



Short-Term Stability and Change in People's Partner Preferences and Perceptions of Their Partners

Elijah G. Gardiner, Skylar H. Yam, Sierra D. Peters, & Andrea L. Meltzer

Florida State University



Introduction

- People's partner preferences and the extent to which their partners match them predict important relationship outcomes such as satisfaction (Valentine et al., 2020)
- The Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher et al., 1999) posits the importance of three trait preferences when selecting and evaluating partners: (1) warmth-trustworthiness, (2) status-resources, and (3) attractiveness-vitality
- Previous work shows stability in these preferences and the extent to which people rate their partners on these three dimensions over months and years (Driebe et al., 2023)
- But it is unclear whether preferences and perceptions of partner traits are stable over a shorter time interval—specifically, four weeks
 - Our research aims to explore this

Method

- 233 participants in relationships recruited via SONA
 - **Gender:** 16% male, 84% female
 - **Age:** $M = 19.60$ years, $SD = 1.87$ years
 - **Race/Ethnicity:** 64% White, 17% Latinx, 8% Asian, 5% Black, 6% Other
 - **Sexual Orientation:** 79% heterosexual, 16% bisexual, 3% homosexual, 2% other or missing
 - **Relationship Length:** $M = 22.11$ months, $SD = 18.83$ months
- Two online assessments occurred four weeks apart
- Participants self-reported their (a) partner preferences and (b) perceptions of their partners' traits on each of the three dimensions: warmth-trustworthiness, status-resources, and attractiveness-vitality (Fletcher et al., 1999)
- We examined descriptive statistics for each constructs
- Moreover, we conducted paired-samples t-tests to assess the extent to which people's preferences and partner perceptions changed from Time 1 to Time 2 (i.e., over a four-week period)

Table 1

	Partner Preferences		Partner Perceptions	
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$	$M (SD)$
Warmth-Trustworthiness	6.39 (0.52)	6.43 (0.55)	6.17 (0.74)	6.07 (0.85)
Status-Resources	4.66 (1.22)	4.91 (1.16)	5.24 (1.04)	5.30 (0.99)
Attractiveness-Vitality	5.33 (0.96)	5.51 (0.95)	5.98 (0.81)	6.02 (0.83)

Figure 1

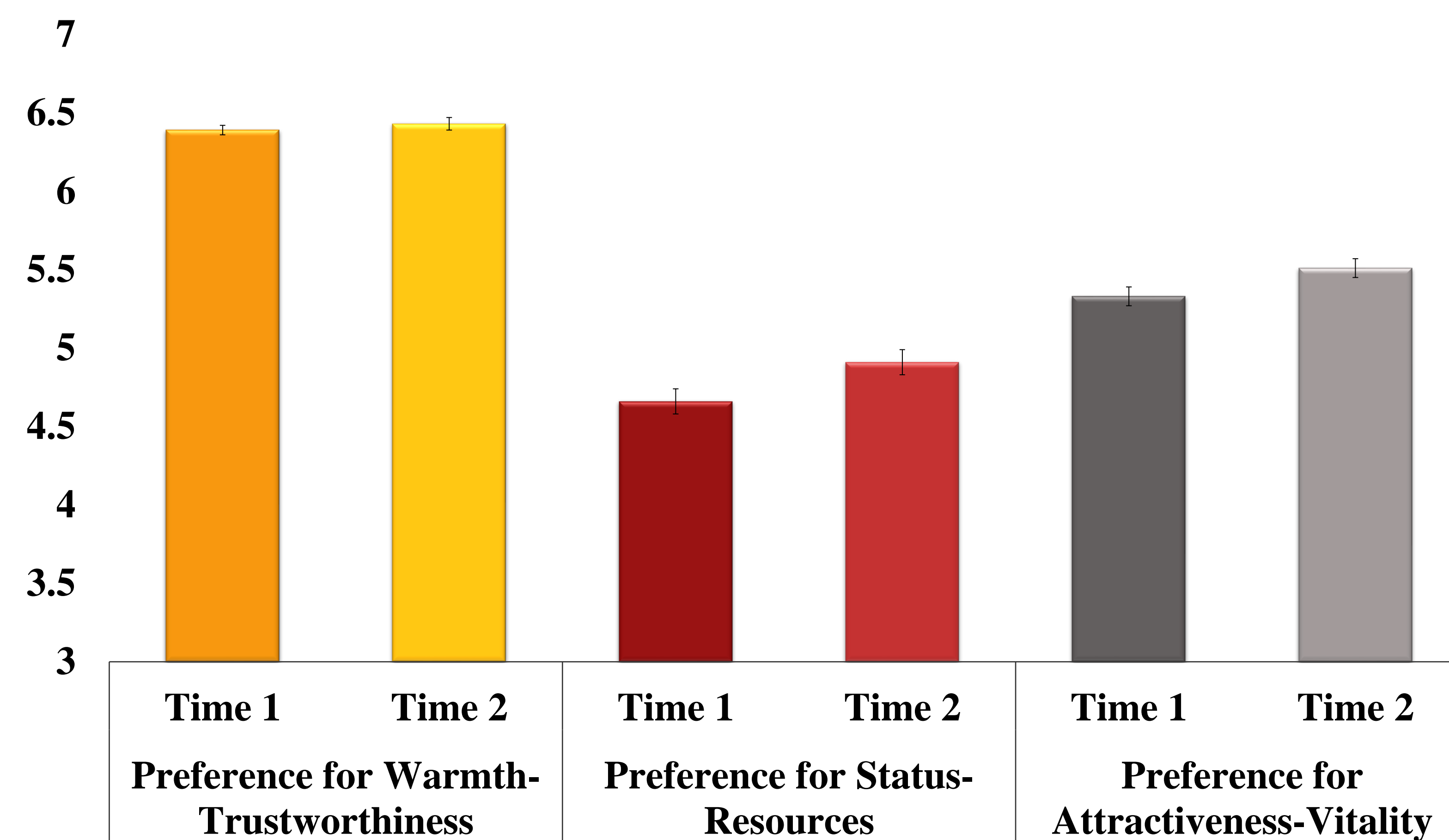
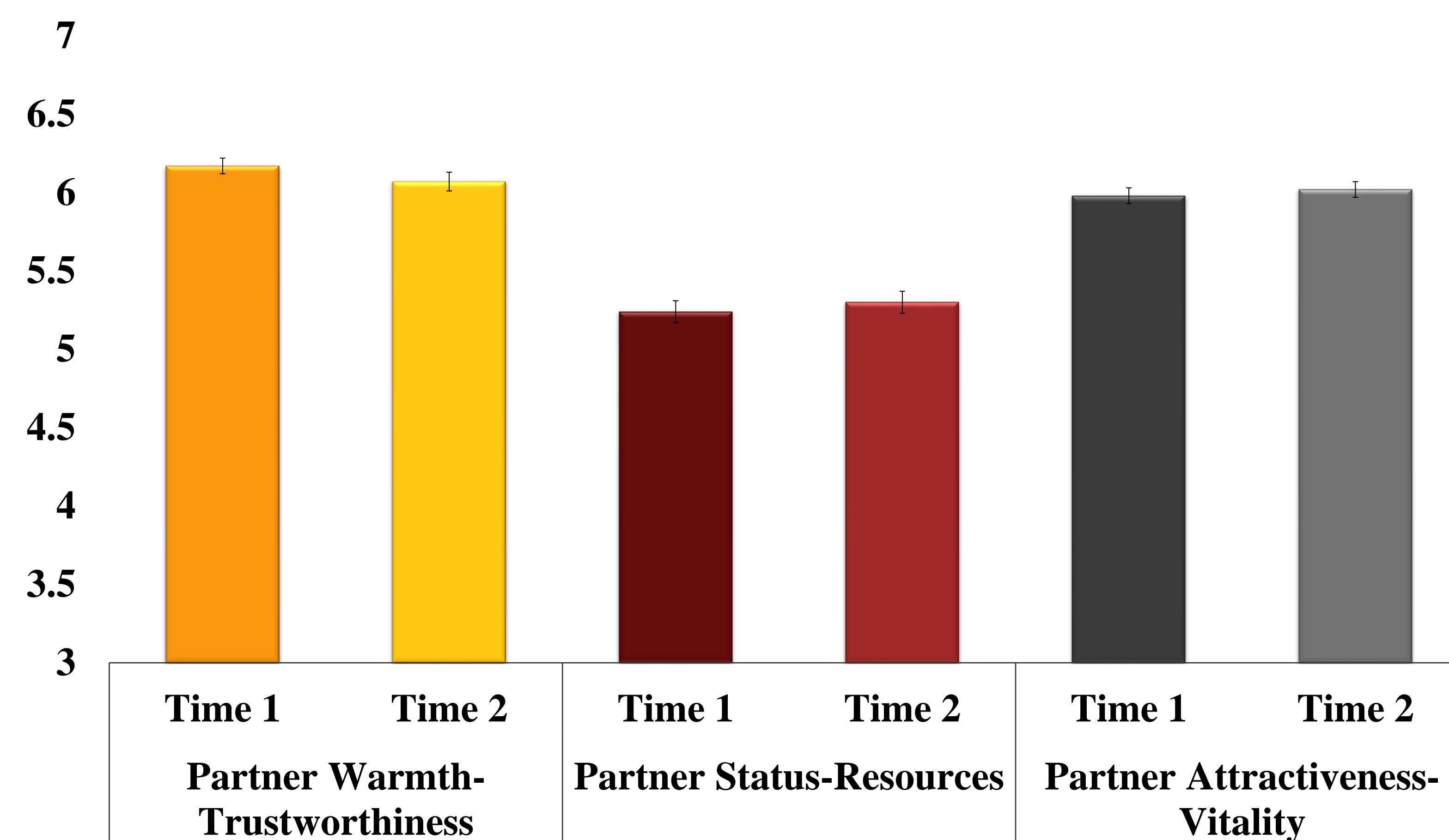


Figure 2



Results

- **Partner Preferences:**
 - Warmth-Trustworthiness remained stable over four weeks, $t(231) = 1.19, p = .235$
 - Attractiveness-Vitality increased over four weeks, $t(231) = 3.06, p = .002$
 - Status-Resources increased over four weeks, $t(231) = 3.46, p < .001$
- **Partner Perceptions:**
 - Warmth-Trustworthiness decreased over four weeks, $t(231) = 2.34, p = .020$
 - Attractiveness-Vitality remained stable over four weeks, $t(232) = 0.88, p = .382$
 - Status-Resources remained stable over four weeks, $t(232) = 1.05, p = .293$

Discussion

- Results provide evidence for both short-term stability and flexibility in preferences and partner perceptions in theoretically sensible ways that depended on the trait dimension
- Limitations of this work include:
 - Only including two time points, limiting our ability to precisely assess change
 - Participants were primarily young, heterosexual, undergraduates, limiting generalizability to other populations
- Future research could:
 - Examine how gender or biological sex may influence preferences and/or partner perceptions
 - Examine both short-term and long-term change in negative traits, or “dealbreakers”

References

Driebe, J. C., Stern, J., Penke, L., & Gerlach, T. M. (2023). Probing the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences for future partner traits and relationship outcomes across 13 years. *European Journal of Personality*, OnlineFirst. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08902070231213797>

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Valentine, K. A., Li, N. P., Meltzer, A. L., & Tsai, M.-H. (2020). Mate preferences for warmth-trustworthiness predict romantic attraction in the early stages of mate selection and satisfaction in ongoing relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 46(2), 298-311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167219855048>