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## **Do Physical Characteristics Influence How People Evaluate Non-Physical Traits? Evidence from the Excess Bodyweight Penalty in the Online Dating Market**

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### **Abstract**

I use two online experiments to test whether physical characteristics affect how people evaluate non-physical traits. I find that participants scored dating profiles displaying overweight/obese photos 17% lower than profiles displaying healthy-weight photos. This penalty was driven by a reduction in the scores assigned to both the photos and the same profile text; participants who viewed heavier photos perceived the text as less indicative of work ethic and intelligence. There is no evidence that participants imposed smaller penalties on profiles reporting higher-earning occupations, suggesting that individuals are limited in their ability to compensate for excess bodyweight with higher socioeconomic status.

JEL Codes: J12; J16; C90

Key words: beauty; dating; discrimination; obesity

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# 1. Introduction

Choosing a spouse is one of the most significant decisions that a person can make, with important implications for labor market performance (Korenman and Neumark 1991; Loughran and Zissimopoulos 2009; Halla et al. 2020), health (Gardner and Oswald 2004; van den Berg and Gupta 2015; Guner et al. 2018), and life satisfaction (Stutzer and Frey 2006; Powdthavee 2009; Rasciute et al. 2023). As a result, researchers have devoted considerable effort to understanding the dating and marriage markets (see, for example: Becker 1973, 1974; Grossbard-Schechtman and Neuman 1988; Suen and Lui 1999; Chiappori et al. 2009; Bursztyn et al. 2017; Goñi 2022). Yet the widespread adoption of broadband internet technology has rapidly reshaped both the size and location of these markets. In 2011, online dating became the most common way people reported meeting their partners; today, over half of couples meet online (Rosenfeld et al. 2019).

While online dating platforms may be an entertaining way for users to interact with potential partners whom they otherwise would not have met (Her and Timmermans 2020), researchers have argued that they are designed to be addictive (Orosz et al. 2016; Rochat et al. 2019; Bonilla-Zorita et al. 2021), encourage deception (Ellison et al. 2006; Toma and Hancock 2010; Guadagno et al. 2012), and overemphasize physical appearance (Strubel and Petrie 2017; Bowman et al. 2025).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the founder of Tinder – the company that popularized modern online dating applications and continues to be an industry leader – has stated that he set out to create a “simplified dating app with a focus on images” (Grigoriadis

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<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of online daters report having an overall negative experience with online dating (Vogels and McClain 2023). One explanation is that technologies eliminating search frictions, such as online dating, can lead to market failures when coarse reasoning results in over-optimism about future romantic prospects (Antler and Bachl 2022).

2014).<sup>2</sup> Of course, even prior to the proliferation of online dating, relatively more attractive individuals did better in the dating and marriage markets than their relatively less attractive counterparts (Hamermesh and Biddle 1994; Hamermesh 2011). However, the increased emphasis on physical appearance in these markets has occurred alongside a dramatic increase in the share of Americans classified as overweight or obese (Fryar et al. 2020), and excess bodyweight is penalized in romantic markets (Averett and Korenman 1996; Chiappori et al. 2014). While secular bodyweight trends may have altered the types of bodies that are perceived as healthy (Hernandez et al. 2010; Lundahl et al. 2014) and attractive (Bonafini and Pozzilli 2011; Robinson and Christiansen 2014), the widespread adoption of online dating technologies that encourage users to present idealized images and emphasize appearance-based decisions may have widened existing disparities.

In this paper, I use two online experiments to provide new evidence on the existence of weight-based discrimination in the online dating market. In the first experiment, 653 participants evaluated the dating profiles of either eight men or eight women using the research platform Prolific. Each participant provided an overall score (on a scale of 1 to 10), as well as separate scores for the profile photo and the profile text. All participants were single, between the ages of 20 and 40, located within the United States, and reported being sexually attracted to the gender displayed in the profiles. Half of participants evaluated profiles depicting men and half evaluated profiles depicting women. Each dating profile had three bodyweight variants (healthy weight, overweight, and obese) and two occupation variants (low-earning job, high-earning job). The profile text was the same across the six total

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<sup>2</sup> Prior to Tinder's launch, the online dating market was dominated by OkCupid (with approximately 60 percent market share) and Match.com (with a little under 20 percent market share). Within one year of its launch, Tinder was the market leader. Within two years, it had over 80 percent market share (Abolfathi and Santamaria 2020).

variants. The profiles were presented to each participant in a random order, and participants evaluated one of the six variants for each profile.

I find that participants who evaluated profiles displaying overweight and obese photo variants gave overall scores approximately 19 percent lower than participants who evaluated profiles displaying the healthy-weight variant. The size of the penalty was monotonic with the degree of excess bodyweight; overweight profiles received 13-percent lower scores, and obese profiles received 26-percent lower scores. What explains this reduction? For one, participants scored overweight and obese photos nearly 30-percent lower than those who scored healthy-weight photos. Interestingly, though, they also scored the profile text 7 percent lower when the associated photo displayed an overweight or obese person compared to when it displayed a healthy-weight person. Together, these results indicate that excess bodyweight influences how participants evaluate both the physical and non-physical aspects of online dating profiles.

Next, I explore whether the size of the excess bodyweight penalty varied based on the demographic characteristics of the participants and the earnings potential of the profiles. First, consistent with Becker's (1973) prediction that individuals with differing non-labor market traits will partner with individuals who have similar traits, I find that participants who described themselves as overweight or obese imposed a smaller penalty on profiles displaying excess bodyweight. Second, in line with prior evidence on the gendered relationship between excess bodyweight and perceived attractiveness (Fisman et al. 2006; Bjerk 2009; Oreffice and Quintana-Domeque 2010), I show that men imposed a larger penalty on profiles displaying excess bodyweight than women and non-binary participants. Third, consistent with interdisciplinary scholarship on the racial underpinnings of obesity classification (Cryle and Stephens 2017; Justin and Jette 2021) and racial/ethnic-specific attitudes towards excess bodyweight (Kernper et al. 1994; Thompson et al. 1996; Averett and Korenman 1999; Reece 2018), I find that Black participants

imposed a smaller penalty than other racial/ethnic groups. Finally, there is no evidence that participants were more forgiving of excess bodyweight when the profile reported a higher-earning occupation.

In the second experiment, I investigated why participants who saw overweight and obese profile photos would rate the accompanying profile text lower than participants who saw the exact same text alongside healthy-weight photos. Using the same set of dating profiles, I asked a different group of participants to specify the extent to which the dating profile text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. I then added these values to create a personality trait index. For 279 participants, the profiles were randomized identically to the first experiment. However, an additional 91 participants evaluated the text without ever seeing a profile photo. I find that participants imposed a 1.5-percent penalty on overweight photos and a 2.7-percent penalty on obese photos. Examining the specific personality traits, I find that participants felt that the text indicated lower levels of work ethic and intelligence when it was presented alongside a photo of an overweight or obese person compared to a healthy-weight person. I also find suggestive evidence that participants viewing heavier photos felt that the text indicated a lower level of cooperation than those viewing healthy-weight photos or no photos. Consistent with the first experiment, male participants imposed larger penalties on excess bodyweight than female and non-binary participants.

These findings contribute to several notable areas of research. First, by showing how excess bodyweight influences how individuals perceive online dating profiles, this paper adds to evidence on the importance of physical attractiveness in romantic markets (Hamermesh and Biddle 1994; Fisman et al. 2006; Banerjee et al. 2013). In the context of excess bodyweight, prior work has documented sizable penalties for overweight and obese individuals – particularly women – in the dating and marriage markets (Averett and Korenman 1996; Averett et al. 2008;

Mukhopadhyay 2008; Ali et al 2014; Malcom and Kaya 2016).<sup>3</sup> For example, Belot and Francesconi (2013) found that each additional standard-deviation increase in bodyweight reduced the likelihood that men desired to match with women during a speed dating session by nearly 1 percentage point (4.5 percent). A common explanation for why healthy-weight individuals do better in romantic markets is that there is consumption value to having an attractive spouse, resulting in taste-based discrimination against heavier individuals who are viewed as less attractive (Becker 1957; Goussé et al. 2017). Yet an alternative explanation is that people perceive relatively less attractive individuals as unproductive and uncooperative, though there is mixed evidence as to whether this does (Mobius and Rosenblat 2006; Adreoni and Petrie 2008) or does not occur (Belot et al. 2012; Jaeger et al. 2019). As such, an important contribution of this paper is demonstrating that participants viewed the exact same text as less indicative of work ethic and intelligence when evaluating alongside an overweight and obese photo compared to a healthy-weight photo or no photo.

Second, by testing whether individuals are more forgiving of excess bodyweight when the potential partner holds a higher-earning occupation, this paper adds to work on the substitutability of traits in romantic markets. The prior evidence has been mixed. Chiappori et al. (2014) found that U.S. men could compensate for each additional 1.3 BMI units with a 1-percent increase in wages, whereas women could compensate for two BMI units with an additional year of education. However, consistent with the findings of this study, Egebark et al. (2021) found no evidence that facial attractiveness and education were substitutable in the

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<sup>3</sup> Likewise, researchers studying the market for sexual activity have consistently shown that heavier adolescent girls are less likely to be sexually active than their healthy-weight counterparts (Cawley et al. 2006; Sabia and Rees 2011; Averett et al. 2013). Related work has also documented substantial labor market penalties associated with being perceived as unattractive (Hamermesh and Biddle 1994; Biddle and Hamermesh 1998; Hamermesh et al. 2002; Mobius and Rosenblat 2006) and specifically for possessing excess bodyweight (Cawley 2004; Brunello and D’Hombres 2007; Han et al. 2009; Caliendo and Gehrsitz 2016).

Netherlands online dating market, though they did note that users always preferred more attractive profiles.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 discusses the main experiment and identification strategy comparing profile scores given by participants who viewed overweight and obese variants of the profile photos to the scores given by participants who viewed the healthy-weight variants. Section 3 presents the results showing that participants penalized profiles displaying excess bodyweight, as well as how this penalty varied by the participants' demographic characteristics and the earnings potential of the profile. It also presents results from the follow-up experiment studying how excess bodyweight influences the perception of non-physical personality traits. Finally, Section 4 discusses the implications and limitations of the results.

## **2. Data and Methods**

### ***2.1 Data***

I solicited study participants through the online research platform Prolific, which is increasingly utilized in experimental economics research (see, for example: Adena and Harke 2022; Butera et al. 2022; Brañas-Garza et al. 2023; Grodeck and Grossman 2024).<sup>4</sup> Potential participants were told that they would be evaluating dating profiles of men or women, that the survey was expected to take approximately 10 minutes, and that they would receive \$4 for their time (i.e., they would earn a \$24 hourly wage). Individuals registered on Prolific were eligible to participate if they were located within the United States, were 20–40 years old, were not in a romantic relationship, and reported being attracted to the sex of the dating profiles being evaluated. Participants could evaluate either the male or

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<sup>4</sup> Recent work indicates that Prolific produces higher quality data than other popular online research platforms, such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Peer et al. 2022; Douglas et al. 2023; Kay 2025).

female dating profiles, but not both. Additionally, to help assure high-quality responses, potential participants were required to have completed at least 20 prior Prolific studies with an approval rating of at least 95 percent. Participants were recruited between December 3<sup>rd</sup> and December 5<sup>th</sup> of 2025.

First, participants completed a demographic survey.<sup>5</sup> Next, they were iteratively presented with a series of either eight dating profiles depicting men or eight dating profiles depicting women. For each profile, they were asked to evaluate (i) the profile photo, (ii) the profile text, and (iii) the overall profile on a scale of one to ten. Participants could only select integer values, and they were told that one was the lowest possible score and ten was the highest possible score. Participants scored the three profile components via sliders, as shown in Appendix Figure C1, and they were required to have engaged with each slider before they could advance to the next profile. A total of 676 eligible individuals completed the survey, though 23 participants were excluded because they opted against reporting at least some demographic information.

All participants who scored male/female dating profiles saw variants of the same eight men/women, though the order that the profiles were presented was randomized. The names, profile text, and general characteristics of the profiles did not change, but there were three bodyweight variants (healthy weight, overweight, and obese) and two occupation variants (high-earning job and low-earning job) for a total of six variants. The profile photos were all generated on an AI-powered platform, OpenArt, and are shown in Appendix B. While bodyweight varied, the photos were designed to be otherwise identical. The participants were randomly presented with one of these six variants. The profile names were randomly selected to match the demographic profile. These names and the associated occupations are

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<sup>5</sup> The survey is included as Appendix A.

listed in Appendix Table C1, and the number of participants who evaluated each bodyweight-occupation variant is shown in Appendix Table C2.

Figure 1 plots the distribution of overall scores given to profiles based on whether the associated photo displayed excess bodyweight. These descriptive patterns suggest that participants preferred online dating profiles with healthy-weight photos. Over 75 percent of evaluations assigned an overall score of six or more to profiles with healthy-weight photos compared to only 51 percent for profiles with overweight or obese photos. Indeed, on average, a profile with a healthy-weight photo received a nearly 1.2-point higher score than a profile with an overweight or obese photo (6.61 points vs. 5.44 points), and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates meaningful differences in these two distributions ( $p = 0.000$ ). Likewise, Table 1 shows that each profile displaying a healthy-weight photo received a higher overall score than variants displaying overweight or obese photos.

What is behind the reduction in the overall score? To examine this, Figure 2 plots the distributions of the two sub-components that participants were asked to evaluate – the profile photos (Panel A) and the profile text (Panel B). Again, the descriptive patterns indicate that participants favored the healthy-weight versions of the profile photos. The average score assigned to a healthy-weight photo was 7.13, and over 80 percent of participants assigned scores of six or more. In contrast, the average score assigned to an overweight or obese photo was 5.44, and only 51 percent of participants assigned scores of six or more. Likewise, the distributions suggest that participants rated the exact same profile text lower for profiles with heavier photos compared to profiles with healthy-weight photos. Again, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicate meaningful differences in the distributions across bodyweight for both photo and text scores ( $p = 0.000$  for both Panel A and Panel B).

Figure 3 plots results from a balance test exploring differences in demographic characteristics between participants presented with healthy-weight

versions of the profile photos and those presented with overweight or obese photos of the same profile. The dependent variables are the demographic characteristics shown on the vertical axis. The independent variables are an indicator for whether the participant scored an overweight or obese profile photo, as well as profile-by-occupation fixed effects.<sup>6</sup> While the variable *Age* takes on values between 20 and 40, the remaining variables are all indicators. Overall, the estimates in Figure 3 are incredibly small and statistically insignificant, which supports the effectiveness of the randomization procedure.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3 Methods

To explore the degree to which profiles displaying excess bodyweight are penalized in the online dating market, I use the following pre-registered specification:

$$\text{SCORE}_{ije} = \alpha + \beta \cdot \text{HEAVIER}_{je} + \mathbf{X}'_{ij}\gamma + \theta_{je} + \varepsilon_{ije} \quad (1)$$

where the dependent variable,  $\text{SCORE}_{ije}$ , is the score that participant  $i$  assigned to profile  $j$  with occupation  $e$ . To model the count nature of the data, the specification is estimated via Poisson regression, though the results are shown to be robust to alternative estimation strategies.

The independent variable of interest,  $\text{HEAVIER}_{je}$ , is an indicator for whether the profile photo variant  $j$  with occupation  $e$  was overweight or obese. Next,  $\mathbf{X}_{ij}$  is vector of pre-registered demographic characteristics. These include age and age squared, as well as indicators for gender (male, female, and non-binary/third gender), sexual orientation (heterosexual and non-heterosexual), educational attainment (no college degree, four-year college degree, graduate degree), body mass index status (underweight, healthy weight, overweight, obese), and self-described body type (underweight, healthy weight, overweight, obese). The vector

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<sup>6</sup> Appendix Figure C2 shows that the pattern is the same excluding the profile-by-occupation fixed effects.

<sup>7</sup> Appendix Table C3 reports the summary statistics for these demographic variables.

$\mathbf{X}_{ij}$  also includes indicators for race/ethnicity (Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic white, and other race/ethnicity) and an indicator for whether the participant was of the same race/ethnicity as the profile being evaluated (Fisman et al. 2006; Hitsch et al. 2010). Finally,  $\theta_{je}$  is a vector of profile-by-occupation fixed effects, which assures that the coefficient of interest,  $\beta$ , is identified from comparing ratings between profiles that have same name, text, and occupation but varying degrees of excess bodyweight in the profile photos.

Prior work has yielded mixed evidence as to whether heavier individuals are (Chiappori et al. 2014) or are not (Egebark et al. 2021) able to compensate for excess bodyweight with higher levels of socioeconomic status. I test this possibility using the following pre-registered specification:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SCORE}_{ije} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot \text{HEAVIER}_j + \beta_2 \cdot \text{HIGH-EARN}_e \\ & + \beta_3 \cdot \text{HEAVIER}_j \times \text{HIGH-EARN}_e + \mathbf{X}'_{ij} \boldsymbol{\gamma} + \theta_j + \varepsilon_{ije} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where the independent variables of interest are (i) an indicator for whether the version of the profile photo was overweight or obese,  $\text{HEAVIER}_j$ , (ii) an indicator for whether the profile reported the higher-earning occupation,  $\text{HIGH-EARN}_e$ , and (iii) the interaction of these two variables. Relative to equation (1), the only other modification is that the regression now includes profile fixed effects,  $\theta_j$ , rather than profile-by-occupation fixed effects, so that  $\beta_3$  is identified.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Changes in Profile Scores

I begin in Table 2 by testing whether participants penalized dating profile photos displaying excess bodyweight. The dependent variable in columns 1 and 2 is the overall score the participants assigned to the profile, the dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 is the score the participants assigned to the profile photo, and the dependent variable in columns 5 and 6 is the score the participants assigned to the

profile text. The independent variable of interest in Panel A is an indicator for whether the participant was shown an overweight or obese version of the profile photo. To examine whether the penalty varied based on the degree of excess bodyweight shown in the photo, Panel B reports results from a pre-registered modification of the specification where the independent variables of interest are separate indicators for whether the participant was shown the overweight variant or the obese variant of the profile photo. The odd-numbered columns report results obtained using a sparse specification including only profile-by-occupation fixed effects, which assures that the estimate is identified from differences in the bodyweight depicted in the photos of profiles with the exact same name, text, and occupation. The even-numbered columns report results after augmenting this specification with a series of pre-registered individual-level demographic characteristics. The specification uses Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the table reports marginal effects for ease of interpretation.

Columns 1 and 2 show that participants who viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo scored the overall profile 1.1 points lower than those who viewed the healthy-weight version – approximately a 17 percent reduction relative to the control mean (Panel A). This penalty was more pronounced for profiles with photos that displayed higher levels of excess bodyweight. While participants imposed an approximate 0.8-point (12-percent) penalty for overweight photos relative to healthy-weight photos, they imposed a 1.5-point (23-percent) penalty for obese photos relative to healthy-weight photos (Panel B). Notably, the estimates are practically identical, regardless of whether the specification includes the individual-level demographic characteristics, which is consistent with the success of the randomization procedure.

It is helpful to consider these estimates alongside prior evidence on the penalties associated with excess bodyweight, with the most comparable estimates coming from research studying labor market discrimination. In Sweden, obese men

and women were 20 percent less likely to receive a callback compared to healthy-weight applicants (Rooth 2009). Similarly, Campos-Vazquez and Gonzalez (2020) found that obese women in Mexico were approximately 27 percent less likely to receive a callback, though they did not detect a statistically significant penalty for obese men.<sup>8</sup> In the context of U.S. romantic markets, Cawley et al. (2006) found that obese teens had approximately half the odds of initiating dating as their healthy-weight counterparts, and Ali et al. (2014) used similar data to show that white obese girls were approximately 16 percent less likely to report having been in a recent relationship than their healthy-weight counterparts. Finally, while they studied facial attractiveness rather than excess bodyweight, Egebark et al. (2021) found that online dating users were 18–20-percentage-points more likely to respond to profiles with high facial attractiveness compared to those with low facial attractiveness.<sup>9</sup> Overall, these figures imply that the estimated relationship between excess bodyweight and perceptions of online dating profiles found here is in line with prior work.

In the remaining four columns of Table 2, I explore whether the overall score penalty was due to a reduction in the profile photo score, a reduction in the profile text score, or reduction in both components. Columns 3 and 4 show that participants imposed a 1.6-point (22-percent) penalty on heavier photos (Panel A), due to a 1.1-point (16-percent) penalty imposed on overweight photos and a 2.2-point (31-percent) penalty imposed on obese photos (Panel B). Interestingly, columns 5 and 6 show that participants who viewed the heavier versions of the profile photos assigned a 0.4 point (6 percent) lower score to the profile text than

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<sup>8</sup> Rooth (2009) found that obese men were 7 percentage points less likely to receive a callback and that obese women were 8 percentage points less likely to receive a callback. The baseline callback rate was 35 percent for healthy-weight men and 40 percent for healthy-weight women. Meanwhile, Campos-Vazquez (2020) estimated a 7.8–8.2-percentage-point reduction for obese women compared to a 29.1 percent callback rate for non-obese women.

<sup>9</sup> Given that the average response rate was 11.7 percent for female participants and 27.5 percent for male participants, these are relatively large increases.

those viewed the *exact same text* with a healthy-weight profile photo (Panel A). Again, this penalty was larger for photos displaying a larger degree of excess bodyweight. Participants who viewed the overweight version of the profile photo imposed an approximate 0.3-point (5-percent) penalty on the profile text, while those who viewed the obese version of the profile photo imposed a 0.5-point (8-percent) penalty.

Next, I conduct two exploratory robustness tests to increase confidence in the baseline results. In Figure 4, I show that the patterns are robust to augmenting the baseline specification with participant-specific fixed effects, estimating the specification via ordinary least squares, and estimating the specification via negative binomial regression. In Figure 5, I plot the results obtained from estimating equation (1) iteratively limiting the sample to each of the dating profiles (i.e., there are separate results for each profile). The dark triangles plot the estimates for the overall profile score, the light grey circles plot the estimates for the photo score, and the grey diamonds plot the estimates for the text score. For the female dating profiles, the results are remarkably consistent, despite the limited sample reducing statistical power. Regardless of the profile, participants imposed a 1.0–1.5-point penalty on the overall score of profiles displaying excess bodyweight. This reduction was due to a 1.4–1.8-point penalty imposed on the photos and a 0.3–0.8-point penalty imposed on the text. Likewise, most of the male dating profiles indicate that participants imposed a 0.9–1.2-point penalty on the overall profile scores, due to a 1.3–2.0-point penalty on the photos and a 0.2–0.5-point penalty on the profile text, though there was more variation in the size of the penalties imposed on overweight and obese men versus overweight and obese women. Overall, Figure 5 indicates that the results are not driven by a particular dating profile.

Figure 6 plots results from an exploratory placebo exercise intended to evaluate whether the estimated penalties associated with excess bodyweight were being driven by a spurious relationship. For each observation, I used a random

number generator to select a value between zero and one. Participants receiving a placebo value between 0 and 0.33 were coded as having seen the healthy-weight version of the profile photo, those receiving a placebo value between 0.33 and 0.67 were coded as having seen the overweight version of the profile photo, and those receiving a placebo value greater than 0.67 were coded as having seen the obese version of the profile photo. I then estimated equation (1) using this placebo treatment and saved the resulting coefficient. The grey bars denote the distribution of placebo coefficients from repeating this process 100 times, while the solid black line indicates the estimate obtained using the actual treatment variable. For all three outcomes, the actual estimated treatment effect is well outside the corresponding placebo distribution, indicating that the results were unlikely to have been obtained by chance.

### ***3.2 Heterogeneity by Participant Demographics***

The penalty imposed on profiles displaying excess bodyweight may not have been uniform across participants. For one, Becker's (1973) theory of marriage predicts that individuals differing in non-labor market traits, such as bodyweight, will partner with those who have similar traits. Additionally, prior work has shown that men place a relatively greater emphasis on physical attractiveness, while women place a greater emphasis on non-physical traits, such as career choice (Braun and Bryan 2006; Fisman et al. 2006; Bjerk 2009; Oreffice and Quintana-Domeque 2010; Ong 2016). Finally, there is a large interdisciplinary literature exploring differences in how racial and ethnic groups perceive excess bodyweight. Because body mass index was developed from a sample of white Belgian men (Cryle and Stephens 2017), some scholars have argued that Black individuals perceive the calculation as less relevant for their own health (Jutin and Jett 2021) and there is evidence that Black individuals are more comfortable with excess bodyweight

(Kernper et al. 1994; Thompson et al. 1996; Averett and Korenman 1999; Reece 2018).

To test these hypotheses, I augmented equation (1) with an interaction between the treatment variable and a particular demographic characteristic. I report the results in Table 3 where I interact the treatment variable with an indicator for whether the participants described themselves as overweight or obese (Panel A), an indicator for whether the participants identified as male (Panel B), and indicators for the participants' race/ethnicity (Panel C). The first two interactions (self-described body type and gender) were pre-registered, while the third interaction (race/ethnicity) is exploratory.

Consistent with Becker's theory of marriage (1973), I find that participants who described themselves as overweight or obese imposed a smaller penalty on profiles displaying excess bodyweight than participants who did not describe themselves as overweight or obese. Though participants who viewed heavier profile photos scored the overall profile 1.3 points lower than those who viewed the healthy-weight variant of the photo, this penalty was approximately 0.5 points smaller if the participants described themselves as overweight or obese (Panel A, column 1). This smaller penalty was due to participants who described themselves as overweight or obese imposing an approximate 28 percent smaller penalty on the photo scores (Panel A, column 2) and a 54 percent smaller penalty on the text scores (Panel A, column 3).

I also find evidence that men imposed a larger penalty on profiles displaying excess bodyweight than women and non-binary participants. While non-male participants scored profiles with an overweight or obese profile photo 0.9 points lower than those with a healthy-weight photo, men imposed an additional 0.4-point penalty (Panel B, column 1). Interestingly, though male participants imposed an additional 0.3-point penalty on the heavier profile photos compared to the 1.5-point penalty that was also imposed by female and non-binary participants (Panel B,

column 2), they imposed nearly twice as large of a penalty on the profile text scores as their non-male counterparts. Though female and non-binary participants scored the text of profiles displaying a heavier photo approximately 0.3 points lower than profiles displaying a healthy-weight photo, male participants imposed an additional 0.2-point penalty on heavier variants (Panel B, column 3). This implies that the penalty imposed on the profile text score by male participants was over 1.8 times larger than the penalty imposed by non-male participants, indicating that physical attributes play a particularly important role in how men evaluate non-physical traits.

There is generally no evidence that the penalty participants imposed on profiles displaying overweight and obese photos varied by race/ethnicity with one exception. While most participants scored photos displaying excess bodyweight 1.9 points lower than those displaying healthy-weight photos, non-Hispanic Black participants imposed a 0.6-point smaller penalty (Panel C, column 2). This pattern is consistent with interdisciplinary evidence that non-Hispanic Black individuals feel lower levels of stigma from excess bodyweight (Parker et al. 1995; Averett and Korenman 1999; Reece 2018) and that obese Black individuals are less penalized in the romantic market than obese individuals of other races (Thompson et al. 1996; Averett and Korenman 1999; Mukhopadhyay 2008; Grossbard and Mukhopadhyay 2017).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Appendix Table C4 examines heterogeneity by Body Mass Index category, body image, and educational attainment. Panel A shows that participants whose BMI classified them as overweight or obese imposed a smaller penalty on heavier profiles. Meanwhile, Panel B replaces the self-description and BMI covariates with indicators for whether participants had a lenient, accurate, or harsh body image, which was determined by taking the difference between their self-described body types and BMI categories (Jiang et al. 2014). For example, an overweight participant who reported that she was healthy weight would be classified as having a lenient body image, while one reporting that she was overweight would be classified as having an accurate body image. There is no clear pattern. Finally, Panel C shows no difference in the penalty imposed on excess bodyweight by college education.

### ***3.3 Heterogeneity by Profile Earnings Potential***

While the results indicate that profiles were penalized for displaying excess bodyweight, it is possible that individuals may be able to compensate with other desirable dating market traits, such as higher levels of socioeconomic status (Chiappori et al. 2014). To test this possibility, Table 4 reports results obtained using equation (2). The dependent variable in columns 1–3 is the overall profile score, the dependent variable in columns 4–6 is the profile photo score, and the dependent variable in columns 7–9 is the profile text score. Because prior work has found that men place less value on their potential partner’s occupation – and, in fact, often prefer a partner of lower socioeconomic status than themselves – the results are reported for the full sample, as well as separately by gender (Braun and Bryan 2006; Fisman et al. 2006; Bjerk 2009; Oreffice and Quintana-Domeque 2010; Ong 2016).<sup>11</sup>

Overall, Table 4 does not support the hypothesis that heavier individuals can offset the penalty associated with excess bodyweight with a higher-earning occupation. The point estimates on the interaction term are smaller in magnitude than the penalties, inconsistently signed, and statistically insignificant. The lone exception is a single result suggesting that while non-male participants imposed a 0.5-point penalty when scoring the text of overweight profiles with lower-earning occupations, there is no penalty for those in higher-earning occupations (Panel B, column 9). However, this single estimate should be interpreted with caution, given the number of interactions being estimated. Moreover, the fact that bodyweight and socioeconomic status are not easily substitutable is consistent with Egebark et al.

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<sup>11</sup> These heterogeneity tests were pre-registered with two minor adjustments. First, to help with interpretation, the sample is stratified by gender, rather than including multiple interaction terms. Appendix Table C5 shows that the patterns are robust to instead using a pooled sample and including these terms. Second, the pre-registration plan included heterogeneity tests for men vs. women, though 30 participants identified as “non-binary / third gender.” Appendix Table C6 shows that the patterns are robust to dropping these participants.

(2021) who found that online daters with low facial attractiveness were unable to offset their penalty with higher levels of education.

### ***3.4 Changes in Perception of the Profile Text***

Thus far, the results have shown that when participants viewed dating profiles that included overweight and obese photos, as opposed to healthy-weight photos, they assigned lower scores to both the profiles photos and the profile text. This latter result indicates that physical attributes, such as bodyweight, influence how individuals perceive non-physical traits. To explore why this occurs, I conducted a follow-up experiment on Prolific from January 22<sup>nd</sup> to January 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2026 where a separate group of participants read the dating profile text and reported the extent to which the text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. The text was identical to the first experiment. The options ranged from 1-5 that were displayed alongside text descriptors (Not at all, A little bit, Somewhat, A good bit, Completely) that participants selected via the slider shown in Appendix Figure C3. Participants in this second experiment were never asked about the photos, and the survey prompt was written to make sure that participants knew to only evaluate the profile text.<sup>12</sup> Participants evaluated all six personality traits for eight separate dating profiles, with 188 participants evaluating the male profiles and 182 participants evaluating the female profiles. Participants were told that they would earn \$2.50 and that the survey was expected to take six minutes (i.e., they would earn a \$25 hourly wage).

As with the first experiment, participants were required to be located within the United States, be 20–40 years old, not be in a romantic relationship, be attracted to the sex of the dating profiles being evaluated, and had to have completed at least

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<sup>12</sup> It said, “Please evaluate the **text** of this dating profile. To what extent does the profile indicate that the person is...”.

20 prior Prolific studies with an approval rating of at least 95 percent. Participants from the prior study were ineligible to participate. Again, some participants evaluated the text when the profile displayed a healthy-weight photo, while others evaluated the text when the profile displayed an overweight or obese photo. However, because this second experiment only asked participants to evaluate the profile text, I was able to introduce an additional control group of participants who did not see any profile photo. As such, I can compare the scores assigned by participants who saw overweight and obese profile photos to those who saw healthy-weight photos and the scores assigned by participants who saw overweight and obese profile photos to those who did not see any profile photo. Among the 279 participants who evaluated the text of profiles that included photos, the bodyweight variants were randomized. Meanwhile, an additional 91 participants were recruited to exclusively evaluate profiles that never included photos.<sup>13</sup>

In Table 5, I explore whether viewing profile photos displaying excess bodyweight affected how participants evaluated the text of the dating profiles. The dependent variable is a pre-registered index that is obtained by adding up the scores assigned to the six personality traits (i.e., it ranges from 6 to 30). The odd-numbered columns report estimates when the control group includes participants who evaluated the text of profiles displaying healthy-weight photos. The even-numbered columns report estimates when the control group includes participants who evaluated the text without seeing a profile photo. Columns 1 and 2 report results for the full sample, columns 3 and 4 for male participants, and columns 5 and 6 for female and non-binary participants. As before, Panel A reports results where the

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<sup>13</sup> Appendix Table C7 shows the number of participants who evaluated the four bodyweight variants (healthy-weight photo, overweight photo, obese photo, no photo) and two occupation variants (high-earning occupation, low-earning occupation) for each profile. Appendix Figure C4 shows balance for a series of pre-registered demographic characteristics between participants who saw overweight and obese profile photos and those in the control groups, supporting the validity of the randomization procedure.

independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant viewed a photo displaying excess bodyweight, and Panel B reports results where the independent variables of interest distinguish between participants who viewed overweight and obese photos.

I find that participants who viewed overweight and obese profile photos scored the personality traits lower than participants who saw healthy-weight photos or did not see any photos, though the estimate is only statistically significant when using the latter control group. In this case, I find a 0.4-point (2.1-percent) reduction in the personality index value for participants who saw overweight or obese photos compared to those who did not see any photos (Panel A, column 2). The penalty was larger for photos displaying larger amounts of excess bodyweight; participants imposed a 0.3-point (1.5-percent) penalty on overweight photos and a 0.5-point (2.7-percent) penalty on obese photos. Consistent with the results from the first experiment showing that male participants imposed a larger penalty on the text of profiles whose photos displayed excess bodyweight, I find that male participants imposed an approximate 1-point (5-percent) penalty on the text of profiles whose photos displayed excess bodyweight, regardless of the control group (Panel A, columns 3 and 4). Again, the penalty was larger for photos displaying obese photos than those displaying overweight photos (Panel B, columns 3 and 4). In contrast, the point estimates for non-male participants are smaller in magnitude, opposite signed, and largely statistically insignificant (Panels A and B, columns 5 and 6).<sup>14</sup>

Though Table 5 provides additional evidence that physical attributes influence how individuals evaluate non-physical traits in dating markets, it does not

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<sup>14</sup> In Appendix Table C8, I show that the results are robust to pooling both the no-photo and the healthy-weight photo groups and estimating equation (1) where the independent variables of interest are indicators for viewing (i) a healthy-weight photo, (ii) an overweight photo, or (iii) an obese photo (i.e., seeing no photo is the omitted category). Likewise, Appendix Table C9 shows that the penalty imposed on excess bodyweight by male participants was statistically larger than the penalty imposed by non-male participants.

reveal whether a particular personality trait was penalized. To test this, in Figure 7 I plot the results obtained after estimating equation (1) with each of the six personality traits on the horizontal axis serving as the dependent variable.<sup>15</sup> I find that participants who viewed photos displaying excess bodyweight perceived the text as connoting less work ethic and intelligence than participants who viewed the exact same text alongside healthy-weight photos (light grey circles) or no photos (dark grey triangles). I find evidence of a 0.09–0.20-point (2.5–5.5-percent) reduction in the perception of the text as indicating that the person was hardworking. There is also suggestive evidence of a statistically 0.12-point (3.5-percent) reduction in the perception of the text as indicating that the person was intelligent, though the estimate is not statistically significant.

In Figure 8, I examine to what extent viewing photos displaying excess bodyweight influenced how male participants (Panel A) and non-male participants (Panel B) perceived the specific personality traits reflected by the profile text. First, I find a 0.2–0.4-point (6–10-percent) reduction in male participants’ perception of the text as indicating that the person was hardworking. Likewise, there was an approximate 0.2-point (6-percent) reduction in male participants’ perception of the text as indicating that the person was intelligent, though the estimate is only marginal statistically significant ( $p = 0.114$  and  $0.083$ ). Interestingly, I also find suggestive evidence of an approximate 0.1–0.2-point (4–6-percent) reduction in male participants’ perception of the text as indicating that the person was cooperative, which is consistent with prior work showing that individuals perceive attractive people was being more cooperative (Mobius and Rosenblat 2006; Andreoni and Petrie 2008; Zylbersztejn et al. 2024). In contrast, I do not find any evidence that photos displaying excess bodyweight received lower scores from non-male participants. Indeed, if anything, there is suggestive evidence that non-

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix Table C10 reports the sample mean for the personality traits. It also reports the estimates showing that the penalties were monotonically related to the degree of excess bodyweight.

male participants who viewed photos displaying excess bodyweight were more likely to report that the profile text indicated that the person was serious about dating.

## 4. Conclusion

Over the last two decades, the dating market has shifted toward online platforms (Rosenfeld et al. 2019) that emphasize physical appearance (Grigoriadis 2014; Strubel and Petrie 2017; Bowman et al. 2025). At the same time, the share of Americans classified as overweight or obese, which is generally viewed as undesirable in romantic markets, has continued to grow (Fryar et al. 2020). Using an online experiment, this paper studies the degree to which excess bodyweight is penalized in online dating markets. Compared to participants who viewed dating profiles displaying healthy-weight photos, I find that those who viewed overweight and obese variants of the photos assigned the profile a 19 percent lower score. This penalty was monotonically related to the amount of excess bodyweight, smaller among participants who described themselves as overweight or obese, and larger among male participants. There is no evidence that participants were more forgiving of excess bodyweight for profiles reporting higher-earning occupations, suggesting a limitation in the degree to which heavier individuals can compensate for their excess bodyweight with elevated levels of socioeconomic status. Interestingly, I find that participants penalized both the profile photo score and the profile text score, indicating that physical attributes influence how individuals evaluate non-physical traits. In a follow-up experiment, I show that participants perceived the exact same profile text as connoting lower levels of work ethic and intelligence when viewed alongside an overweight or obese photo compared to a healthy-weight photo or no photo.

This study is subject to some limitations. First, the experiments measured participants' bodyweight preferences at a particular point in time, and it is possible

that these preferences may evolve the longer that they use an online dating application. Second, while the results clearly show that participants penalized profiles displaying excess bodyweight and that excess bodyweight appeared to be correlated with their beliefs about other undesirable traits (e.g., laziness), the experimental design cannot rule out the presence of tasted-based discrimination when participants evaluated the profile text. Future work should explore alternative mechanisms to test this possibility. Finally, while there was little evidence that participants were more tolerant of excess bodyweight for profiles reporting higher-earning occupations, it is possible that the occupation-specific differences were not large enough to generate meaningful differences in behavior relative to more salient measures of socioeconomic status, such as earnings. Despite these limitations, this study provides important new evidence on the workings of the modern dating market.

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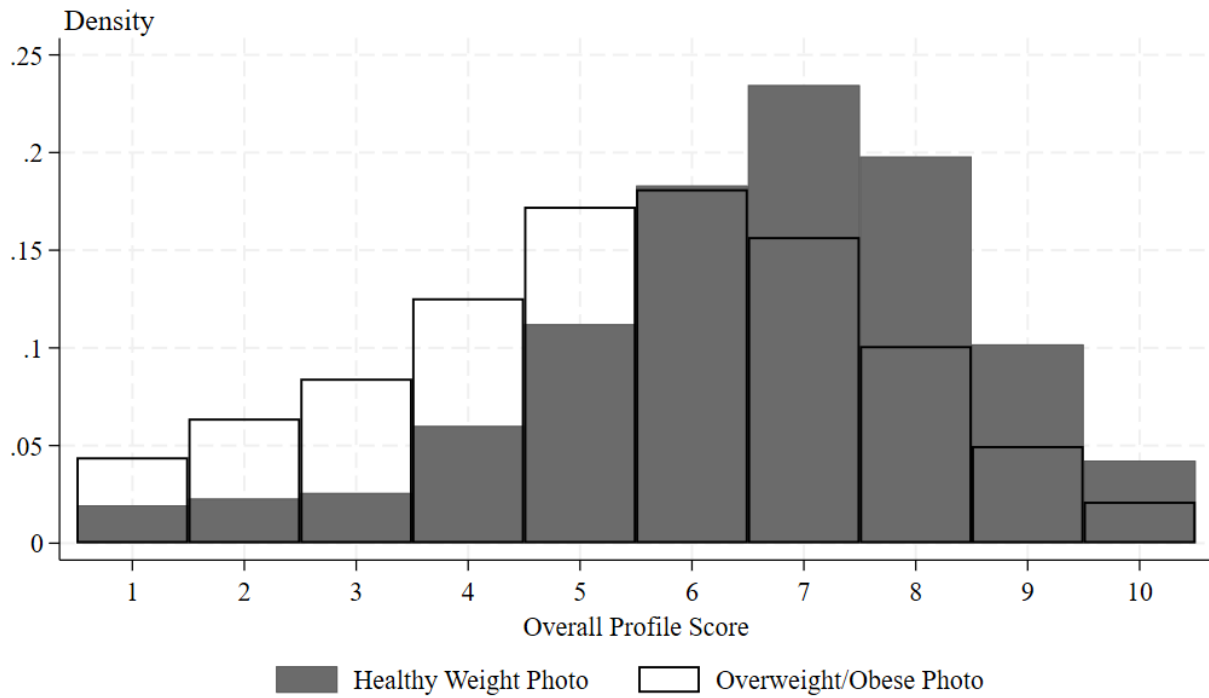
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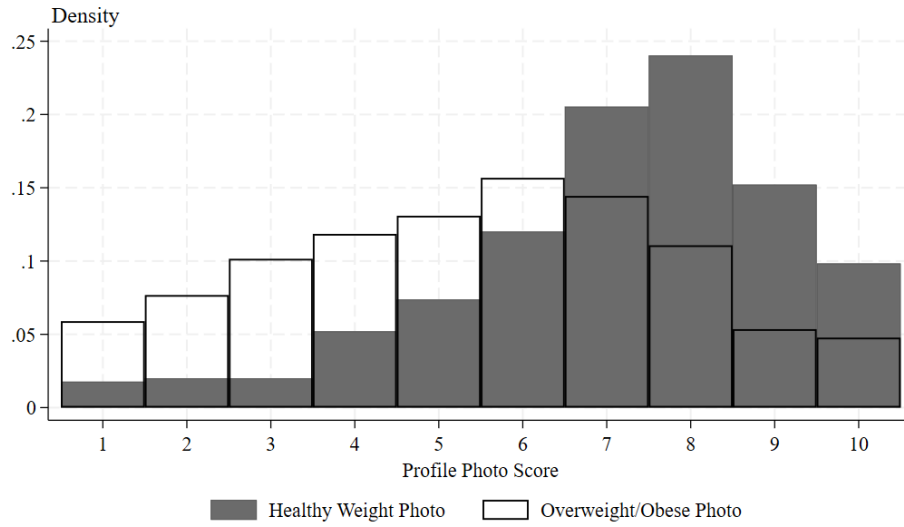
## 6. Figures

**Figure 1: Distribution of Overall Profile Scores Separately by the Bodyweight of the Profile Photo**

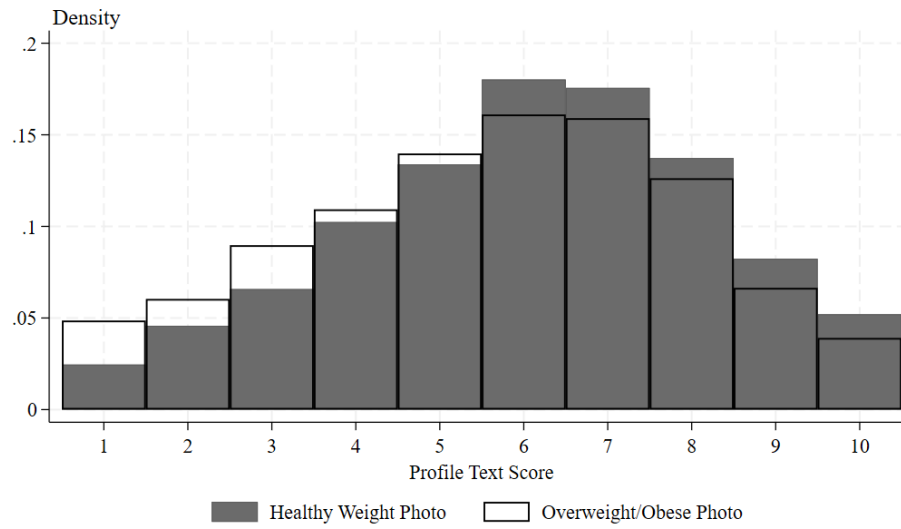


Note: The figure plot2 the density of the overall profile scores. The grey shaded bars denote the densities for healthy-weight profiles, while the unshaded bars with the black border denote the densities for overweight and obese profiles.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Scores Assigned to Dating Profile Components Separately by the Bodyweight of the Profile Photo**



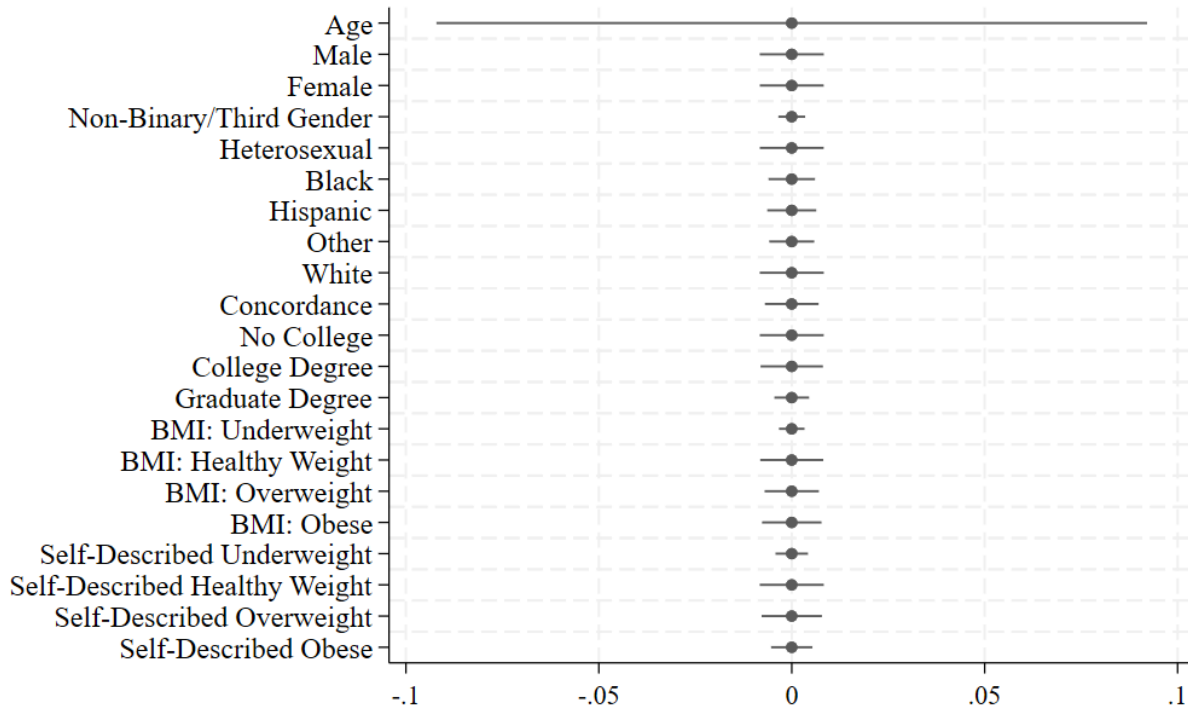
**(A)**



**(B)**

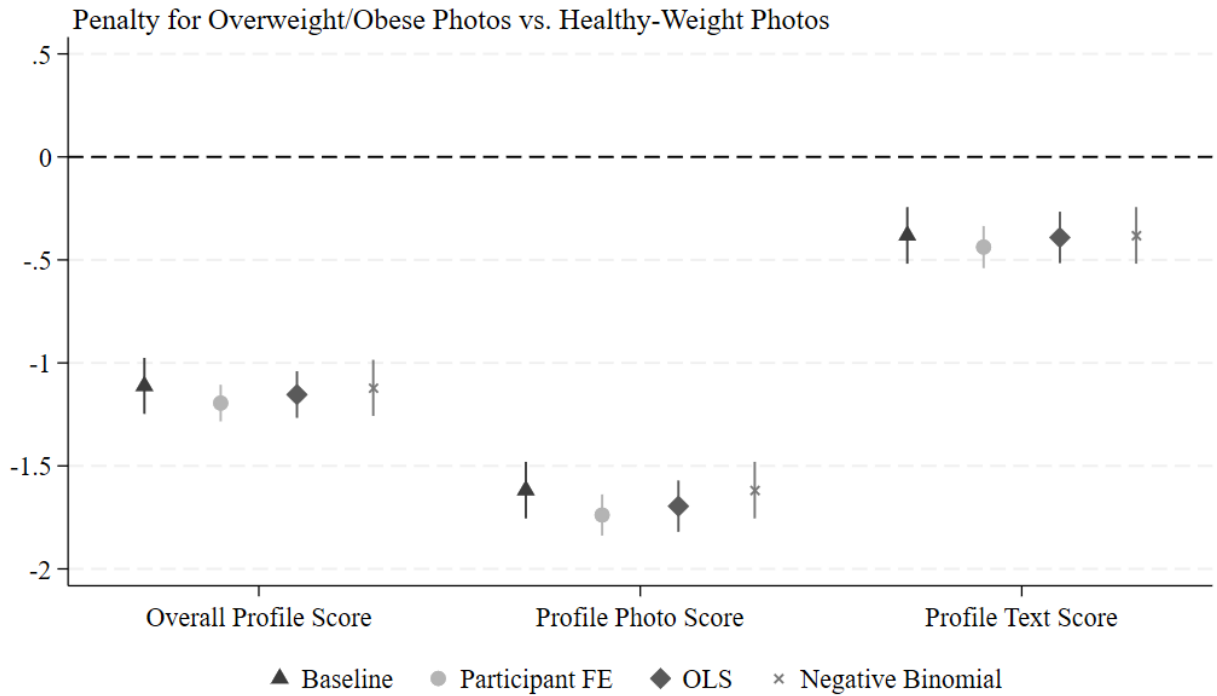
Note: The panels plot the density of the scores assigned to the profile photos (Panel A) and the profile text (Panel B). The grey shaded bars denote the densities for healthy-weight profiles, while the unshaded bars with the black border denote the densities for overweight and obese profiles.

**Figure 3: Balance Test Supporting the Effectiveness of the Randomization Procedure**



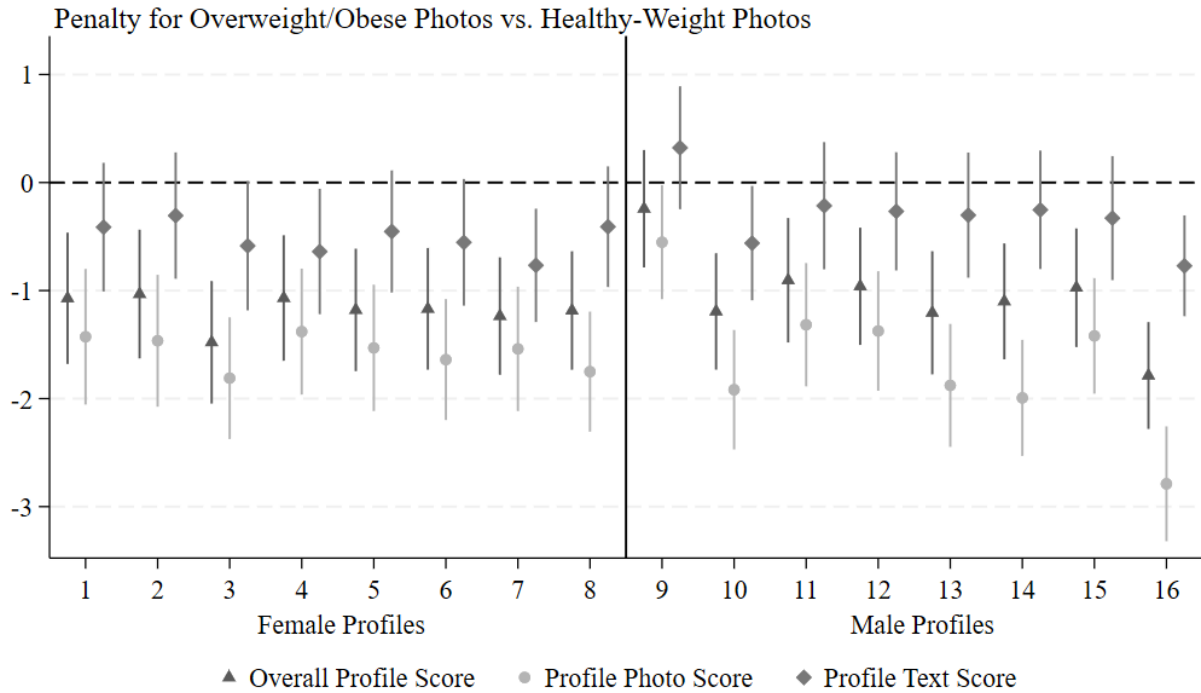
Note: The figure plots the estimates from a regression of the variable shown on the vertical axis on the treatment indicator for whether the participant was shown an overweight/obese profile photo and profile-by-occupation fixed effects. While the variable “Age” takes on values between 20 and 40, the remaining variables are indicators taking on values of zero or one.

**Figure 4: The Estimated Relationships Are Robust to Alternative Specifications**



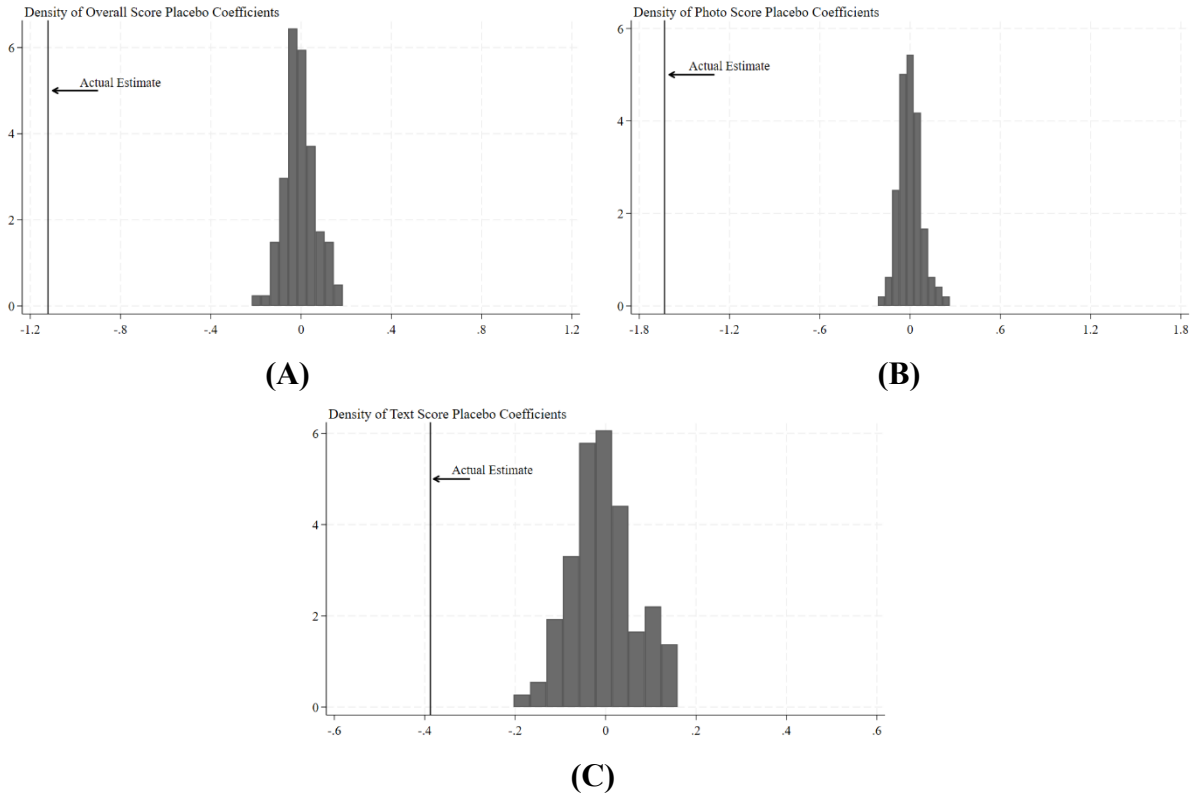
Note: The dependent variables are shown on the horizontal axis and include the overall profile score, the profile photo score, and the profile text score. The independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant evaluated a profile displaying an overweight or obese photo. The dark grey triangles denote the estimates obtained from estimating equation (1) via Poisson regression. The light grey circles denote the estimates obtained when augmenting equation (1) with participant fixed effects via Poisson regression. The grey diamonds denote the estimates obtained when estimating equation (1) via ordinary least squares. The Xs denote estimates obtained when estimating equation (1) via negative binomial regression. The estimates obtained via Poisson and negative binomial regression are reported as marginal effects.

**Figure 5: The Penalty Imposed on Profiles Displaying Excess Bodyweight Was Largely Consistent Across Profiles**



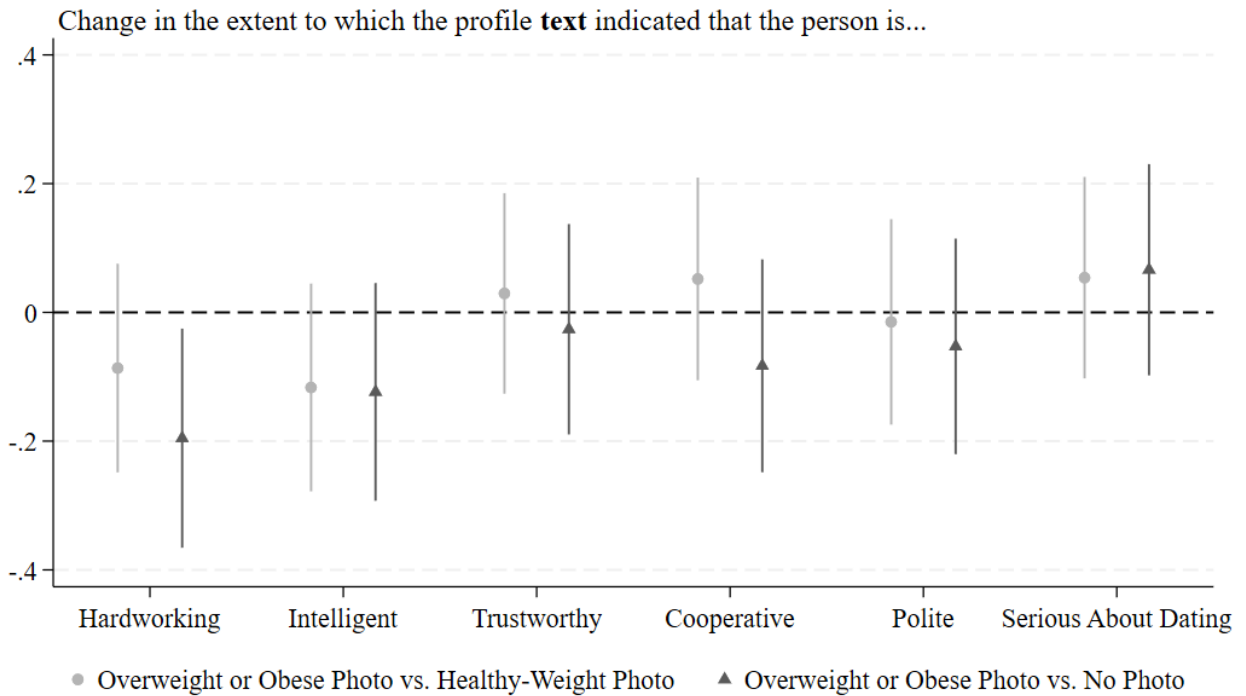
Note: The figure plots the results obtained from estimating equation (1) when limiting the sample to only include observations for the dating profile shown on the horizontal axis. The dark triangles plot the estimates for the overall profile score, the light grey circles plot the estimates for the photo score, and the grey diamonds plot the estimates for the text score. The corresponding vertical lines denote the 95-percent confidence intervals. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

**Figure 6: There Was No Relationship Between the Placebo Treatment and How Participants Evaluated Online Dating Profiles**



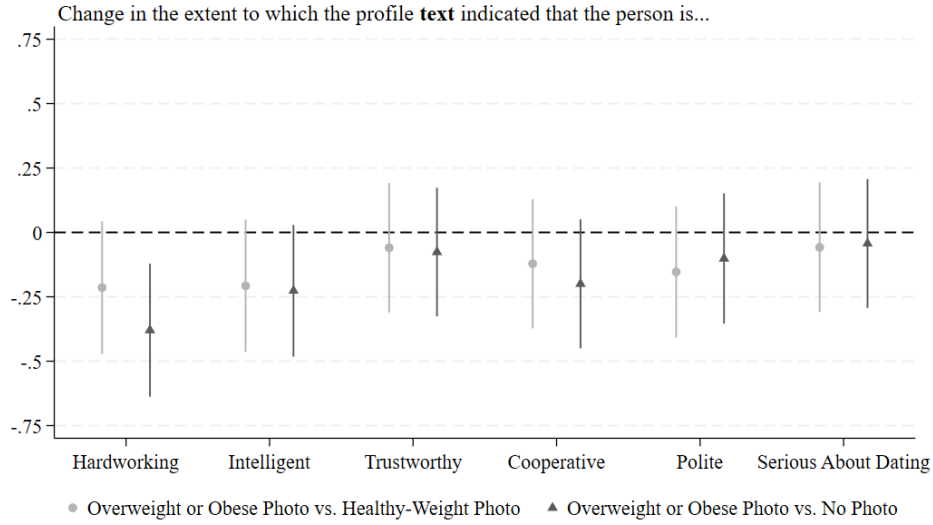
Note: The dependent variable in Panel A is the overall profile score, the dependent variable in Panel B is the profile photo score, and the dependent variable in Panel C is the profile text score. The solid black line denotes the actual estimates that are obtained when the independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant evaluated a profile displaying an overweight or obese photo. The grey histogram denotes the distribution of 100 placebo coefficients by randomly assigning treatment status. Specifically, a random number generator assigned each observation a value between zero and one. Observations with values 0–0.33 were classified as having seen a healthy-weight photo, those with values 0.33–0.67 were classified as having seen an overweight photo, and those with values 0.67–1 were classified as having seen an obese photo. The estimates are obtained via Poisson regression using equation (1). Marginal effects are reported.

**Figure 7: Suggestive Evidence That Participants Who Evaluated Dating Profile Text Alongside Heavier Profile Photos Reported That the Text Was Less Indicative of Work Ethic and Intelligence**

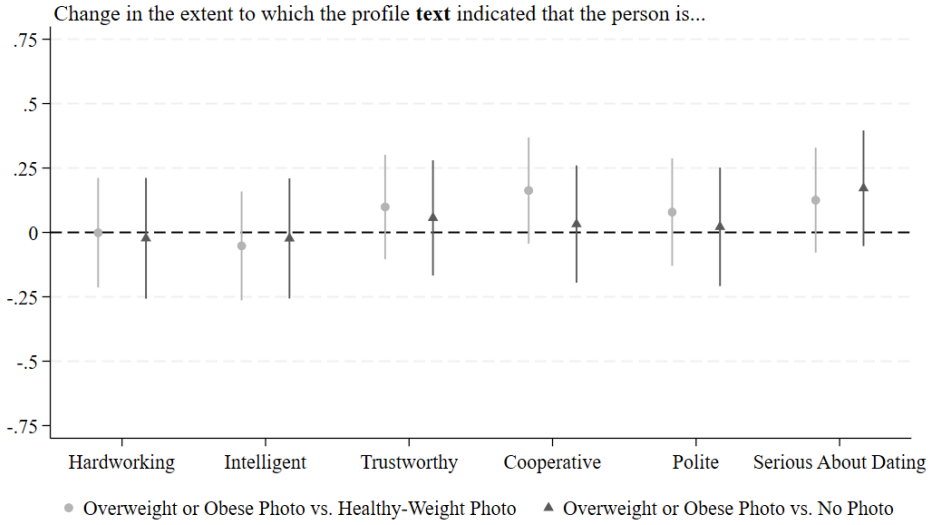


Note: The figure plots the results obtained from estimating equation (1) where the outcomes of interest measure the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person referenced in the dating profile was hardworking, intelligent, trustworthy, cooperative, polite, and serious about dating (ranging from 1–5). The light grey circles plot the estimates comparing the scores for profiles that had overweight or obese profile photos to profiles that displayed healthy-weight photos. The dark grey triangles plot the estimates obtained by comparing the scores for profiles that had overweight or obese profile photos to profiles that did not include profile photos. The corresponding vertical lines denote the 95-percent confidence intervals. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

**Figure 8: Male Participants Penalized the Dating Profile Text When the Profile Photos Depicted an Overweight or Obese Person**



**(A) Male Participants**



**(B) Non-Male Participants**

Note: The figure plots the results obtained from estimating equation (1) where the outcomes of interest measure the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person referenced in the dating profile was hardworking, intelligent, trustworthy, cooperative, polite, and serious about dating (ranging from 1–5). The light grey circles plot the estimates comparing the scores for profiles that had overweight or obese profile photos to profiles that displayed healthy-weight photos. The dark grey triangles plot the estimates obtained by comparing the scores for profiles that had overweight or obese profile photos to profiles that did not include profile photos. The corresponding vertical lines denote the 95-percent confidence intervals. Panel A limits the sample to male participants, and Panel B limits the sample to non-male participants. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

## 7. Tables

**Table 1: Overall Scores Awarded to Each Profile by Body Type**

(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)		(6)	
Female Profiles						Male Profile					
No.	Healthy Weight	Overweight	Obese	No.	Healthy Weight	Overweight	Obese	No.	Healthy Weight	Overweight	Obese
1.	7.391 (1.574)	6.867 (1.584)	5.486 (1.897)	9.	5.689 (2.210)	5.366 (2.087)	5.439 (2.095)				
2.	7.518 (1.489)	6.768 (1.834)	6.154 (2.087)	10.	6.275 (2.029)	5.769 (1.786)	4.232 (1.889)				
3.	7.133 (1.647)	6.102 (1.844)	4.918 (2.199)	11.	6.902 (1.659)	6.101 (2.173)	5.885 (2.031)				
4.	7.065 (1.920)	6.814 (1.839)	5.333 (2.220)	12.	6.160 (2.107)	5.541 (2.044)	4.786 (2.179)				
5.	6.480 (1.597)	5.748 (2.005)	4.950 (2.147)	13.	6.850 (1.733)	5.757 (2.065)	5.523 (2.157)				
6.	6.758 (2.041)	5.285 (2.205)	5.591 (2.248)	14.	6.126 (2.059)	5.280 (1.954)	4.819 (2.067)				
7.	6.265 (1.897)	5.522 (1.928)	4.256 (1.953)	15.	6.272 (1.806)	5.519 (1.921)	5.211 (2.109)				
8.	6.740 (1.945)	6.109 (2.161)	5.133 (2.177)	16.	5.936 (2.011)	4.295 (1.956)	3.779 (2.016)				

Note: The table reports the sample means and standard deviations (in parentheses).

**Table 2: Dating Profiles Displaying Excess Bodyweight Are Penalized Across All Dimensions**

	Overall Profile Score		Profile Photo Score		Profile Text Score	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>						
Heavier Photo	-1.112*** (0.069)	-1.122*** (0.069)	-1.618*** (0.070)	-1.632*** (0.070)	-0.381*** (0.070)	-0.388*** (0.070)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>						
Overweight Photo	-0.775*** (0.085)	-0.774*** (0.085)	-1.135*** (0.088)	-1.138*** (0.088)	-0.275*** (0.083)	-0.274*** (0.083)
Obese Photo	-1.491*** (0.082)	-1.510*** (0.082)	-2.197*** (0.083)	-2.223*** (0.083)	-0.489*** (0.081)	-0.502*** (0.081)
Control Mean	6.607	6.607	7.129	7.129	6.064	6.064
Covariates?		Y		Y		Y
Observations	5,224	5,224	5,224	5,224	5,224	5,224

Note: The dependent variable in columns 1 and 2 is the score the participant assigned to the overall profile, the dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 is the score the participant assigned to the profile photo, and the dependent variable in columns 5 and 6 is the score the participant assigned to the profile text. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). In Panel A, the independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo. In Panel B, the independent variables of interest are separate indicators for whether the participant viewed the overweight version of the profile photo or the obese version of the profile photo. Columns 1, 3, and 5 include profile-by-occupation fixed effects, so that the comparison is between participants who viewed identical text profiles with variation in bodyweight. Columns 2, 4, and 6 augment this specification with demographic covariates. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Table 3: Participants Who Reported Being Overweight or Obese Imposed a Smaller Penalty and Male Participants Imposed a Larger Penalty**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Outcome →	Overall Profile Score	Profile Photo Score	Profile Text Score
<b>Panel A: Heterogeneity by Participants' Self-Described Body Type</b>			
Heavier Photo	-1.349*** (0.095)	-1.876*** (0.096)	-0.515*** (0.095)
Heavier Photo × Overweight/Obese	0.487*** (0.139)	0.522*** (0.140)	0.276** (0.141)
<b>Panel B: Heterogeneity by Participants' Gender</b>			
Heavier Photo	-0.921*** (0.096)	-1.487*** (0.098)	-0.275*** (0.098)
Heavier Photo × Male	-0.415*** (0.138)	-0.297** (0.139)	-0.233* (0.140)
<b>Panel C: Heterogeneity by Participants' Race/Ethnicity</b>			
Heavier Photo	-1.290*** (0.187)	-1.897*** (0.191)	-0.371** (0.188)
Heavier Photo × Hispanic	0.025 (0.250)	0.106 (0.253)	-0.172 (0.252)
Heavier Photo × Black	0.380 (0.255)	0.596** (0.258)	-0.100 (0.257)
Heavier Photo × White	0.197 (0.210)	0.283 (0.213)	0.056 (0.211)
Control Mean	6.607	7.129	6.064
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y
Observations	5,224	5,224	5,224

Note: The dependent variable in column 1 is the score the participant assigned to the overall profile, the dependent variable in column 2 is the score the participant assigned to the profile photo, and the dependent variable in column 3 is the score the participant assigned to the profile text. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The independent variables of interest are an indicator for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo, as well as the interaction between this indicator and an indicator for the participant's demographic characteristic. In Panel A, the interaction indicates whether the participant was self-described as being overweight or obese. In Panel B, the interaction is an indicator for whether the participant identified as a man. In Panel C, the interaction terms are indicators for whether the participant identified as Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, or non-Hispanic white. Panels A and B were pre-registered, and Panel C is exploratory analysis. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Table 4: Dating Profiles with Higher- and Lower-Earning Occupations Were Similarly Penalized for Displaying Excess Bodyweight**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Outcome →	Overall Profile Score			Profile Photo Score			Profile Text Score		
Participants →	All	Male	Non-Male	All	Male	Non-Male	All	Male	Non-Male
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>									
Heavier Photo	-1.111*** (0.099)	-1.264*** (0.140)	-0.937*** (0.141)	-1.530*** (0.100)	-1.645*** (0.142)	-1.417*** (0.140)	-0.457*** (0.100)	-0.475*** (0.141)	-0.428*** (0.142)
Heavier Photo × High-Earning Profile	-0.043 (0.138)	-0.136 (0.196)	-0.014 (0.196)	-0.209 (0.139)	-0.296 (0.199)	-0.157 (0.196)	0.113 (0.140)	-0.100 (0.199)	0.264 (0.198)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>									
Overweight Photo	-0.811*** (0.121)	-0.864*** (0.172)	-0.758*** (0.171)	-1.066*** (0.124)	-1.082*** (0.178)	-1.068*** (0.174)	-0.408*** (0.118)	-0.357** (0.167)	-0.464*** (0.168)
Overweight Photo × High-Earning Profile	0.047 (0.161)	-0.084 (0.226)	0.138 (0.229)	-0.131 (0.161)	-0.218 (0.228)	-0.074 (0.229)	0.237 (0.163)	-0.058 (0.231)	0.495** (0.231)
Obese Photo	-1.467*** (0.117)	-1.770*** (0.168)	-1.147*** (0.166)	-2.097*** (0.119)	-2.373*** (0.172)	-1.834*** (0.167)	-0.517*** (0.117)	-0.609*** (0.166)	-0.404** (0.165)
Obese Photo × High-Earning Profile	-0.113 (0.164)	-0.116 (0.234)	-0.166 (0.230)	-0.252 (0.168)	-0.273 (0.242)	-0.240 (0.234)	-0.001 (0.162)	-0.121 (0.231)	0.044 (0.228)
Control Mean	6.607	6.693	6.529	7.129	7.275	6.996	6.064	6.094	6.035
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	5,224	2,568	2,656	5,224	2,568	2,656	5,224	2,568	2,656

Note: The dependent variable in columns 1–3 is the score the participant assigned to the overall profile, in columns 4–6 the score assigned to the photo, and in columns 7–9 the score assigned to the text. The estimates are obtained via equation (2). In Panel A, the independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant viewed an overweight/obese version of the profile photo, as well as the interaction of this variable with an indicator for whether the profile reported the higher-earning occupation. In Panel B, the independent variables separately identify those who viewed the overweight and obese versions of the photos. Columns 1, 4, and 7 examine the full sample. Columns 2, 5, and 8 limit the sample to male participants. Columns 3, 6, and 9 limit the sample to female and non-binary participants. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Table 5: Participants Who Saw Profiles Displaying Excess Bodyweight Perceived the Profile Text as Less Favorably Describing the Person's Personality Traits**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Participants →	All		Male		Non-Male	
Control Group →	Healthy-Weight Photos	No Photos	Healthy-Weight Photos	No Photos	Healthy-Weight Photos	No Photos
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>						
Heavier Photo	-0.084 (0.198)	-0.416** (0.208)	-0.815** (0.317)	-1.027*** (0.316)	0.408 (0.259)	0.233 (0.286)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>						
Overweight Photo	0.042 (0.228)	-0.306 (0.238)	-0.700* (0.365)	-0.888** (0.364)	0.519* (0.298)	0.346 (0.322)
Obese Photo	-0.221 (0.233)	-0.541** (0.242)	-0.959** (0.378)	-1.208*** (0.377)	0.292 (0.300)	0.112 (0.324)
Control Mean?	19.575	19.849	19.863	20.199	19.382	19.548
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	2,232	2,179	888	911	1,344	1,268

Note: The dependent variable is an index constructed by summing the scores participants gave for the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. Each personality trait was scored between 1 and 5, so the index ranges from 6 to 30. In Panel A, the independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo. In Panel B, the independent variables of interest are separate indicators for whether the participant viewed the overweight version of the profile photo or the obese version of the profile photo. The control group in the odd-numbered columns includes participants who viewed healthy-weight photos. The control group in even-numbered columns includes only participants who saw the profile text without a profile photo. Columns 1 and 2 examine all participants, columns 3 and 4 limit the sample to male participants, and columns 5 and 6 limit the sample to non-male (i.e., female and non-binary/third-gender participants). The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

# Appendix A: Survey

## **Online Survey Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled "Dating Profile Evaluation." This study is being done by Dr. Brandyn Churchill from American University. You were selected to participate in the study because you are an active member of the Prolific.com community.

## **Why are we doing this research study?**

The purpose of this research study is to understand how people evaluate online dating profiles. Anybody who is at least 20-40-years-old, single, attracted to men (women), and part of the Prolific.com community can participate in this study.

## **What will I be asked to do, and how much time will it take?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. You will then be asked to evaluate eight (8) dating profiles. These are not real dating profiles. You will be asked to evaluate the profile photos, the profile text biographies, and the overall profile. It will take you approximately 10 minutes.

## **Will being in this research help me in any way?**

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, your participation in the study may help to advance the research goal.

## **What are my risks of being in the research study?**

The research team believes there are minimal risks associated with this research study. However, a risk of breach of confidentiality always exists, and the research team has taken steps to minimize the risk as outlined in the section below.

## **How will my personal information be protected?**

To the best of the research team's ability, your answers to this study will remain confidential. The research team will minimize any risks by removing your Prolific.com ID from the dataset once all payments have been confirmed.

## **Will I be given any money or other compensation for being in this research study?**

You will receive \$4 for completing this study. If you choose to exit the survey before it is completed, you will forfeit the entire payment, and we will have access to the data that you provided until the point of your exit.

## **What happens if I say yes, but then I change my mind later?**

You do not have to participate in this study, if you do not want to participate. If you agree to be in the study but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences if you decide that you do not want to participate.

## **Who can I talk to if I have questions?**

If you have questions about this project or you encounter a research-related problem, you may contact Dr. Brandyn Churchill (bchurchill@american.edu). If you have any questions concerning

your rights as a research subject, you may contact American University's Institutional Review Board at 202-885-3447 or [irb@american.edu](mailto:irb@american.edu).

By clicking "I agree" below, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study. You may print a copy of this page for your records.

---

- I agree
- I do not wish to participate

---

**If participants select that they do not wish to participate**

You chose not to participate in this study. You will not receive any payment from us. Thank you.

---

**If participants select that they do wish to participate**

1. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary / third gender
  - Prefer not to say
  
2. How old are you?
  - [Text entry]
  
3. What group best describes your race?
  - American Indian / Aleut / Eskimo
  - Asian or Pacific Islander
  - Black
  - White
  - Other [Text entry]
  - Prefer not to say
  
4. Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to say
  
5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
  - Attended but did not finish high school
  - High school graduate
  - Attended college but did not receive a degree
  - Completed a four-year college degree (e.g., BA/BS)
  - Post-graduate education (e.g., MA, MS, JD, MD, PhD, etc.)

---

**Page Break**

6. How tall are you?
  - Feet: [text entry]
  - Inches: [text entry]
  
7. What do you weigh in pounds?
  - [text box entry]
  
8. How would you describe your body?
  - Underweight
  - Healthy Weight
  - Overweight
  - Obese
  - Prefer not to respond

---

**Page Break**

9. Are you attracted to men?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to respond

---

**If participants do not respond that they are attracted to men (women)**

This study is for individuals who are attracted to men (women). You did not respond that you are attracted to men (women). You will not receive any payment from us. Thank you.

---

10. Which of the following best represents how you think about yourself?
  - Heterosexual / Straight
  - Gay or Lesbian
  - Bisexual
  - Something else
  - Prefer not to respond
  
11. What is your current relationship status?
  - Single
  - In a relationship, but not married
  - Married
  - Prefer not to respond

---

**If participants select that they are not single**

This study is for individuals who are single. You did not respond that you are single. You will not receive any payment from us. Thank you.

---

**Page Break**

12. How frequently do you consume alcohol?

- I never consume alcohol
- A few times per week
- A few times per month
- A few times per year
- Prefer not to respond

13. How frequently do you use tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, smokeless tobacco)?

Do not include electronic cigarettes or vapes.

- I never use tobacco products
- A few times per week
- A few times per month
- A few times per year
- Prefer not to respond

14. How frequently do you use electronic cigarettes (also known as e-cigarettes or vapes)?

- I never use electronic cigarettes
- A few times per week
- A few times per month
- A few times per year
- Prefer not to respond

---

**Page Break**

**Dating Profiles. Randomized order. Randomized profile variant.**

---

**Page Break**

Thank you for completing this session. Your validation code is \_\_\_\_\_.

To receive payment for your participation, please go back to the Prolific task page and enter the validation code. As soon as we verify that your Prolific ID and the validation code are matched, your payment will be distributed to you.

# Appendix B: Profiles

## Appendix Figure B1: Alicia Profiles



**Alicia 35**  
Orthodontist

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



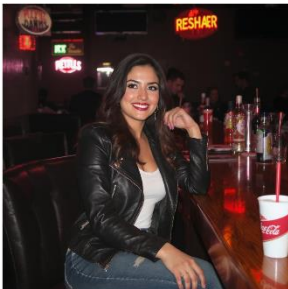
**Alicia 35**  
Orthodontist

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Alicia 35**  
Orthodontist

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Alicia 35**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Alicia 35**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Alicia 35**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.

## Appendix Figure B2: Ashley Profiles



**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a nurse so you know I'm good with kids.



**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a nurse so you know I'm good with kids.

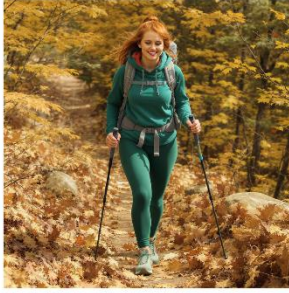


**Ashley 32**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a nurse so you know I'm good with kids.

## Appendix Figure B3: Alicia Profiles



**Alicia 33**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Alicia 33**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Alicia 33**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Alicia 33**  
Waitress

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Alicia 33**  
Waitress

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Alicia 33**  
Waitress

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.

## Appendix Figure B4: Felicity Profiles



**Felicity 30**  
Attorney

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Felicity 30**  
Attorney

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Felicity 30**  
Attorney

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Felicity 30**  
Preschool Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Felicity 30**  
Preschool Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Felicity 30**  
Preschool Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.

## Appendix Figure B5: Hannah Profiles



**Hannah 35**  
Strategy Consultant

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state



**Hannah 35**  
Strategy Consultant

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state



**Hannah 35**  
Strategy Consultant

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state



**Hannah 35**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state



**Hannah 35**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state



**Hannah 35**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

Two Truths and a Lie

1. I have a twin
2. I am colorblind
3. I've visited every state

## Appendix Figure B6: Kendra Profiles



**Kendra 33**  
Software Engineer

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Kendra 33**  
Software Engineer

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Kendra 33**  
Software Engineer

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Kendra 33**  
Cashier

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Kendra 33**  
Cashier

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Kendra 33**  
Cashier

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)

## Appendix Figure B7: Mira Profiles



**Mira 32**  
Cardiologist

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Mira 32**  
Cardiologist

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Mira 32**  
Cardiologist

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Mira 32**  
Barista

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Mira 32**  
Barista

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Mira 32**  
Barista

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast

## Appendix Figure B8: Shelby Profiles



Shelby 31

Lawyer by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.



Shelby 31

Lawyer by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.



Shelby 31

Lawyer by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.



Shelby 31

Teacher by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.



Shelby 31

Teacher by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.



Shelby 31

Teacher by day, musician by night.

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself.

## Appendix Figure B9: Chris Profiles



Chris 35

Lawyer by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself



Chris 35

Lawyer by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself



Chris 35

Lawyer by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself



Chris 35

Barista by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself



Chris 35

Barista by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself



Chris 35

Barista by day, musician by night

If you can't handle me at my worst, I respect you for setting healthy boundaries for yourself

**Appendix Figure B10: Hector Profiles**



**Hector 36**  
M&A Attorney

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state



**Hector 36**  
M&A Attorney

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state



**Hector 36**  
M&A Attorney

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state



**Hector 36**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state



**Hector 36**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state



**Hector 36**  
Bartender

Looking for a partner who values ambition and supports dreams

- Two Truths and a Lie
1. I have a twin
  2. I am colorblind
  3. I've visited every state

## Appendix Figure B11: Jaden Profiles



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a pediatrician so you know I'm good with kids.



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a middle school teacher so you know I'm good with kids.



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a middle school teacher so you know I'm good with kids.



**Jaden 36**

Family-oriented and always up for creating memories with loved ones. Hoping to build a future filled with laughter and love.

I'm a middle school teacher so you know I'm good with kids.

## Appendix Figure B12: Mark Profiles



**Mark 35**  
Radiologist

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Mark 35**  
Radiologist

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Mark 35**  
Radiologist

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Mark 35**  
Waiter

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Mark 35**  
Waiter

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)



**Mark 35**  
Waiter

I'm 90% jokes and 10% bad decisions.  
Swipe right if you can handle both.

Fan of live music and black coffee.

Libra (though idk what that means)

**Appendix Figure B13: Mason Profiles**



**Mason 30**  
Software Engineer

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Mason 30**  
Software Engineer

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Mason 30**  
Software Engineer

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Mason 30**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Mason 30**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.



**Mason 30**  
Bartender

Passionate about my career and always up for a challenge. Seeking someone with ambition and a sense of humor to conquer the world together.

## Appendix Figure B14: Ravi Profiles



**Ravi 31**  
Management Consultant

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Ravi 31**  
Management Consultant

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Ravi 31**  
Management Consultant

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Ravi 31**  
Music Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Ravi 31**  
Music Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.



**Ravi 31**  
Music Teacher

On a mission to find the best taco in town. Join me on this culinary adventure, and let's explore the local food scene together.

Part-time artist, full-time daydreamer.

## Appendix Figure B15: Wei Profiles



**Wei 31**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Wei 31**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Wei 31**  
Financial Analyst

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Wei 31**  
Line Cook

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Wei 31**  
Line Cook

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.



**Wei 31**  
Line Cook

Outdoor enthusiast with a passion for hiking, camping, and seeking the next adrenaline rush. Looking for someone to explore the world with.

Tell me your favorite vacation spot.

## Appendix Figure B16: Will Profiles



**Will 33**  
Attorney

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Will 33**  
Attorney

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Will 33**  
Attorney

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Will 33**  
Mechanic

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Will 33**  
Mechanic

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast



**Will 33**  
Mechanic

Honest to a fault  
Lover of yacht rock  
Cocktail enthusiast

# Appendix C: Figures and Tables

**Appendix Figure C1: The Sliders That Participants Used to Score the Online Dating Profiles**

How would you score the components of this profile? Please score the profile photo on its own, the profile text on its own, and then also score the profile as a whole. 1 is the lowest score and 10 is the highest score.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Photo Evaluation

○

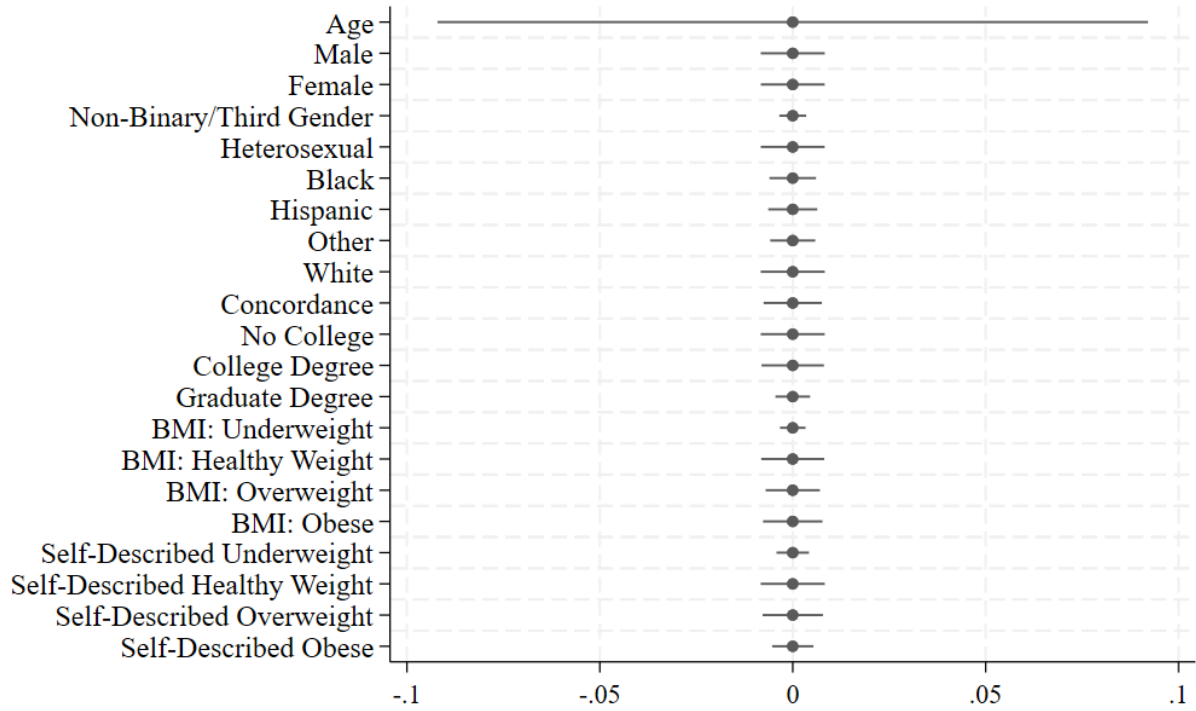
Text Evaluation

○

Overall Evaluation

○

**Appendix Figure C2: Balance Test Results Excluding the Profile-by-Occupation Fixed Effects**



Note: The figure plots the estimates from a regression of the variable shown on the vertical axis on the treatment indicator for whether the participant was shown an overweight or obese profile photo. While the variable “Age” takes on values between 20 and 40, the remaining variables are indicators. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

### Appendix Figure C3: The Sliders That Participants Used to Score Personality Traits

Please evaluate the **text** of this dating profile. To what extent does the profile text indicate that the person is...

Not at all 1      A Little Bit 2      Somewhat 3      A Good Bit 4      Completely 5

Serious about dating



Hard working



Trustworthy



Intelligent



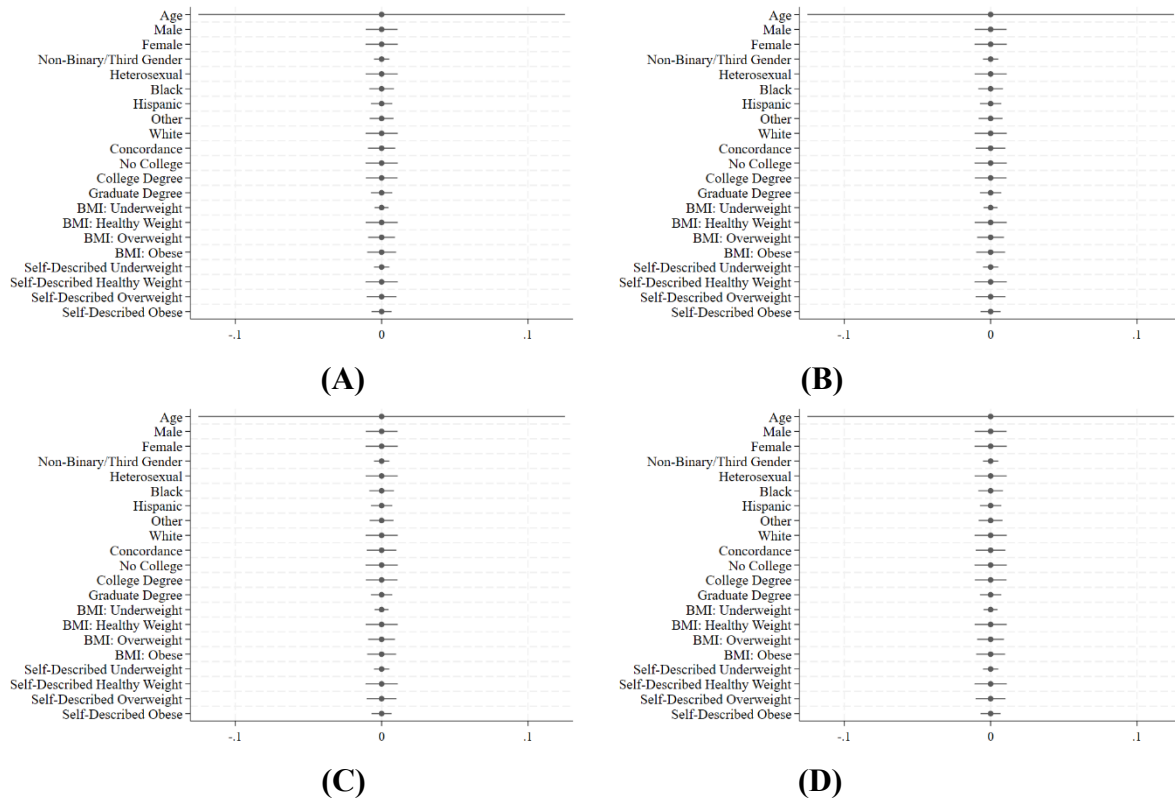
Cooperative



Polite



### Appendix Figure C4: Balance Test Results for the Second Experiment



Note: The panels plot the estimates from a regression of the variable shown on the vertical axis on the treatment indicator for whether the participant was shown an overweight or obese profile photo. Panels A and B include profile-by-occupation fixed effects. Panels C and D exclude these fixed effects. The control group in Panels A and C includes participants who saw healthy-weight photos, and the control group in Panels B and D includes participants who did not see any photos. While the variable “Age” takes on values between 20 and 40, the remaining variables are indicators taking on values of zero or one.

**Appendix Table C1: Profile Names and Occupations**

	(1)	(2)	(2)	(3)
Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Higher-Earning Job	Lower-Earning Job
1. Alicia	Woman	Hispanic	Orthodontist	Bartender
2. Ashley	Woman	White	Pediatrician	Nurse
3. Alicia	Woman	White	Financial Analyst	Waitress
4. Felicity	Woman	Black	Attorney	Preschool Teacher
5. Hannah	Woman	White	Strategy Consultant	Bartender
6. Kendra	Woman	Black	Software Engineer	Cashier
7. Mira	Woman	Asian	Cardiologist	Barista
8. Shelby	Woman	Asian	Lawyer	Teacher
9. Chris	Man	White	Lawyer	Barista
10. Hector	Man	Hispanic	M&A Attorney	Bartender
11. Jaden	Man	Black	Pediatrician	Middle School Teacher
12. Mark	Man	White	Radiologist	Waiter
13. Mason	Man	Black	Software Engineer	Bartender
14. Ravi	Man	Asian	Management Consultant	Music Teacher
15. Wei	Man	Asian	Financial Analyst	Line Cook
16. Will	Man	White	Attorney	Mechanic

**Appendix Table C2: The Number of Participants Scoring Each Profile Variant**

Profile →	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Healthy Weight		Overweight		Obese	
	Low-Earning	High-Earning	Low-Earning	High-Earning	Low-Earning	High-Earning
1. Alicia	65	45	50	63	48	57
2. Ashley	58	54	56	43	54	63
3. Alicia	48	50	60	48	58	64
4. Felicity	48	60	48	49	57	66
5. Hannah	51	51	50	57	53	66
6. Kendra	47	48	61	62	61	49
7. Mira	46	52	54	59	53	64
8. Shelby	65	58	49	43	58	55
9. Chris	49	63	51	49	59	54
10. Hector	55	65	59	48	52	46
11. Jaden	61	60	48	61	47	48
12. Mark	44	62	60	47	61	51
13. Mason	50	62	52	51	58	52
14. Ravi	59	50	44	56	53	63
15. Wei	58	55	49	55	52	56
16. Will	54	55	55	48	46	67

**Appendix Table C3: Summary Statistics of Control Variables**

	(1)	(2)
	Mean	SD
Age	30.193	5.544
Male	0.492	0.500
Female	0.462	0.499
Non-Binary / Third Gender	0.046	0.209
Straight	0.542	0.498
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
Hispanic	0.178	0.382
Non-Hispanic Black	0.156	0.363
Non-Hispanic White	0.522	0.500
Other	0.144	0.351
Racial Concordance	0.293	0.455
<u>Educational Attainment</u>		
No College Degree	0.533	0.499
College Degree	0.387	0.487
Graduate Degree	0.080	0.271
<u>Body Mass Index Category</u>		
Underweight	0.041	0.199
Healthy Weight	0.410	0.492
Overweight	0.234	0.424
Obese	0.314	0.464
<u>Self-Described Body Type</u>		
Underweight	0.069	0.253
Healthy Weight	0.482	0.500
Overweight	0.331	0.470
Obese	0.118	0.323

**Appendix Table C4: Heterogeneity by Body Mass Index Category,  
Body Image, and Educational Attainment**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Outcome →	Overall Profile Score	Profile Photo Score	Profile Text Score
<b>Panel A: Heterogeneity by Participants' Body Mass Index Category</b>			
Heavier Photo	-1.372*** (0.105)	-1.942*** (0.107)	-0.538*** (0.106)
Heavier Photo × Overweight/Obese	0.440*** (0.140)	0.543*** (0.141)	0.267* (0.141)
<b>Panel B: Heterogeneity by Participants' Body Image</b>			
Heavier Photo	-1.214*** (0.089)	-1.709*** (0.089)	-0.414*** (0.090)
Heavier Photo × Lenient Body Image	0.199 (0.147)	0.198 (0.148)	0.030 (0.149)
Heavier Photo × Harsh Body Image	0.617* (0.365)	0.251 (0.370)	0.442 (0.365)
<b>Panel C: Heterogeneity by Participants' Educational Attainment</b>			
Heavier Photo	-1.120*** (0.112)	-1.738*** (0.113)	-0.317*** (0.113)
Heavier Photo × College Degree	-0.002 (0.142)	0.170 (0.143)	-0.115 (0.144)
Control Mean	6.607	7.129	6.064
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y
Observations	5,224	5,224	5,224

Note: The dependent variable in columns 1 and 2 is the score the participant assigned to the overall profile, the dependent variable in columns 3 and 4 is the score the participant assigned to the profile photo, and the dependent variable in columns 5 and 6 is the score the participant assigned to the profile text. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The independent variables of interest are indicators for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo, as well as the interaction between this indicator and an indicator for the participant's demographic characteristic. In Panel A, the interaction indicates whether the participant reported height and weight that yielded a body mass index classified as being overweight or obese. In Panel B, the interaction terms are indicators for whether the participant held a lenient body image (self-described body type lighter than the BMI body type) or a harsh body image (self-described body type heavier than the BMI body type). In Panel C, the interaction indicates whether the participant reported having at least a college degree. The specification includes profile-by-occupation fixed effects and pre-specified demographic covariates, though Panel B replaces the BMI and self-described body type covariates with the body image indicators. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \* p < 0.10

**Appendix Table C5: Relationship Between the Excess Bodyweight Penalty and Occupation, Including Additional Interaction Terms Instead of Using Sample Stratifications**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Outcome →	Overall Profile Score	Profile Photo Score	Profile Text Score
Heavier Photo	-1.288*** (0.129)	-1.679*** (0.130)	-0.495*** (0.130)
Heavier Photo × Non-Male	0.140 (0.170)	0.021 (0.175)	0.309* (0.166)
Heavier Photo × High-Earning Profile	-0.119 (0.164)	-0.222 (0.165)	-0.047 (0.164)
Heavier Photo × Non-Male × High-Earning Profile	0.344** (0.163)	0.293* (0.164)	0.072 (0.163)
Control Mean	6.607	7.129	6.064
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y
Observations	5,224	5,224	5,224

Note: The dependent variable in column 1 is the score the participant assigned to the overall profile, the dependent variable in column 2 is the score the participant assigned to the profile photo, and the dependent variable in column 3 is the score the participant assigned to the profile text. The estimates are obtained via equation (2). The independent variables of interest are indicators for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo, as well as interactions between this indicator and whether the participant identified as non-male, whether the profile reported a higher-earning occupation, and the interaction of these latter two variables. The specification includes profile fixed effects and pre-specified demographic covariates. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Appendix Table C6: Relationship Between the Excess Bodyweight Penalty and Occupation,  
Excluding “Non-Binary / Third Gender” Participants**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Outcome →	Overall Profile Score			Profile Photo Score			Profile Text Score		
Participants →	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>									
Heavier Photo	-1.139*** (0.101)	-1.264*** (0.140)	-0.977*** (0.148)	-1.558*** (0.102)	-1.645*** (0.142)	-1.461*** (0.148)	-0.462*** (0.102)	-0.475*** (0.141)	-0.440*** (0.149)
Heavier Photo × High-Earning Profile	-0.056 (0.141)	-0.136 (0.196)	-0.045 (0.205)	-0.208 (0.142)	-0.296 (0.199)	-0.152 (0.205)	0.083 (0.143)	-0.100 (0.199)	0.214 (0.208)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>									
Overweight Photo	-0.833*** (0.124)	-0.864*** (0.172)	-0.797*** (0.180)	-1.087*** (0.127)	-1.082*** (0.178)	-1.113*** (0.183)	-0.410*** (0.121)	-0.357** (0.167)	-0.475*** (0.176)
Overweight Photo × High-Earning Profile	0.033 (0.164)	-0.084 (0.226)	0.120 (0.240)	-0.129 (0.165)	-0.218 (0.228)	-0.057 (0.239)	0.203 (0.167)	-0.058 (0.231)	0.453* (0.242)
Obese Photo	-1.507*** (0.120)	-1.770*** (0.168)	-1.192*** (0.175)	-2.140*** (0.122)	-2.373*** (0.172)	-1.887*** (0.175)	-0.525*** (0.120)	-0.609*** (0.166)	-0.417** (0.174)
Obese Photo × High-Earning Profile	-0.128 (0.168)	-0.116 (0.234)	-0.221 (0.243)	-0.254 (0.172)	-0.273 (0.242)	-0.259 (0.246)	-0.030 (0.166)	-0.121 (0.231)	-0.022 (0.241)
Control Mean	6.636	6.693	6.579	7.150	7.275	7.025	6.088	6.094	6.081
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	4,984	2,568	2,416	4,984	2,568	2,416	4,984	2,568	2,416

Note: The dependent variable in columns 1–3 is the overall profile score, in columns 4–6 is the profile photo score, and in columns 7–9 the profile text score. The estimates are obtained via equation (2). In Panel A, the independent variable of interest is an indicator for whether the participant viewed an overweight/obese version of the profile photo, as well as the interaction of this variable with an indicator for whether the profile reported the higher-earning occupation. In Panel B, the independent variables separately identify those who viewed the overweight and obese versions of the photos. Columns 1, 4, and 7 examine the full sample. Columns 2, 5, and 8 limit the sample to male participants. Columns 3, 6, and 9 limit the sample to female participants. The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\* p < 0.01, \*\* p < 0.05, \* p < 0.10

**Appendix Table C7: The Number of Participants Scoring  
the Text of Each Profile Variant in the Second Experiment**

Profile →	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Healthy Weight		Overweight		Obese		No Photo	
	Low-Earning	High-Earning	Low-Earning	High-Earning	Low-Earning	High-Earning	Low-Earning	High-Earning
1. Alicia	26	24	23	18	23	23	25	20
2. Ashley	32	23	20	27	19	16	31	14
3. Alicia	23	23	21	30	22	18	21	24
4. Felicity	29	29	25	18	21	15	28	17
5. Hannah	23	19	33	21	20	21	19	26
6. Kendra	21	28	21	20	25	22	24	21
7. Mira	35	20	21	21	26	14	21	24
8. Shelby	17	26	21	26	18	29	25	20
9. Chris	23	25	34	23	19	18	25	21
10. Hector	23	32	19	28	19	21	20	26
11. Jaden	14	25	29	20	26	28	22	24
12. Mark	25	19	29	21	23	25	21	25
13. Mason	25	26	23	17	27	24	22	24
14. Ravi	29	26	23	19	20	25	24	22
15. Wei	22	19	23	30	23	25	26	20
16. Will	24	26	25	30	17	20	20	26

**Appendix Table C8: The Relationship is Robust to Including Participants Who Viewed Healthy-Weight Photos and No Photos in the Same Sample**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Participants →	All	Male	Non-Male
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>			
Healthy-Weight Photo	-0.390* (0.232)	-0.253 (0.352)	-0.308 (0.315)
Heavier Photo	-0.447** (0.206)	-1.038*** (0.314)	0.150 (0.280)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>			
Healthy-Weight Photo	-0.393* (0.234)	-0.259 (0.360)	-0.307 (0.313)
Overweight Photo	-0.334 (0.236)	-0.897** (0.360)	0.261 (0.318)
Obese Photo	-0.576** (0.240)	-1.207*** (0.374)	0.035 (0.321)
Control Mean?	19.849	19.575	19.849
Covariates?	Y	Y	Y
Observations	2,960	1,736	1,224

Note: The dependent variable is an index constructed by summing the scores participants gave for the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. Each personality trait was scored between 1 and 5, so the index ranges from 6 to 30. In Panel A, the independent variables of interest are indicators for whether the participant viewed a healthy-weight version of the profile photo or an overweight or obese version of the profile photo. In Panel B, the independent variables of interest are separate indicators for whether the participant viewed the healthy-weight version, the overweight version, or the obese version of the profile photo. The control group includes only participants who saw the profile text without a profile photo. Column 1 examines all participants, column 2 limits the sample to male participants, and column 3 limits the sample to non-male (i.e., female and non-binary/third gender) participants. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Appendix Table C9: Male Participants Imposed a Larger Penalty in the Second Experiment Than Non-Male Participants**

	(1)	(2)
Control Group →	Healthy-Weight Photos	No Photos
<b>Panel A: Estimating the Relationship by General Body Type</b>		
Heavier Photo	0.357 (0.256)	0.123 (0.278)
Heavier Photo × Male	-1.112*** (0.405)	-1.210*** (0.412)
<b>Panel B: Estimating the Relationship by Granular Body Type</b>		
Overweight Photo	0.478 (0.295)	0.226 (0.315)
Obese Photo	0.229 (0.296)	0.015 (0.317)
Overweight Photo × Male	-1.087** (0.464)	-1.172** (0.470)
Obese Photo × Male	-1.158** (0.479)	-1.270*** (0.487)
Control Mean?	19.575	19.849
Covariates?	Y	Y
Observations	2,232	2,179

Note: The dependent variable is an index constructed by summing the scores participants gave for the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. Each personality trait was scored between 1 and 5, so the index ranges from 6 to 30. In Panel A, the independent variables of interest are indicators for whether the participant viewed an overweight or obese version of the profile photo and the interaction of this term with an indicator for being male. In Panel B, the independent variables of interest are separate indicators for whether the participant viewed the overweight version or the obese version of the profile photo, as well as the interaction of these variables with an indicator for being male. The control group in column 1 includes participants who only saw the healthy-weight versions of the photos, and the control group in column 2 includes participants who did not see any photo. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

**Appendix Table C10: The Penalty Was Monotonically Related to the Degree of Excess Bodyweight**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Outcome →	Hardworking	Intelligent	Trustworthy	Cooperative	Polite	Serious About Dating
<b>Panel A: Control Group Includes Participants Who Saw Healthy-Weight Photos</b>						
Overweight Photo	-0.010 (0.096)	-0.073 (0.096)	0.018 (0.091)	0.076 (0.092)	-0.026 (0.093)	0.058 (0.091)
Obese Photo	-0.170* (0.097)	-0.166* (0.097)	0.042 (0.093)	0.026 (0.094)	-0.003 (0.096)	0.050 (0.093)
Control Mean?	3.469	3.466	3.099	3.151	3.298	3.092
Observations	2,232	2,232	2,232	2,232	2,232	2,232
<b>Panel B: Control Group Includes Participants Who Did Not See Any Photos</b>						
Overweight Photo	-0.124 (0.100)	-0.084 (0.099)	-0.042 (0.095)	-0.060 (0.097)	-0.067 (0.097)	0.070 (0.095)
Obese Photo	-0.278*** (0.101)	-0.169* (0.101)	-0.009 (0.097)	-0.109 (0.098)	-0.038 (0.100)	0.062 (0.097)
Control Mean?	3.559	3.438	3.141	3.288	3.321	3.100
Observations	2,179	2,179	2,179	2,179	2,179	2,179

Note: The dependent variables are the scores participants gave to the extent to which the profile text indicated that the person was (i) hardworking, (ii) intelligent, (iii) trustworthy, (iv) cooperative, (v) polite, and (vi) serious about dating. Each personality trait was scored between 1 and 5. The independent variables of interest are indicators for whether the participant viewed the overweight version of the profile photo or the obese version of the profile photo. The control group in Panel A includes participants who saw healthy-weight versions of the profile photos. The control group in Panel B includes participants who did not see any profile photos. The estimates are obtained via equation (1). The results are obtained from Poisson regression to model the count nature of the data, and the marginal effects are reported.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$