



Female Hair Color Preference: Does female choice vary by region?



Dr. Abraham Miller, Dr. Jen Wortham & Daniela Delvescovo

The University of Tampa, Tampa, Florida

Introduction & Background

Current Hypothesis

- Male and Female choice is influenced by their environment (repeated exposure) and will exhibit regional differences in hair color preference.

Our Previous Research Findings

- Males prefer the hair color of their mother.
- Females are inconsistent and did not choose mother's hair color, father's hair color or their own.



Introduction

Mate choice begins by assessing the visual characteristics of an individual. These traits help us determine if a potential mate is attractive and worth pursuing. One of the least studied traits in this decision making process is hair color. Most of the previous research has focused on male hair color preference in women, leaving a paucity of information regarding female choice. Further, women's preference of hair color in other women has not been evaluated.

In this study we assessed men's and women's hair color preference by giving them a choice of who they found most attractive between a blonde, brunette or red-headed female. Hinsz et al (2013) found hair color preference varied by region, so we examined the choices for regional differences in the US.

Background

In 2008, Clairol reported that 75% of American women in their study dyed their hair and that 88% felt their hair affects their confidence. However, what influences their preference in hair color? Is there a universal preference? Researchers have found that blonde women are more likely to be approached at a bar (Swami & Barrett 2011), earn more wages working as a waitress (Gueguen 2012a) and experience more empathy (Gueguen 2012b) than other hair colors. Etoff (1999) estimated that up to 40% of women in the US add blonde coloring to their hair. So, why don't all women choose blonde? The answer might be preference for blondes is context dependent. Takeda et al (2006) found blonde women are underrepresented as corporate leaders and suggested this was due to the historical view that blondes are not as competent for such roles. More recently, Swami and Barrette (2011) found men preferred brunettes when they were given a choice in pictures. These discrepancies may be explained by an interaction of social and evolutionary influences. Evolutionary psychology theories predict males would prefer lighter colored hair in mates as an indicator of youthfulness and fertility (Buss and Schmitt 1993; Feingold 1992) and females would prefer darker hair as a sign of being successful and mature (Lawson 1971). Social psychology theories predict individuals would prefer hair color that is similar to their own or close relatives because of repeated exposure in their environment (Buckingham et al 2006; Harmon-Jones & Allen 2001). Hinsz et al (2013) showed support for both of these hypotheses and suggested choice comes from a combination of the two. However, the study simply asked what they preferred and did not give them a visual choice.

Acknowledgements

- College of Natural & Health Sciences (funding)
- HSHP Summer Fellowship (funding)
- University of Tampa DANA Grant (funding)
- Cristina Delvescovo (survey assistance)
- Dominique Coppola (survey assistance)
- Kayla Schmidt (Data entry)
- Students & Faculty of UT (participation)
- UT & SPC IRB approved this research

Citations

- Buckingham et al 2006 – Visual adaptations to masculine and feminine faces influences generalized preferences and perceptions of trustworthiness. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 27, 381-389.
- Buss & Schmitt 1993 – Sexual strategies theory: an evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, 100, 204-232
- Etoff 1999 – *Survival of the prettiest: The science of beauty*. New York.
- Feingold 1992 – Gender differences in mate selection preferences: a test of the parental investment model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 125-139
- Gueguen 2012a – Hair color and wages: waitresses with blond hair have more fun. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 41(2), 370-372.
- Gueguen 2012b – The sweet color of an implicit request: women's hair color and spontaneous helping behavior. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 40(7), 1099-1102.
- Harmon-Jones & Allen 2001 – The role of affect in the mere exposure effect: evidence from psychophysiological and individual differences approaches. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 889-898
- Hinsz et al 2013 – The intermingling of social and evolutionary psychological influences on hair color preferences. *Current Psychology* 32, 136-149.
- Lawson 1971 – Hair color, personality, and the observer. *Psychological Reports*, 28, 311-322.
- Swami & Barrett 2011 – British men's hair color preferences: an assessment of courtship solicitation and stimulus ratings. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 52 (6), 595-600.
- Takeda et al 2006 – Hair color stereotyping and CEO selection in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 13(3), 85-99.

Methods



- Data collection using a 14-question demographic survey
 - Ask which was most attractive in picture above
 - Same model was used to control for facial features (no photoshop was used)
 - Demographics included:
 - Ethnicity
 - Hair color
 - Parents' hair color
 - Boyfriend/Girlfriend hair color
 - Region where they lived
- Mid-sized Private University with large out of state population
- N = 2005 participants
- 699 males & 1213 females
- Sex Ratio 1:1.74



Results

Figure 1. Males significantly preferred brunettes across all regions ($p < 0.01$). Male choice was not significantly different between regions ($p = 0.5$). This suggests male choice is not influenced by regional demographics (repeated exposure).

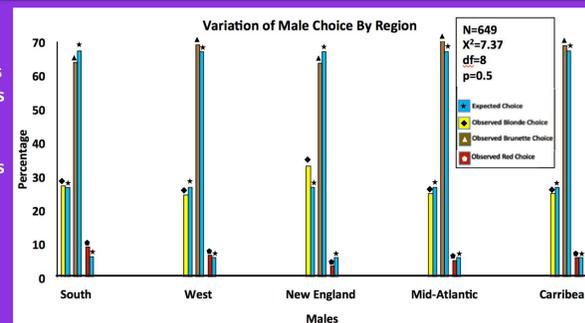
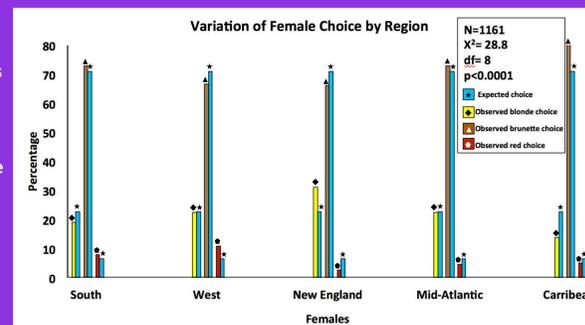


Figure 2. Females significantly preferred brunettes across all regions ($p < 0.01$). Female choice was significantly different across regions ($p = 0.001$). This suggests female choice is influenced by regional demographics (repeated exposure).



Results Continued

Figure 3. Overall, brunette hair was significantly preferred over blonde, which was preferred over red hair in males and female ($p < 0.01$).



Figure 4. Pooled female hair color preference was statistically the same as the overall distribution of hair color across regions ($p > 0.2$). The regional differences are masked when the regional data are pooled.

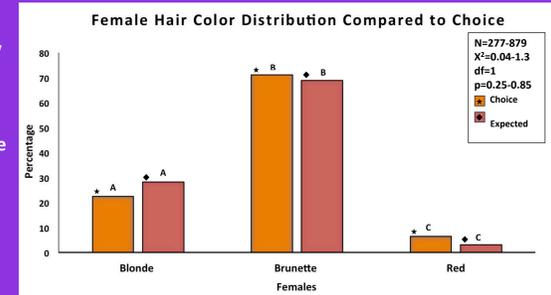


Figure 5. Percent of females who chose blonde was statistically the same as the percent of blondes in the population in New England ($p = 0.87$).

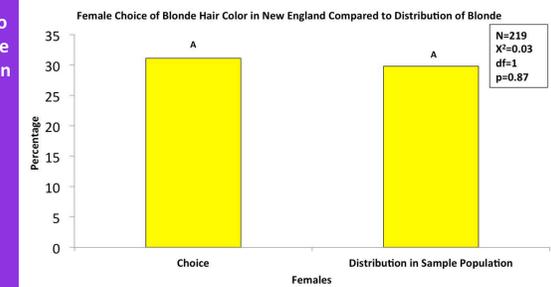
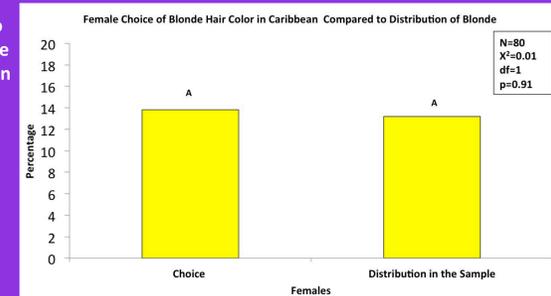


Figure 6. Percent of females who chose blonde was statistically the same as the percent of blondes in the population in the Caribbean ($p = 0.91$).



Conclusions

Males and females, across all regions, prefer brunettes. However, females exhibit regional differences in their preference and males do not. This suggests males are consistent regardless of their environment but females are influenced by the demographics of their population.

Hypothesis:

Male and Female choice is influenced by their environment (repeated exposure) and will exhibit regional differences in hair color preference.

- Males – Not accepted: Males choice did not vary with region
- Females – Accepted: Females are influenced by their environment (repeated exposure hypothesis suggested)

It is not surprising the fashion industry targets females more than males, given the results that females are more influenced by what they see. This research supports selling different beauty products based on geographic region.