Introduction: The world is no longer a simple place for children to live and grow. It is filled with ethical, social and environmental pressures such as violence, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, tobacco usage, bullying and so on. One of the less spoken pressures is the issue of body image that can be resulted in destructive behaviors in a child such as eating disorders, malnutrition and drug abuse. Eighty percent of American girls start dieting as early as fourth grade submitting to social messages of who is acceptable and who is not. Many contributing factors are determinants of forming the body image in early childhood about age six. The strongest influence on a child’s satisfaction with his body is parental body image. This descriptive study examined the discrepancy between children's perceived versus actual body weight and explored their comfort level and satisfaction as it related to their body weight.

Methodology: Data were collected from a convenient sample totaling 219 children and adolescents ages 4 to 20 who participated in a Health Fair conducted in disadvantage section of Fresno, California. A short questionnaire was developed and a digital scale was used for weighing the children. Measures included Children's perceived and actual body weight, comfort level with weight, happiness and self-esteem.

Results: The participants profile consisted of 44.3% male, & 56.7% female with multiple ethnic background (16.9% Caucasian, 53.4% Latino, 22.4% African-American, 7.3% South East Asians and other). Overall 27% perceived themselves as heavy, 12% as thin, 39.3% as normal and 22% had no idea. Regardless of perceived or actual weight, 67% were happy with their weight, 17.4 were not and 15.5% did not know. Overall, 58% felt highly socially acceptable, 28.5% did not and 15% did not know. The level of feeling socially acceptable varied by Ethnicities: 66% of Latinos had the highest rate, followed by 54% of Caucasians and 49% of African American. There was no significant difference between the means of perceived (36.1 kg) and actual weight (36.7 kg).

Discussion and Conclusions Overall, the children's perceived weight was consistent with the actual. The 9-13 year olds were the happiest and their self esteem has not yet been distorted while the 17-20 group was catching up with the negative interfering factors of their body image. Sampling and lack of information regarding parents’ income & education are considered limitations of study. A refined follow up study is needed.

Keywords: Body Image, environmental pressures, weight perception, actual weight, happiness, self-esteem

Presentation: Oral