as satisfaction and awareness of one's height, in order to better understand what roles they play in perceiving other's based on their height.

The experimental (height) group did not show higher ratings of awareness of their height. This could be because the number of subjects per time slot was unable to be controlled. While subjects signed up in groups of five, not all subjects would always show up. Therefore, some participants' heights were measured in front of four other people, while others may have been measured in front of only one, two or three other people. This could be one of the possible reasons that the salience of the experimental condition may not have been strong enough. In addition, participants – in particular those in the experimental condition – may have been susceptible to demand characteristics. If the participants knew that height stereotypes were being tested, they may have rated targets according to societal stereotypes of height.

Previous findings have shown that people's stereotyped perceptions of others fade with time. In other words, as one gets to know the person better, stereotypical traits (physical attraction, height, etc.) become less important to the overall perception of that person. (Hensley & Angoli, 1980). However, the present findings were based on *initial* reactions to targets. Very little information was given besides the target's height, yet it significantly influenced the participant's perceptions of that target. This provides important practical implications, particularly for situations in which first impressions are critical. When being interviewed for a job, first impressions are crucial, and the results show that shorter people may be negatively judged by their stature. First impressions are also important for job promotions in which the company is large and therefore allows for little personal connection or relationship between the applicant and the person hiring him or her. Informally, first impressions are important in dating.

Shorter dates may be negatively judged by his or her date and therefore cast aside before a more comprehensive, accurate assessment of their personality and character can be made.

The present study provides further support for the prevalence of height stereotypes, and shows that future research should give the topic the same scientific and scholarly attention that weight and physical attractiveness have received. To increase ecological validity, researchers should continue laboratory research but also extend more research to height in more real-life situations, such as observational studies. Future research should examine the validity or accuracy of these stereotypes. In particular, the mechanisms behind the stereotypes of height should be studied. The interplay of social esteem, self-esteem, the confirmation bias and self-fulfilling prophecy might critically influence not only perceptions of height, but also the actual personality of those of various heights.

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Table 1

*Mean Ratings of Male and Female Targets As a Function of Their Height*

Dimensions (M, SD)	$\eta^2$	Height of Target		
		Short	Average	Tall
Social Attractiveness	0.31			
Male Target		4.48	5.32	5.52
		1.16	0.99	0.92
Female Target		4.58	5.45	5.22
		1.27	0.85	1.03
Professional Status	0.16			
Male Target		4.22	4.62	4.72
		0.91	0.77	1.01
Female Target		4.22	4.59	4.77
		1.07	0.83	0.91
Personal Adjustment	0.39			
Male Target		4.16	5.06	5.17
		0.94	0.86	0.92
Female Target		4.04	5.01	4.82
		1.01	0.90	0.90

Athletic Orientation	0.37			
Male Target		4.20	5.12	5.44
		1.15	1.02	1.47
Female Target		3.80	4.57	5.12
		1.26	1.01	1.14
Masculinity	0.40			
Male Target		3.89	4.69	5.05
		1.02	0.81	0.98
Female Target		3.75	4.49	4.81
		0.91	0.80	0.93
Femininity	0.10			
Male Target		4.66	4.66	4.42
		0.88	0.88	0.72
Female Target		4.91	4.80	4.57
		1.11	0.93	0.89
Physical Attractiveness	0.32			
Male Target		3.70	5.01	4.93
		1.09	1.05	1.19
Female Target		4.33	5.29	5.00
		1.33	1.09	1.26

Table 2

*Mean Ratings of Short, Average, and Tall Targets on Social Attractiveness as a Function of Participant Height*

Height of Participant	Height of Target					
	Short (M, SD)		Average (M, SD)		Tall (M, SD)	
Short	4.22	.26	5.13	.18	5.35	.22
Average	4.43	.16	5.5	.11	5.34	.14
Tall	5.19	.28	5.31	.20	5.50	.24

Table 3

*Mean Ratings of Short, Average, and Tall Targets on Femininity as a Function of Participants'*

*Awareness Rating*

Awareness	Height of Target					
	Short (M, SD)		Average (M, SD)		Tall (M, SD)	
Low	4.93	.17	4.88	.14	4.42	.12
Medium	4.42	.21	4.58	.20	4.42	.17
High	4.82	.18	4.62	.26	4.64	.14

Table 4

*Mean Ratings of Short, Average, and Tall Targets on Social Attractiveness as a Function of Participants' Awareness Rating*

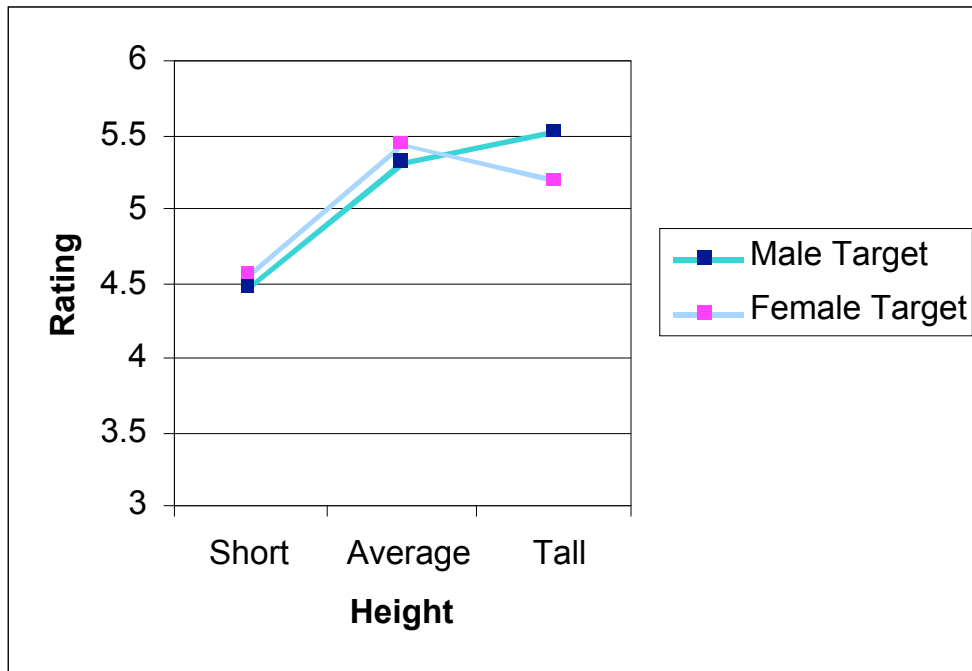
Awareness	Height of Target					
	Short (M, SD)		Average (M, SD)		Tall (M, SD)	
Low	4.78	.18	5.40	.13	5.31	.15
Medium	4.40	.27	5.12	.19	5.15	.22
High	4.25	.22	5.56	.16	5.60	.18

### Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Sample Silhouette Drawing from the Character Perception Scale (CPS)

*Figure 2.* Interaction of Target Height and Target Gender on Trait Ratings.

*Figure 3.* Interaction of Participant Height and Target Height on Ratings of Social Attractiveness.





## Appendix A

## Character Perception Scale

The items below inquire about the person you just saw above. Based on the information give, rate how well the following various adjectives describe the person.

Popular	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unpopular
Socially Unsuccessful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Socially Successful
Professionally successful	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Professional Unsuccessful
Earns below average at job	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Earns more than average
Has high status job	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Has lower status job
Unstable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Well-adjusted
Secure	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Insecure

Unconfident	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Self-assured
Athletic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Not Athletic
Does not play sports	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Plays sports
Independent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Dependent
Hesitant	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Assertive
Dominant	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Submissive
Unaccepting	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Understanding
Warm	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Unfriendly
Unsympathetic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Compassionate
Physically attractive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Physically unattractive