

Look at that Rock! Induced Mate Abundance Increases Women's Expectation for Engagement Ring Size and Cost

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Introduction

- Previous research has demonstrated that perceptions of perceived mate availability (particularly scarcity vs. abundance) influences human mating behaviors including sociosexual orientation and mate-guarding (see Arnocky et al., 2014; 2016).
- One growing area of research involves the study of engagement ring preferences, as a putative cue to male commitment to, and willingness to share resources with, the female recipient.
- A recent study identified that individuals who were primed with mate scarcity or abundance influenced intended engagement ring preferences. Specifically, the researchers found that a sample of females primed with mate abundance and males primed with scarcity (combined) held greater preferences (female) or intentions to purchase (male) larger, more expensive engagement rings.
- This research was flawed in combining the sexes across different priming conditions and lacked a manipulation check.
- The present study aimed to address these issues by looking specifically at female preferences for engagement rings and ensuring that our mate availability manipulation worked.

Method

Sample. 205 undergraduate women aged 17 to 39 ($M = 20$, $SD = 2.87$).

Demographic Measures. Prior to the priming task, participants completed measures of age and romantic relationship status ("Are you currently in a committed heterosexual romantic relationship?").

Mate Availability Priming Task. Using a set of fictitious magazine articles developed by Spielmann, MacDonald, and Wilson (2009), participants were primed with the belief that potential mates were either abundant or scarce. In this task, participants read one of two articles. In the mate-abundant condition, the article explained the task of finding a new romantic partner as being relatively easy, with the mating population consisting of many available mates. Conversely, in the mate-scarcity condition, the article highlighted the difficulty of finding a new romantic partner, with desirable mates being a scarce resource.

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Method (Continued)

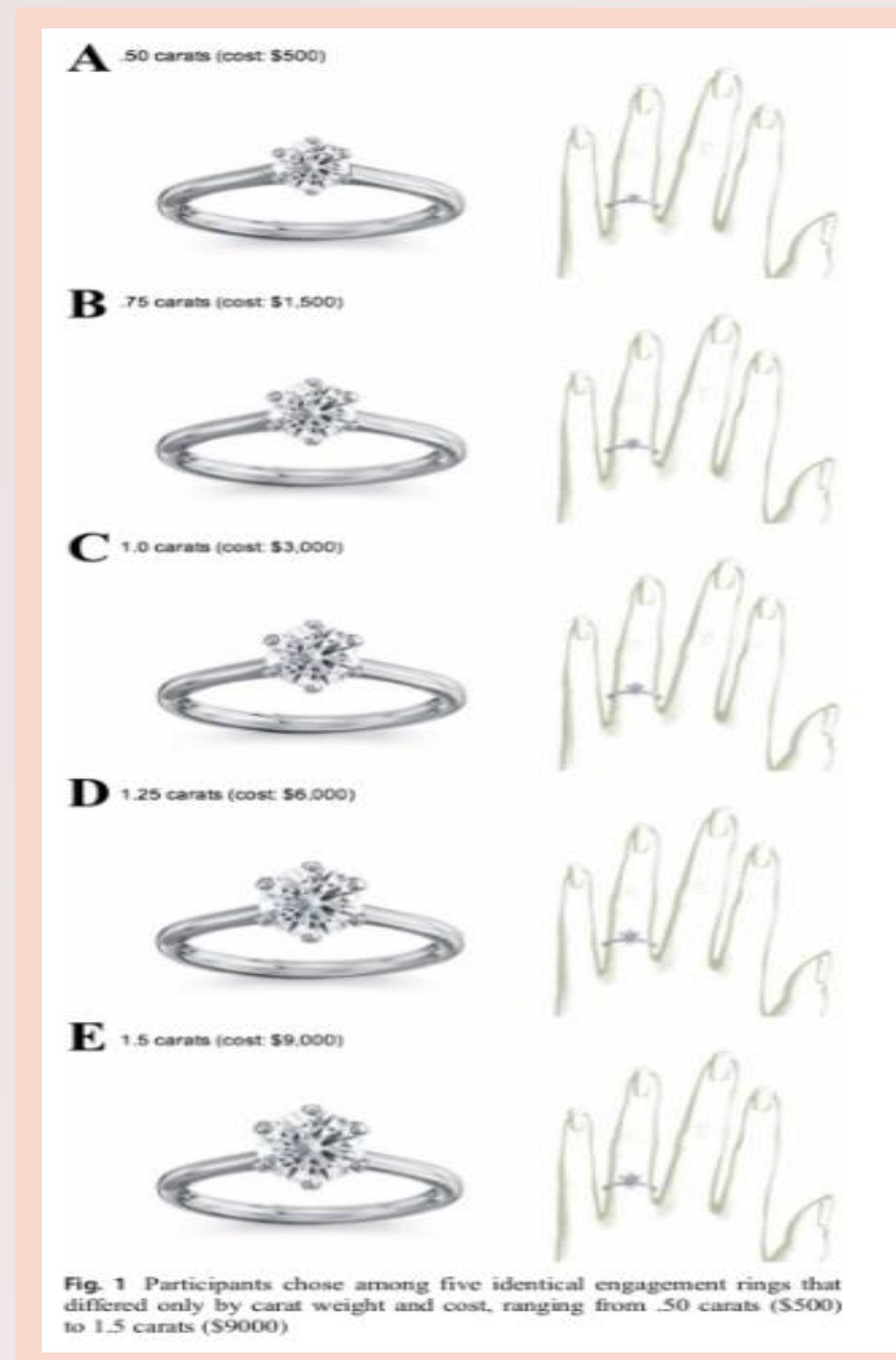


Fig. 1 Participants chose among five identical engagement rings that differed only by carat weight and cost, ranging from .50 carats (\$500) to 1.5 carats (\$9000)

Manipulation Check. Participants then responded to the following two items asking about their own perceptions of mate availability: (1) "It scares me to think there might not be anyone out there for me" and (2) "I feel it is close to being too late for me to find love in my life"

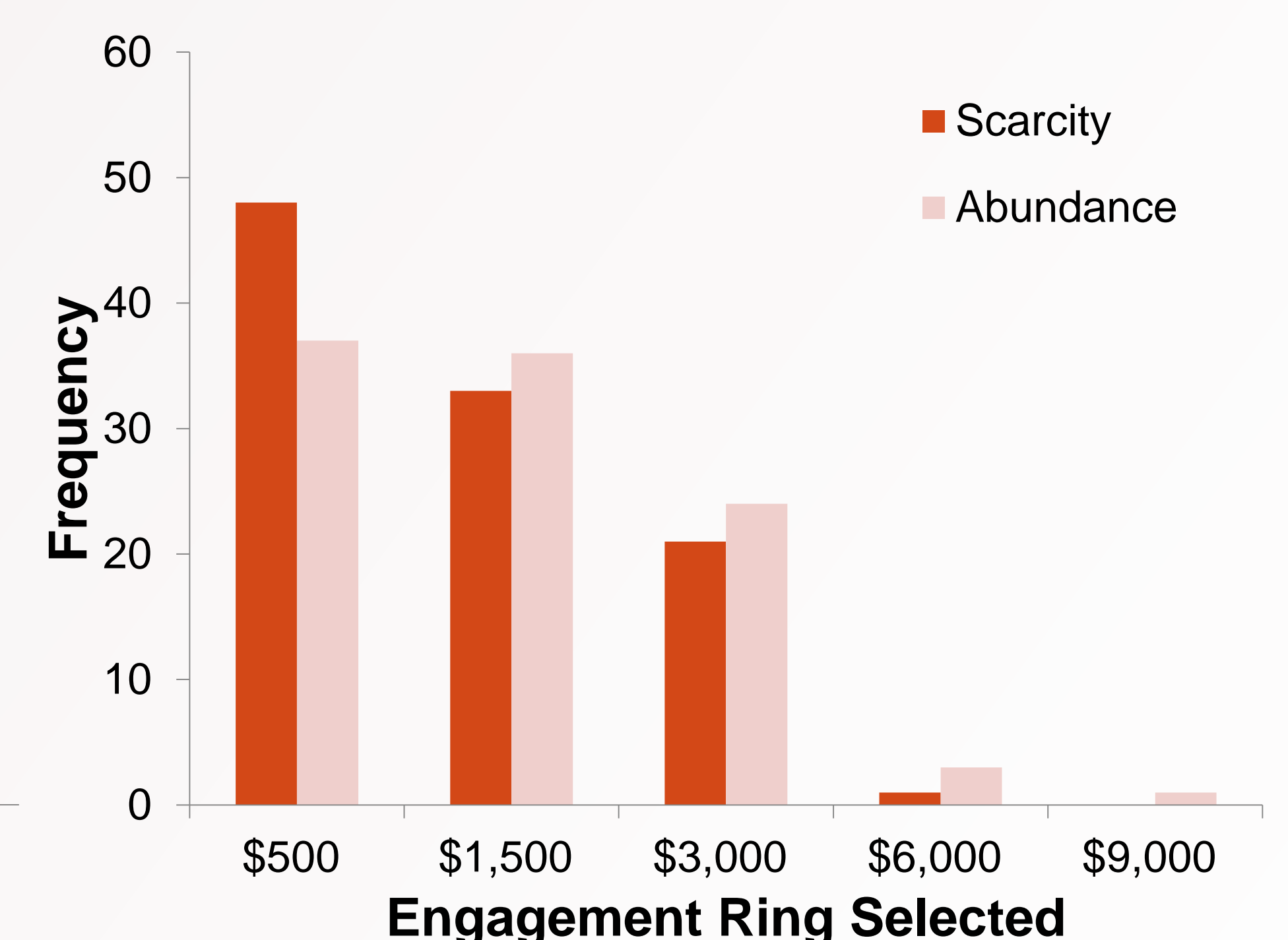
Engagement Ring Preferences. Following Cloud and Taylor (2018) female participants were asked, "if this man were to propose to you after an extended period of dating, what is the smallest size engagement ring that you would be satisfied with him giving to you?" To make their decision, participants saw five identical engagement rings that differed only by carat weight and cost, ranging from 0.50 carats (\$500) to 1.5 carats (\$9000), and their selection was recorded (see Fig. 1 from Cloud and Taylor (2008).

Results

Descriptives and Manipulation Check. Participants did not differ across conditions in terms of whether they were currently single or pair-bonded ($M_{scarcity} = 1.49$, $SD = 0.50$, $M_{abundance} = 1.48$, $SD = 0.50$, $t(203) = 0.07$, $p = .94$ two-tailed). Participants varied along Item 1 ($M_{scarcity} = 2.99$, $SD = 1.49$, $M_{abundance} = 2.57$, $SD = 1.47$, $t(203) = 2.04$, $p = .021$ one-tailed) and Item 2 ($M_{scarcity} = 1.85$, $SD = 1.18$, $M_{abundance} = 1.59$, $SD = 0.81$, $t(203) = 1.88$, $p = .031$ one-tailed) suggesting the manipulation was effective at inducing a sense of perceived mate scarcity.

Figure 1. Females primed with mate abundance exhibited greater preference for engagement ring size and cost, ($M_{scarcity} = 1.76$, $SE = 0.09$, $M_{abundance} = 1.98$, $SE = 0.09$, $F(1, 201) = 0.3.08$, $p = .04$ (1-tailed)

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of participants across engagement ring category.



Conclusion

We examined whether females primed with mate abundance versus scarcity exhibited differing expectations for an engagement ring purchased by a male proposer. Results showed that females primed with mate abundance expected a significantly larger and more expensive engagement ring relative to females primed with mate scarcity – a finding that held when controlling for age and current romantic relationship status. This finding suggests that when females perceive mates to be abundant, they increase their expectation of cues to long-term male investment in a mateship.

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