



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

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## 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
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<b>Warmth-Trustworthiness</b>	<b>6.39 (0.52)</b>	<b>6.43 (0.55)</b>	<b>6.17 (0.74)</b>	<b>6.07 (0.85)</b>
<b>Status-Resources</b>	<b>4.66 (1.22)</b>	<b>4.91 (1.16)</b>	<b>5.24 (1.04)</b>	<b>5.30 (0.99)</b>
<b>Attractiveness-Vitality</b>	<b>5.33 (0.96)</b>	<b>5.51 (0.95)</b>	<b>5.98 (0.81)</b>	<b>6.02 (0.83)</b>

Figure 1

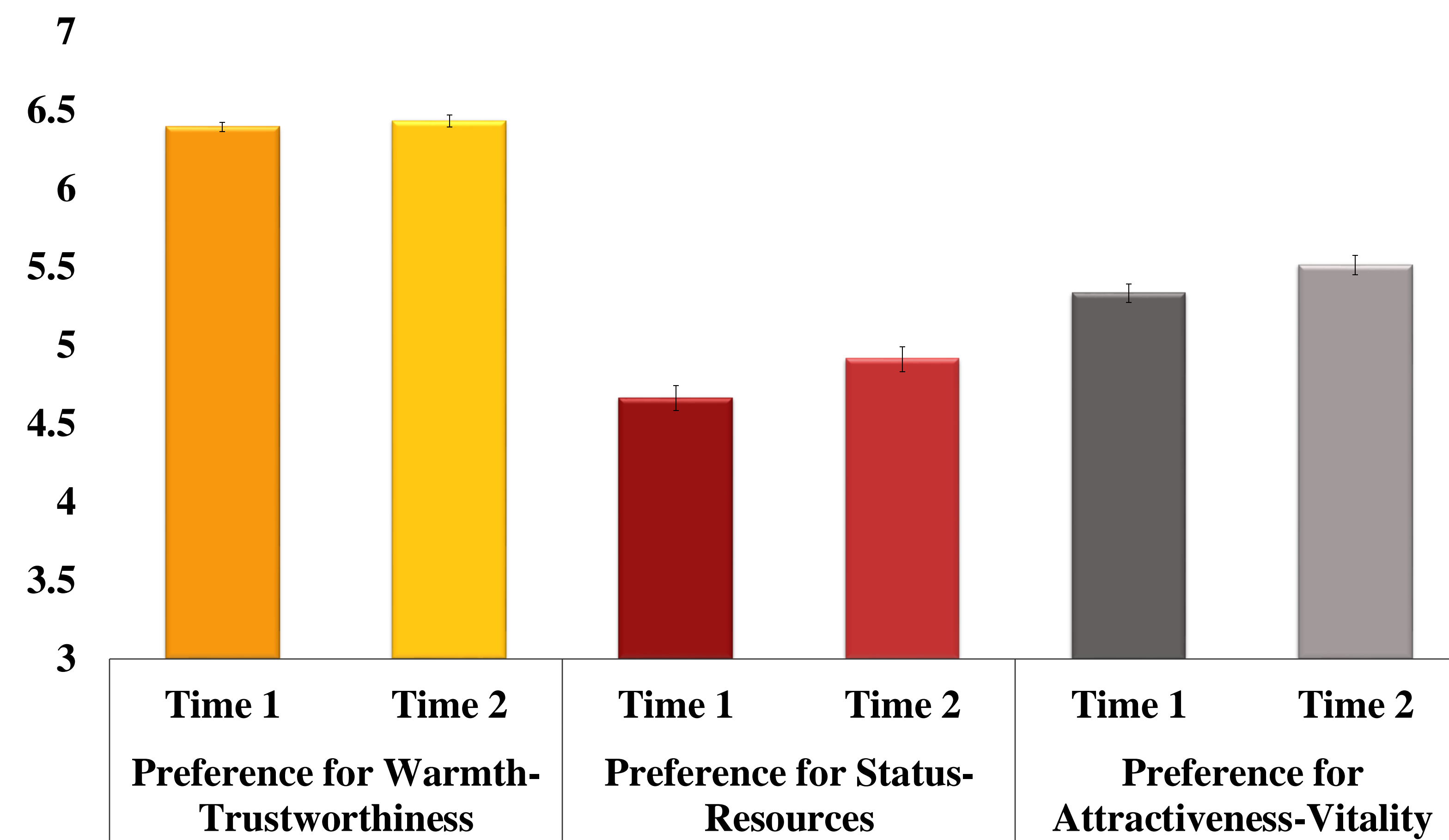
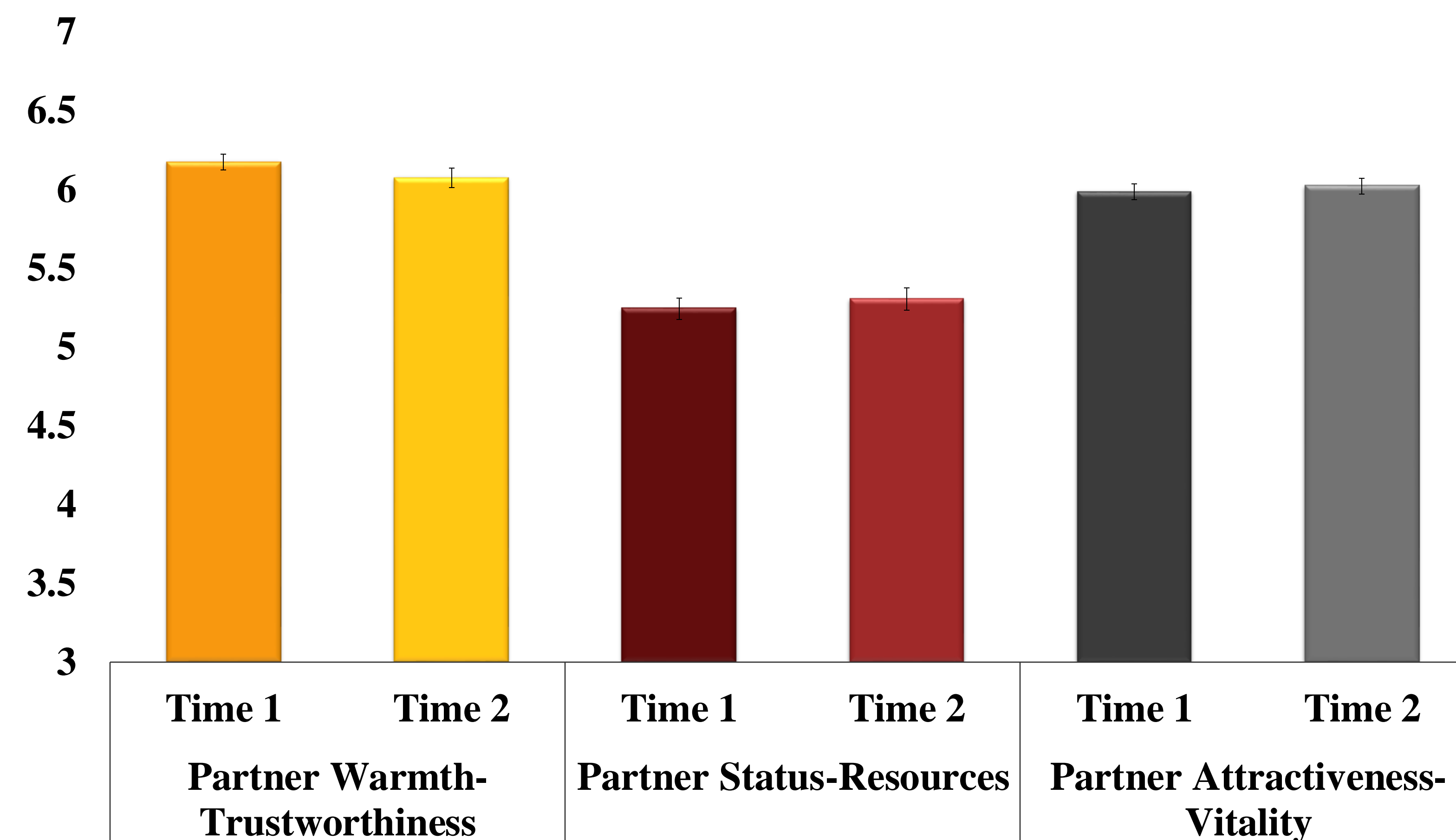


Figure 2



## 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>

Fletcher, G. J. O., Simpson, J. A., Thomas, G., & Giles, L. (1999). Ideals in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(1), 72-89. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.72>

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>