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“Did You Lose Weight? Love Your Shirt!” Cultural Differences Predict Approval of Selfie-Commenting on Body Shape vs. Trendiness

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INTRODUCTION

When posting selfies online, the only feedback users get on their posts is in the form of comments/likes, and this also represents the common “passive” user pattern for social media, in contrast with posting selfies or generating other types of original content. These interactions on social media may be shaped by personality traits/cultural values, and contribute to understanding about why an individual believes certain comments are appropriate public responses to people’s selfie posts. Research has shown that cultural values play a critical role in shaping our personality (Markus & Kitayama, 1998). For example, research has shown that countries scoring higher on individualism also demonstrate high narcissism (Foster, Campbell & Twenge, 2003).

Study Objectives: To examine whether personality traits and cultural orientations predict perceptions towards selfie-commenting on social media.

Hypothesis:

Due to predictions about the importance of hierarchies and power in Lebanese society (Hofstede, n.d.), we predicted site differences between Lebanon and the US among which traits/values predicted selfie-commenting attitudes. Some research assumes the United States should represent one homogenous culture (Hofstede, 1983), so we sought to test this assumption as well by examining more than one site in the US with reputations for cultural differences.

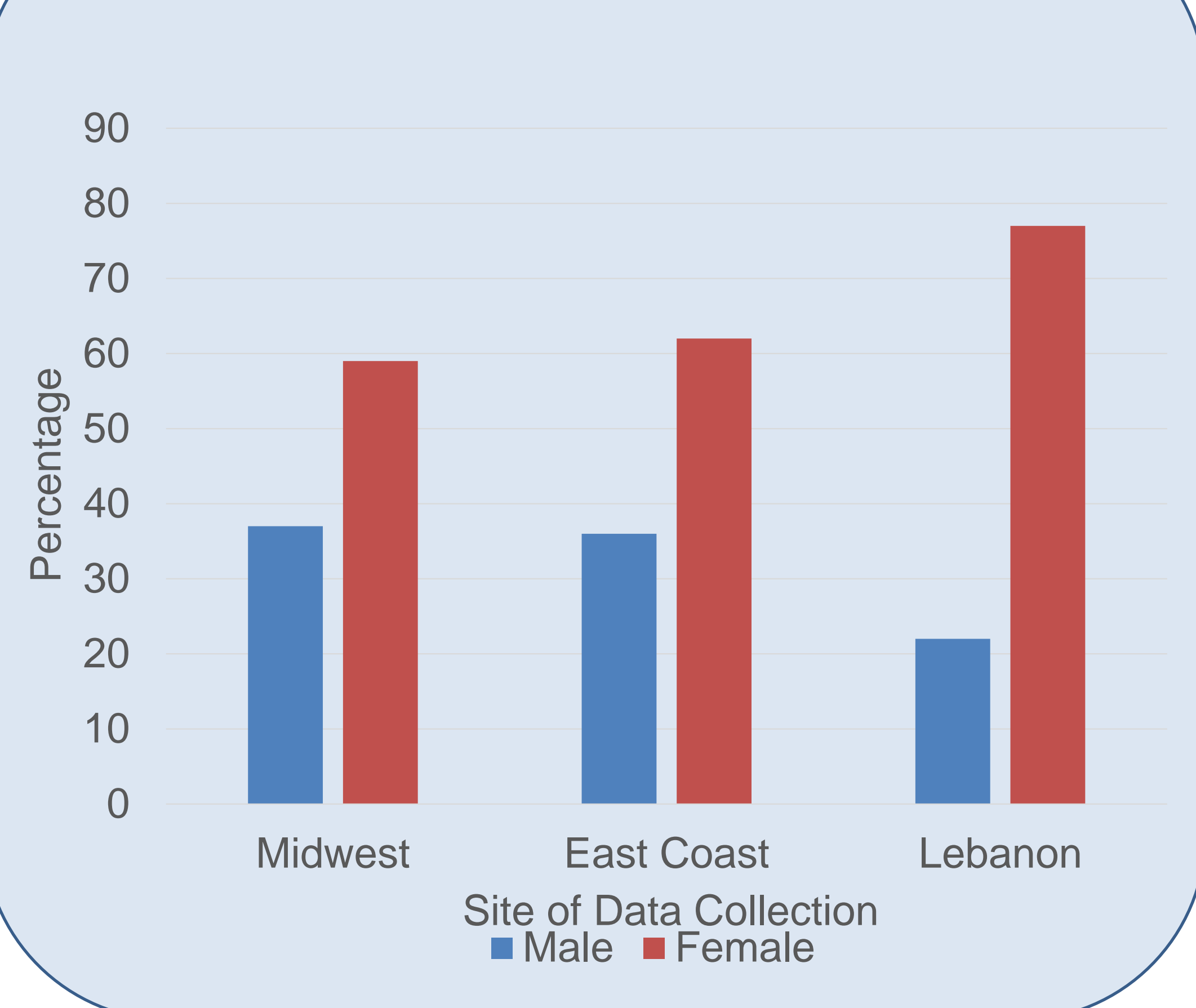
METHOD

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

767 college students were recruited from three regions.

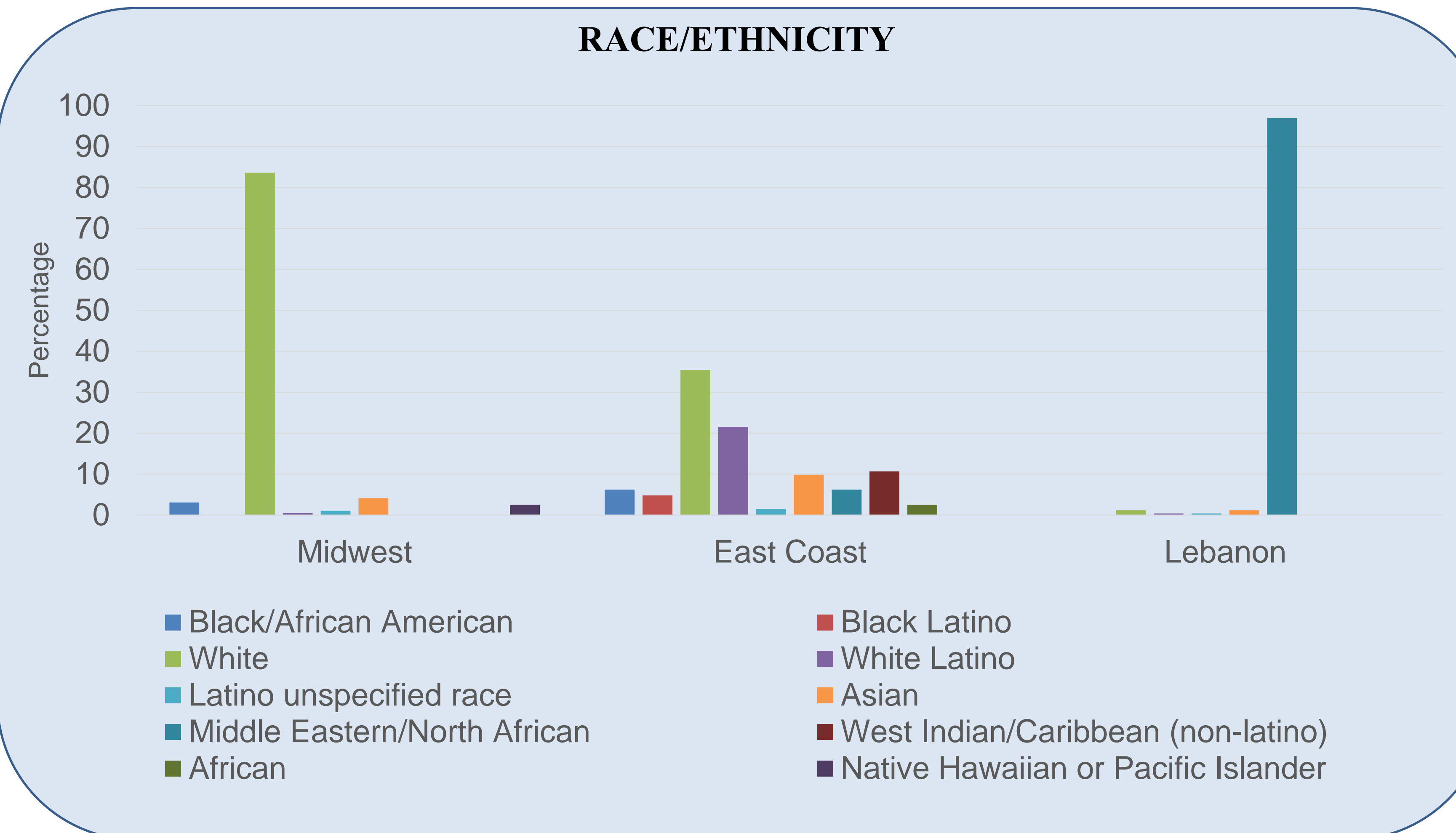
Data Collection Site	n	Age M(SD)
Midwest US	199	19.60 (3.0)
East Coast US	296	20.38 (3.0)
Lebanon	272	20.9 (4.29)

GENDER

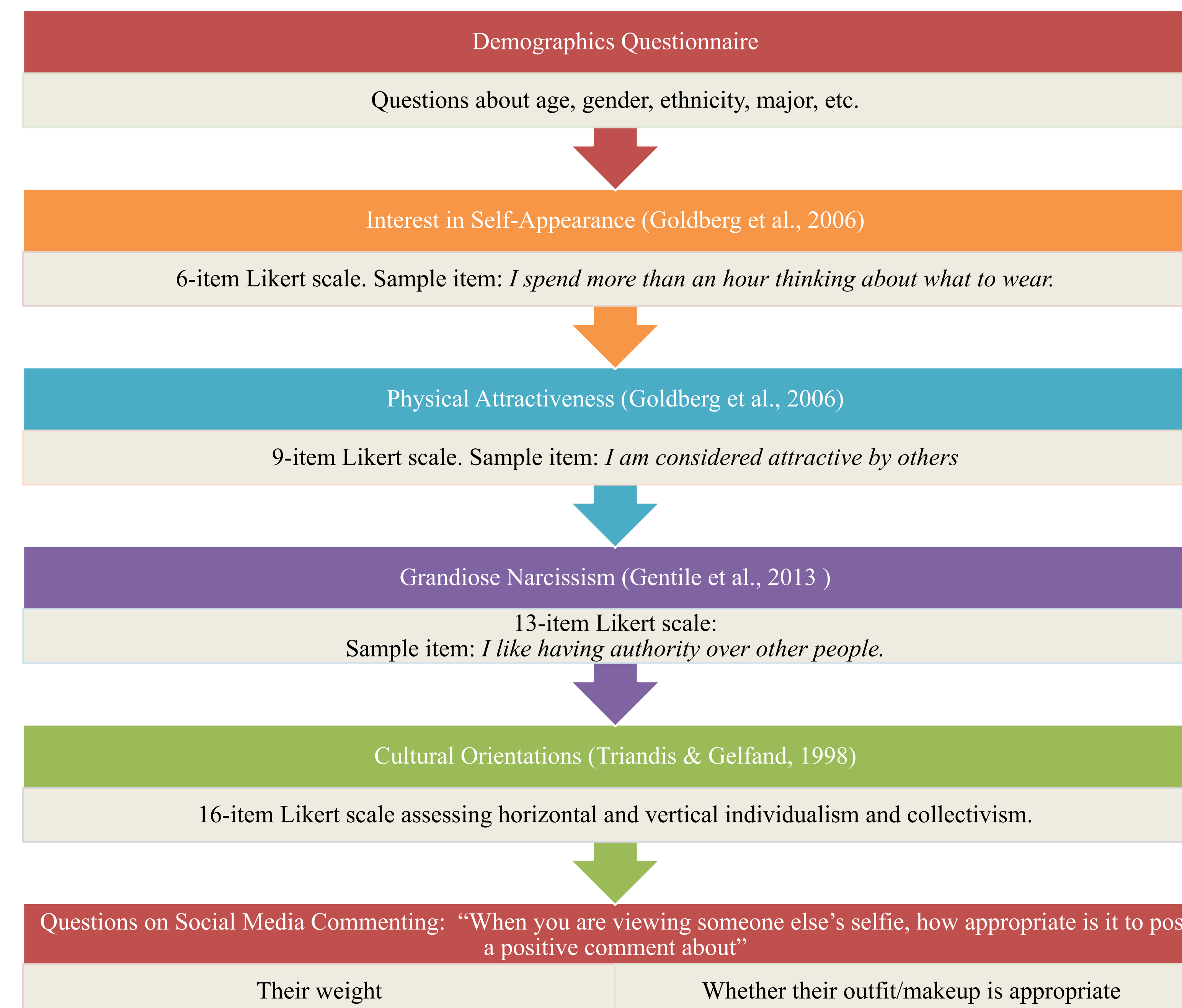


METHOD Continued

RACE/ETHNICITY



PROCEDURE



RESULTS

Two linear regressions used to explore demographics (e.g., gender), personality traits (interest in self-appearance, physical attractiveness; Goldberg, 2006), narcissism, (Gentile, 2013), and cultural orientations (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). These variables predicted:

- 1) User perceptions about the appropriateness of posting positive comments about another person’s weight, $R^2=.04$, $F(8,474)=2.30$, $p=.02$,
- 2) User perceptions about posting positive comments about another’s fashion choices, $R^2=.05$, $F(8,474)=3.20$, $p=.002$.

Predicting commenting on weight:

- Positive commenting on someone’s weight was only predicted by gender and cultural orientations.
- Men reported commenting on weight as more acceptable ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .02$)
- A Vertical cultural orientation also predicted weight commenting as more acceptable ($\beta = .12$, $p = .02$)

Predicting commenting on fashion sense:

- While not directly comparable, the pattern for commenting on a person’s fashion sense was predicted by one’s interest in fashion ($\beta = .14$, $p = .006$) and culture (horizontal: $\beta = .11$, $p = .02$).

Post-Hoc Analyses:

- Post-hoc analyses showed significant differences were between participants in the Midwest (Fashion: $M=1.98$, $SD=.77$; Weight: $M=3.09$, $SD=.80$) compared to participants in the Northeast (Fashion: $M=2.38$, $SD=.98$; Weight: $M=3.50$, $SD=.78$) and Lebanon (Fashion: $M=2.27$, $SD=.83$; Weight: $M=3.38$, $SD=.74$).
- Participants in the Midwest demonstrated the lowest acceptance towards commenting on both weight and fashion.

DISCUSSION

- Findings support prior research that selfies are used differently by **men and women**, likely because of **cultural expectations** surrounding the acceptable **appearance** parameters for men versus women.
- Our findings indicate that a primary motivation for the types of comments people leave in response to selfies is either a sense of **egalitarianism** or a value of establishing **social dominance**.
- Findings also suggest that relational behaviors in geographical **communities** differ significantly in their online behaviors, requiring more research and suggesting an mediating impact of **culture** on how new technologies are adopted into a community.
- Future work should qualitatively examine people’s understanding of selfie-posting and why they post selfies.
- Limitations: In this project, we asked participants about the appropriateness of *positive* commenting. Future work should also examine when and whether it is appropriate to provide negative comments on social media in relation to fashion sense and weight and compare that to in-person comments.

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