

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

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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*
 - 323 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

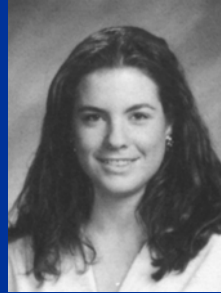
Weight Category Choices

- | • Male | • Female |
|--------------|--------------|
| < 164 lbs. | < 114 lbs. |
| 165-169 lbs. | 115-119 lbs. |
| 170-174 lbs. | 120-124 lbs. |
| 175-179 lbs. | 125-129 lbs. |
| 180-184 lbs. | 130-134 lbs. |
| > 185 lbs. | > 135 lbs. |

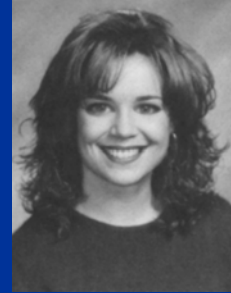
Personality Cluster Choices

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

Female Eye Size Choices

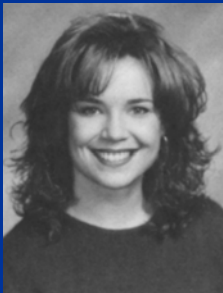


Decreased Eye Size

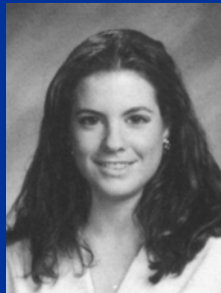


Increased Eye Size

Female Eye Size Choices

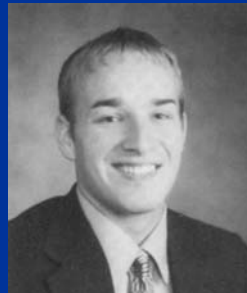


Decreased Eye Size



Increased Eye Size

Male Eye Size Choices



Decreased Eye Size

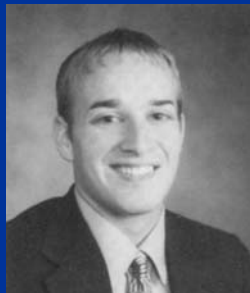


Increased Eye Size

Male Eye Size Choices

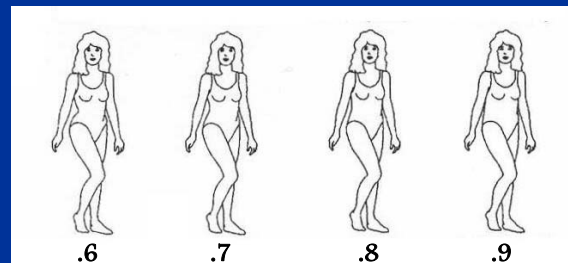


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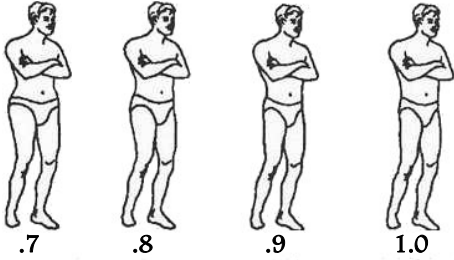
Increased Eye Size

Female Waist-to-Hip Ratio Choices

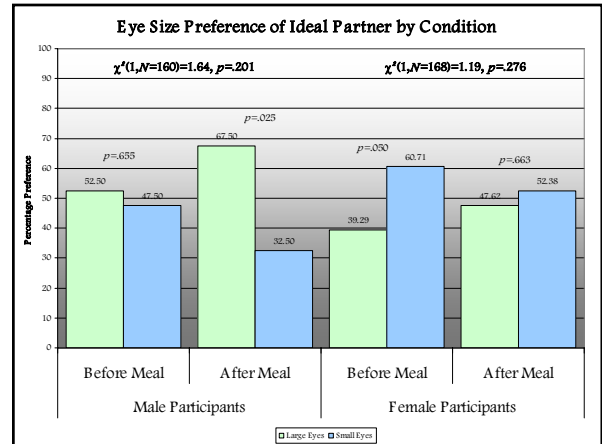
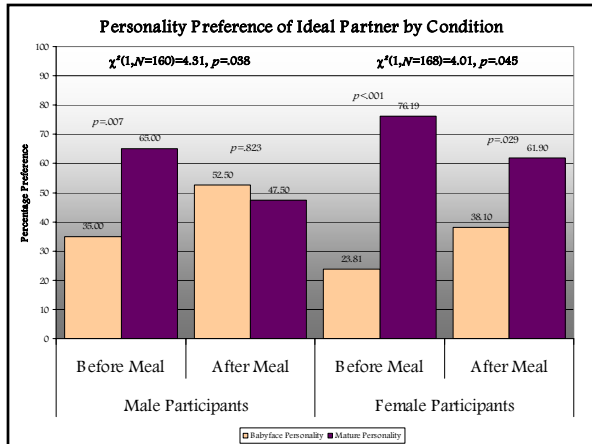
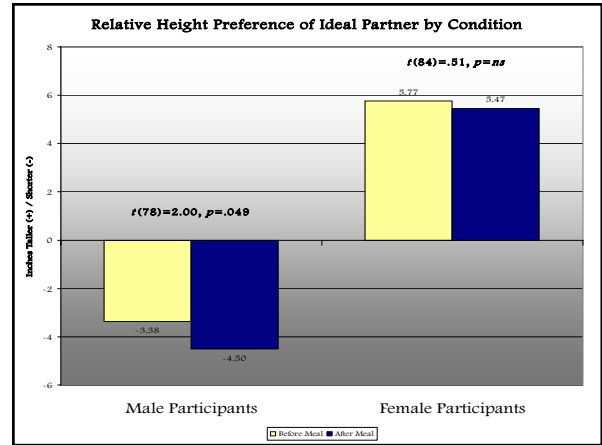
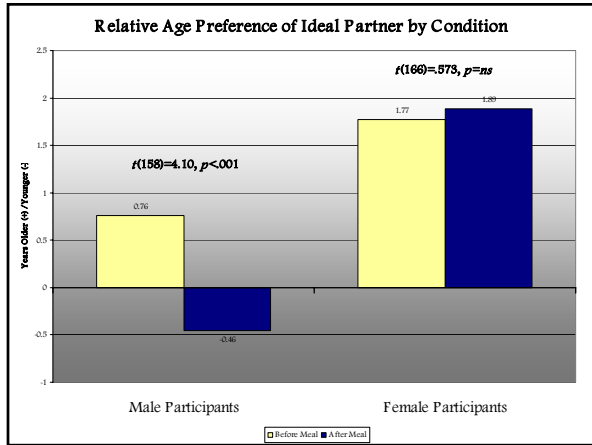
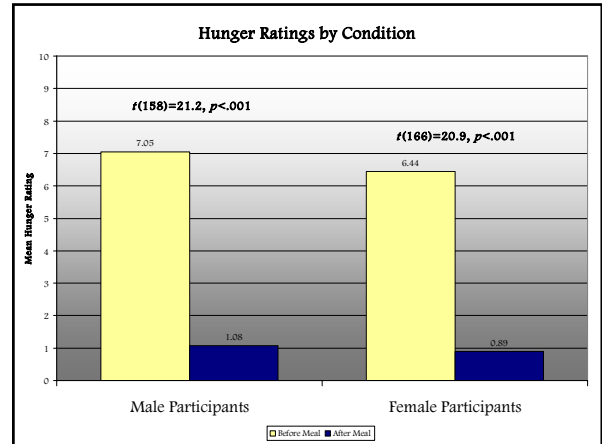


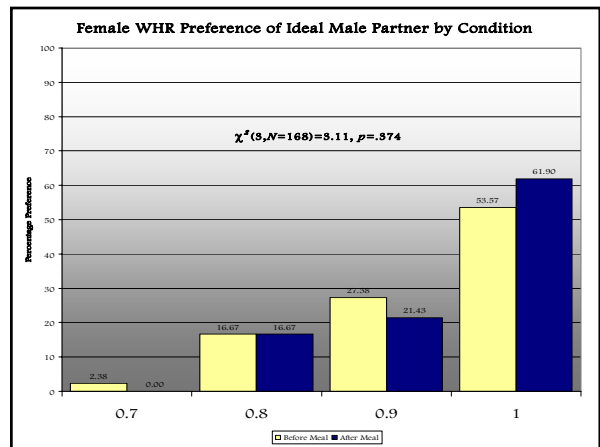
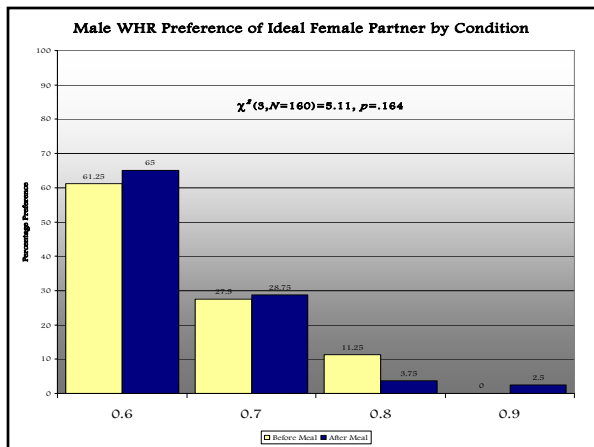
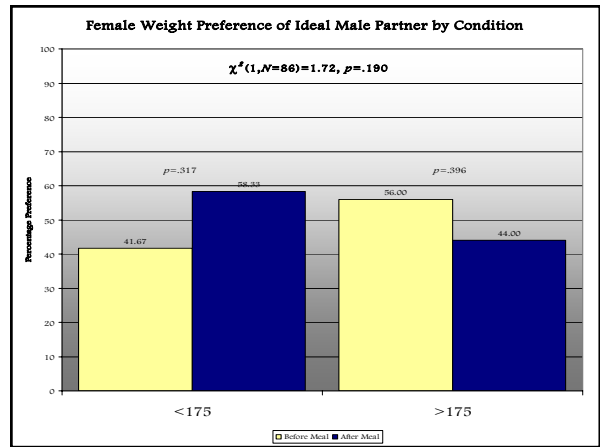
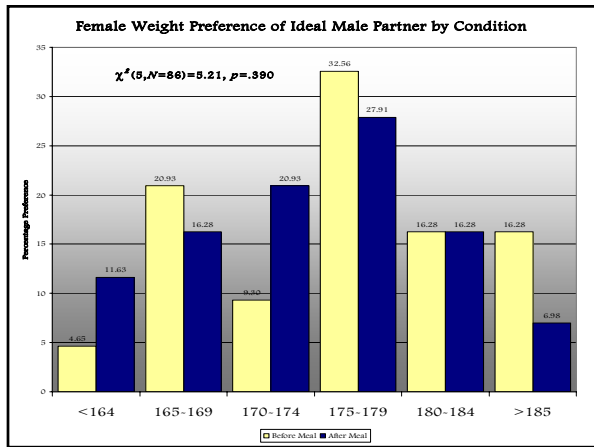
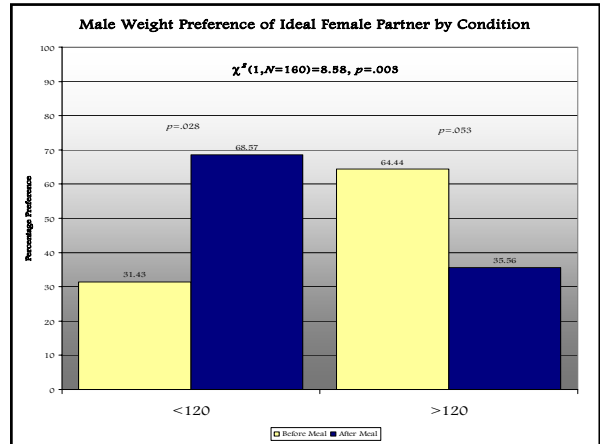
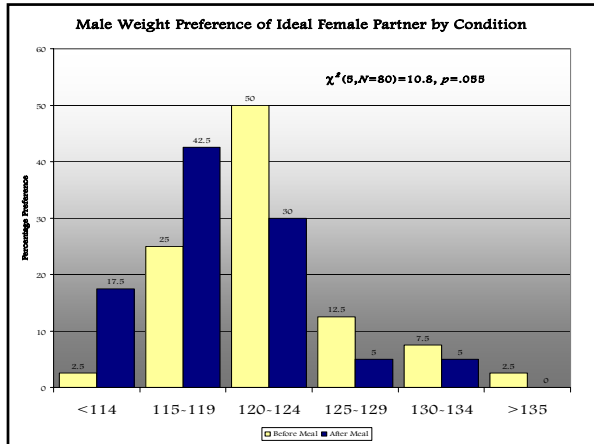
From Singh (1993) – Average weight models

Male Waist-to-Hip Ratio Choices



From Singh (1995) – Average weight models





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

- Results support the predicted hypotheses. Overall, hungry males showed a preference for more mature characteristics in female partners. Females showed the predicted pattern of preferences, but results were only statistically significant for personality and eye size choice. Hunger salience, asking whether participants were hungry before partner preference questions, strengthened differences between hungry and full male age preference compared to asking about hunger after partner preference questions. Hunger salience in the female sample led females to prefer relatively older males overall compared to the hunger non-salience 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 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

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