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Physical and Psychological Balancing Act: Is Stability Desirable?

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Background

- Recent studies have conveyed that the physical instability of a person would alter the way they thought about other people's relationships and the traits people seek in romantic partners. These studies also show that cordial physical experiences can impact people's views of relationship stability (Kille, Forest, & Wood, 2013).
- Confessing love for a significant other while seated in an unstable condition can alter how they truly feel if they were to be sitting in a stable condition (Forest, Kille, Wood, & Stehouwer, 2015).
- Similarly, one study showed that being in a position that makes someone feel uncomfortable can influence what people seek in relationships (Kille, Forest, & Wood, 2013).
- Even something such as physical temperature effects people's perceptions of others (Williams & Bargh, 2008).
- We were interested to see if manipulating a chair and table to be unstable would change the participant's views of whether or not the likelihood of famous couple's relationships would dissolve within a range of years.
- We hypothesized that being physically unstable would cause the participant to perceive other people's relationships as unstable. We also hypothesized that the qualities people are attracted to can be modified due to physical instability.

Method

- Participants were 25 predominantly white males, and 42 predominantly white females from a small Baptist university who participated in exchange for course credit in a psychology course.
- Participants were randomly assigned into two groups (unstable and stable). The unstable group was asked to sit at an assigned table. The table and chair were both modified with a small pebble under a table leg and two chair legs, to make the chair and table wobblier.
- Participants were given four questionnaires, one of which was a filler questionnaire. The other three were used to determine the participant's perception of certain celebrity's relationships and the strength of those relationships, perceived desirable traits in a partner, and their mood at the time of the study.

Results

- A one-way ANOVA of trait instability revealed no significance between participants in the unstable and stable group $F(1,65) = 0.192, p > .05$. The unstable group scored higher on desire for trait instability in a partner ($M = 5.58, SD = 1.46$) than the stable group ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.32$).
- A one-way ANOVA of potential stability revealed no significant difference between participants in the unstable and stable group $F(1,65) = 2.864, p > .05$. Participants in the stable group rated potential for stability in a partner higher ($M = 6.43, SD = 0.52$) than the unstable group ($M = 6.09, SD = 1.03$).
- A one-way ANOVA of the trait loving revealed no significant difference between participants in either group $F(1,65) = 1.527, p > .05$. The stable group rated loving in a partner higher ($M = 6.94, SD = 0.24$) than the unstable group ($M = 6.85, SD = 0.36$).
- A one-way ANOVA of the trait funny revealed no significance between participants in either group $F(1,65) = 2.397, p > .05$. The stable group rated funny in a partner higher ($M = 6.59, SD = .783$) than the unstable group ($M = 6.24, SD = 1.032$).

Conclusions

- Our study did not confirm that physical instability affects people's preferences in significant others.
- We found no significant result for preference for stable qualities in a partner among the unstable group.
- Neither funny nor loving revealed significant differences between groups.
- Our results were most likely affected by the furniture not feeling unstable enough resulting in the participants not feeling psychologically unstable.
- It could be that the traits participants were asked to rate did not give a sense of psychological stability.
- For future studies, more traits evoking a sense of psychological stability should be included in the questionnaires.
- In order to make the furniture more unstable, different desks and chairs should be used.

References

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Figure 1. Effects of stability of furniture on desire for unstable traits

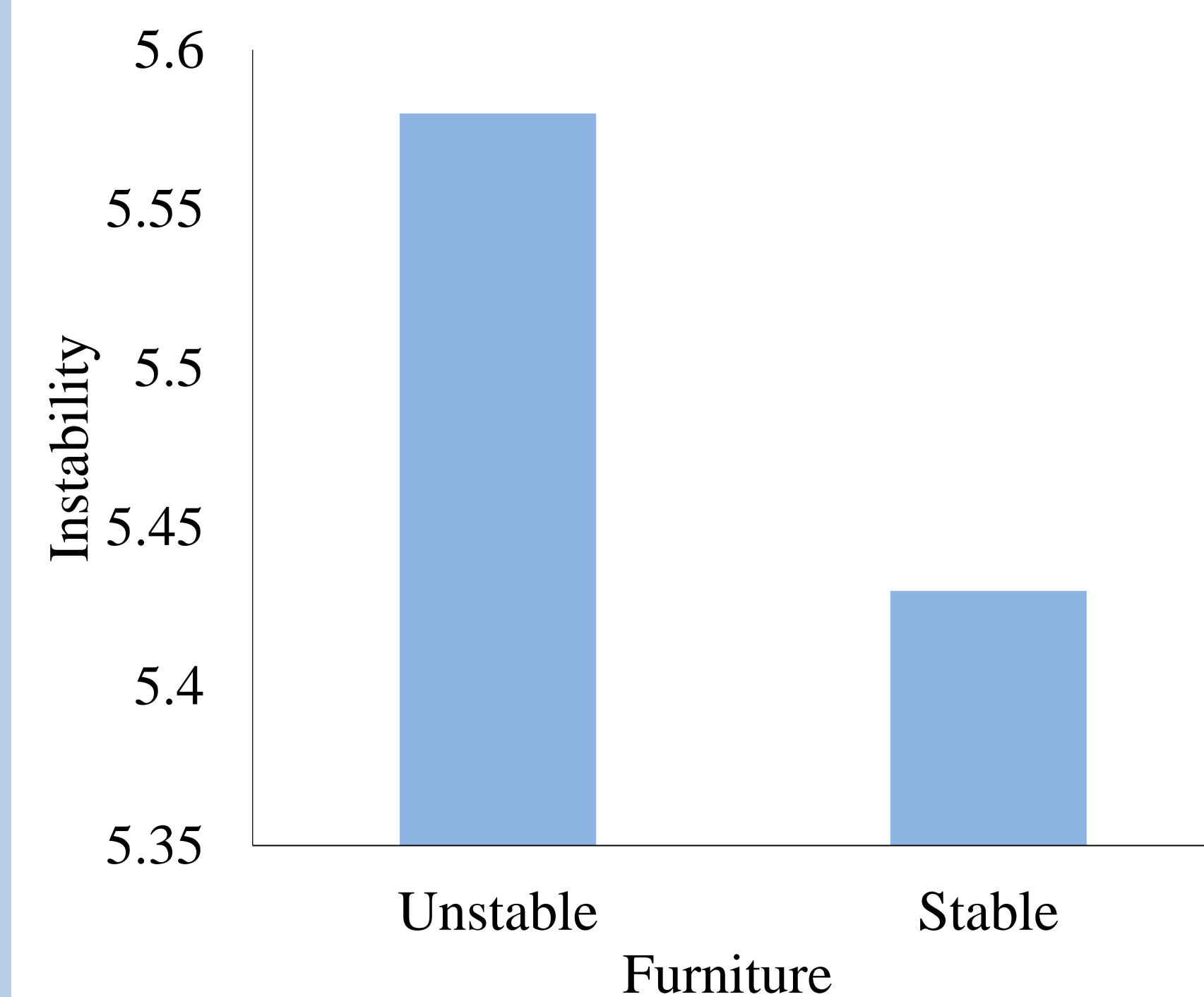


Figure 2. Effects of stability of furniture on desire for stable traits

