Hungry Men Prefer More Mature Women: A Field Test of the Environmental Security Hypothesis

Terry F. Pettijohn II Donald F. Sacco, Jr. Melissa Yerkes Mercyhurst College

Presented at the 17th Annual American Psychological Society Convention, Los Angeles, California, May 28, 2005

E-mail: tpettijohn@mercyhurst.edu

Introduction

- Ideals of beauty vary depending on culture and time. In cultures where women have limited wealth and financial opportunities, body fat is considered attractive (Anderson et al., 1992). In cultures with abundant resources and opportunities, men prefer thinner women (Furnham & Baguma, 1994). Recently, Nelson and Morrison (2005) conducted a series of creative studies in which they manipulated *individual* resource scarcity and measured ideal partner body weight preferences. Men who felt hungry or financially threatened expressed a relatively greater preference for heavier females compared to full or financially secure men.
- The current study extends these findings by considering preferences for ideal partner age, height, personality, and facial and body features in the context of the *Environmental Security Hypothesis*.

The Environmental Security Hypothesis

• Pettijohn & Tesser's (1999) Environmental Security Hypothesis is a context-dependent theory of attraction and preferences drawing on evolutionary theory and ecology. The theory suggests that when social and economic conditions are threatening, individuals will prefer others with more mature characteristics compared to non-threatening conditions because maturity is associated with the ability to handle threatening situations. Past archival research on American actress facial features (Pettijohn & Tesser, 1999), Playboy Playmate facial and body features (Pettijohn & Jungeberg, 2004), as well as experimental studies (Pettijohn & Tesser, in press) have supported this theory.

Predictions

- Consistent with the Environmental Security
 Hypothesis, we predicted that when heterosexual
 males are hungry (a physiological threat and
 reminder of resource scarcity), they would show a
 relatively greater preference for more mature ideal
 female partners compared to males who are not
 hungry (full after eating). Females were not expected
 to show a significant change in preference related to
 hunger state.
- Furthermore, when participants were primed with hunger, these preferences were predicted to become stronger.

Method

- Participants
 - 328 college students, 160 men and 168 women
- · Materials & Procedure
 - Before or after eating at the college dining hall, participants were asked
 - How hungry are you? (scale from 0-10)
 - Ideal partner relative age and relative height
 - Weight, personality, eye size (large or small), and body shape (waist-to-hip ratio) preference

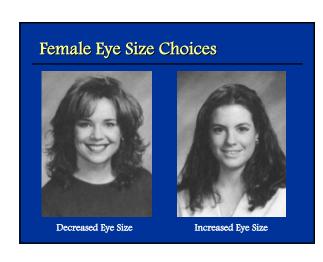
Weight Category Choices

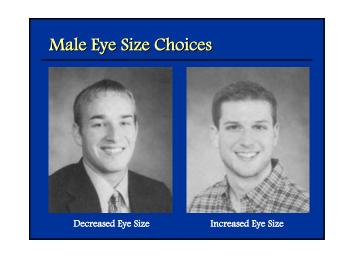
Male
Female
164 lbs.
165-169 lbs.
170-174 lbs.
175-179 lbs.
180-184 lbs.
185 lbs.
Female
115-119 lbs.
120-124 lbs.
125-129 lbs.
130-134 lbs.
130-134 lbs.

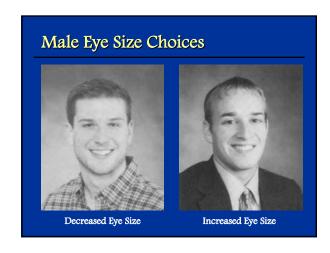
Personality Cluster Choices

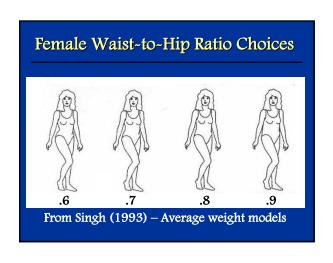
- · Warm, naïve, kind, agreeable
- Strong, mature, independent, competent

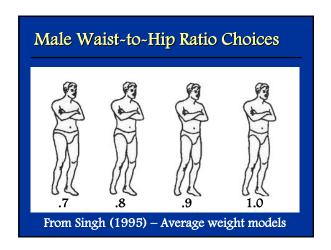
Female Eye Size Choices Decreased Eye Size Increased Eye Size

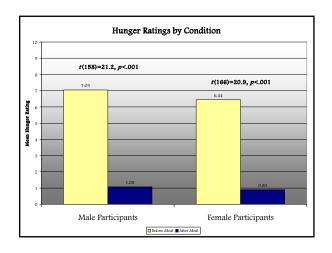


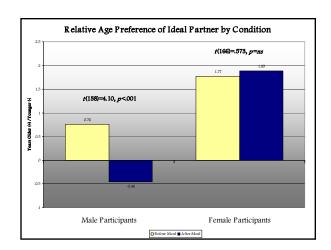


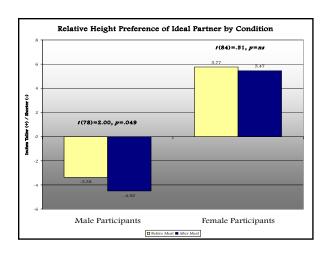


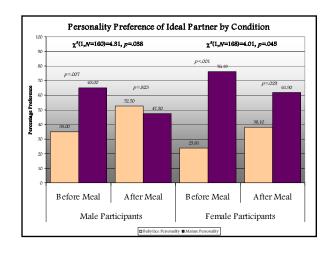


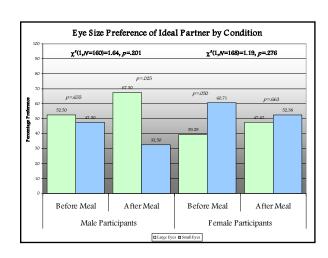


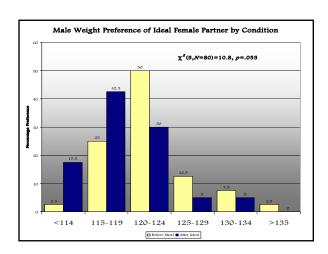


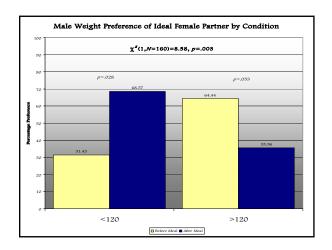


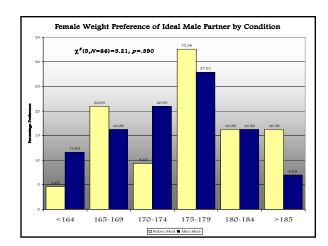


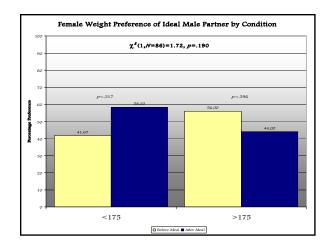


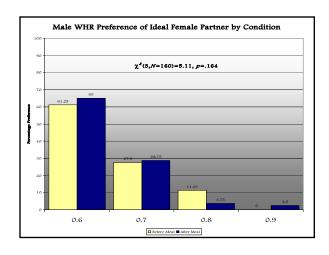


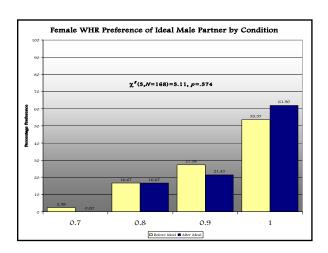












Male Results Summary

- · Overall, hungry males preferred females
 - relatively older, taller, and heavier
 - with mature personality characteristics
- · Overall, full males preferred females
 - relatively lighter
 - with larger eyes
- · Hunger salience strengthened differences between hungry and full male age preference compared to the hunger non-salience condition
- · No interaction between hunger condition and WHR preferences

Female Results Summary

- Overall, female preferences for age, height, and weight were not significantly altered by hunger state, but trends in the predicted directions were found
- Overall, hungry and full females preferred males with mature personality characteristics
- · Overall, hungry females preferred males with smaller eye size
- Hunger salience caused females to prefer relatively older male partners overall compared to the hunger non-salience condition
- · No interaction between hunger condition and WHR preferences

Discussion

- condition.

 Although preference differences were small (~1 year in age preference for males, ~1? in height preference for males, etc.) these differences were statistically significant between hungry and full participants and consistent.

 It is interesting to note that males reported differences in physical features for ideal partners and females reported differences in personality characteristics preferences for ideal partners. This pattern of results is consistent with evolutionary theories of mate preferences.

 Although males and females in the preference of the preferences of the preferences.
- mate preferences. Although males and females did not show a change in preferences for waist-to-hip ratios in the current study, future studies may use alternative WHR stimuli. These findings extend the Environmental Security Hypothesis and contribute new insight into perceptions of beauty and how environmental circumstances can influence partner preferences.

References

- Anderson, J. L., Crawford, C. B., Nadeau, J., & Lindberg, T. (1992). Was the duchess of Windsor right? A cross-cultural study of the socioecology of ideals of feminine body shape. Ethology and Sociobiology, 13, 197-227.

 Hurtham, A., & Baguma, F. (1994). Cross-cultural differences in evaluation of male and female body shapes. International Journal of Eating Disorders, 15, 81-89.
- Nelson, L. D., & Morrison, E. L. (2005). The symptoms of resource scarcity: Judgments of food and finances influence preferences for potential partners. Psychological Science, 16(2), 167-173.
- Psychological Science, 16(2), 167-173.

 Pettijohn, T. F. II, & Jungeberg, B. (2004). Flayboy playmate curves: Changes in facial and body feature preferences across U.S. social and economic conditions. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 30(3), 1186-1197.

 Pettijohn, T. F. II, & Tesser, A. (1999). An investigation of popularity in environmental context: Facial feature assessment of American movie actresses. Media Psychology, 1, 229-247.

 Pettijohn, T. F. II & Tesser, A. (in press). Threat and social choice: When eye size matters. Journal of Social Psychology.

 Singh, D. (1993). Adaptive significance of female physical attractiveness: Role of waist-to-hip ratio. Journal of Fersonality and Social Psychology, 65, 293-307.

 Singh, D. (1995). Female judgment of male attractiveness and desirability for

- Singh, D. (1995). Female judgment of male attractiveness and desirability for relationships: Role of waist-to-hip ratio and financial status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 1089-1101.