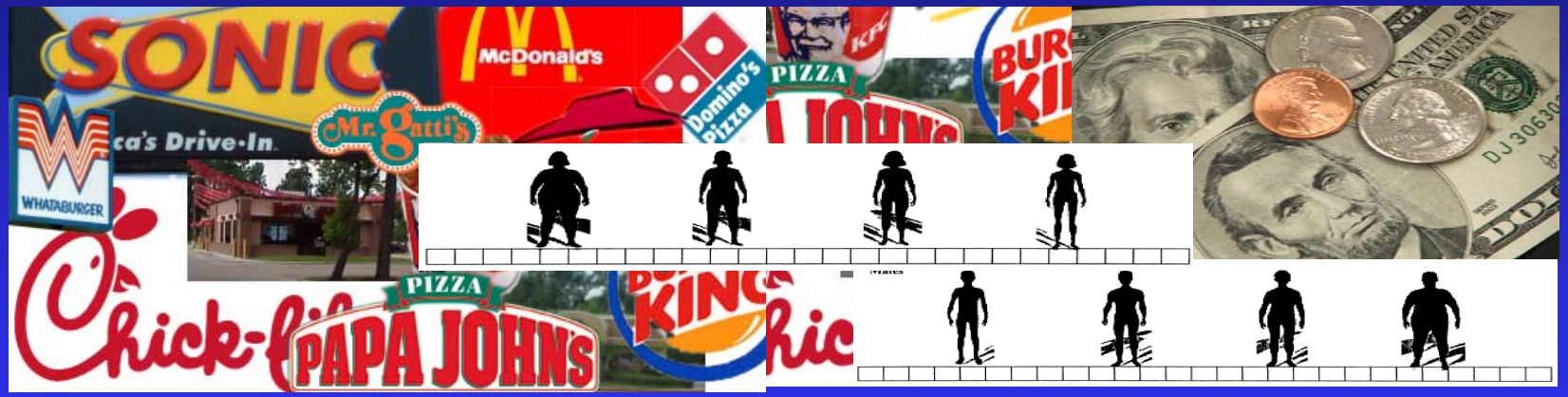
Eating by Number:

Measuring Undergraduate Dietary Practices



Elizabeth Cooper & Ernesto Ruiz

University of South Florida

Rationale

- Assumption of linear, cost-benefit analyses in Public Health constructs
- Investigate from the perspective of participants
- Greater cultural competence

Cognitive Theory of Culture

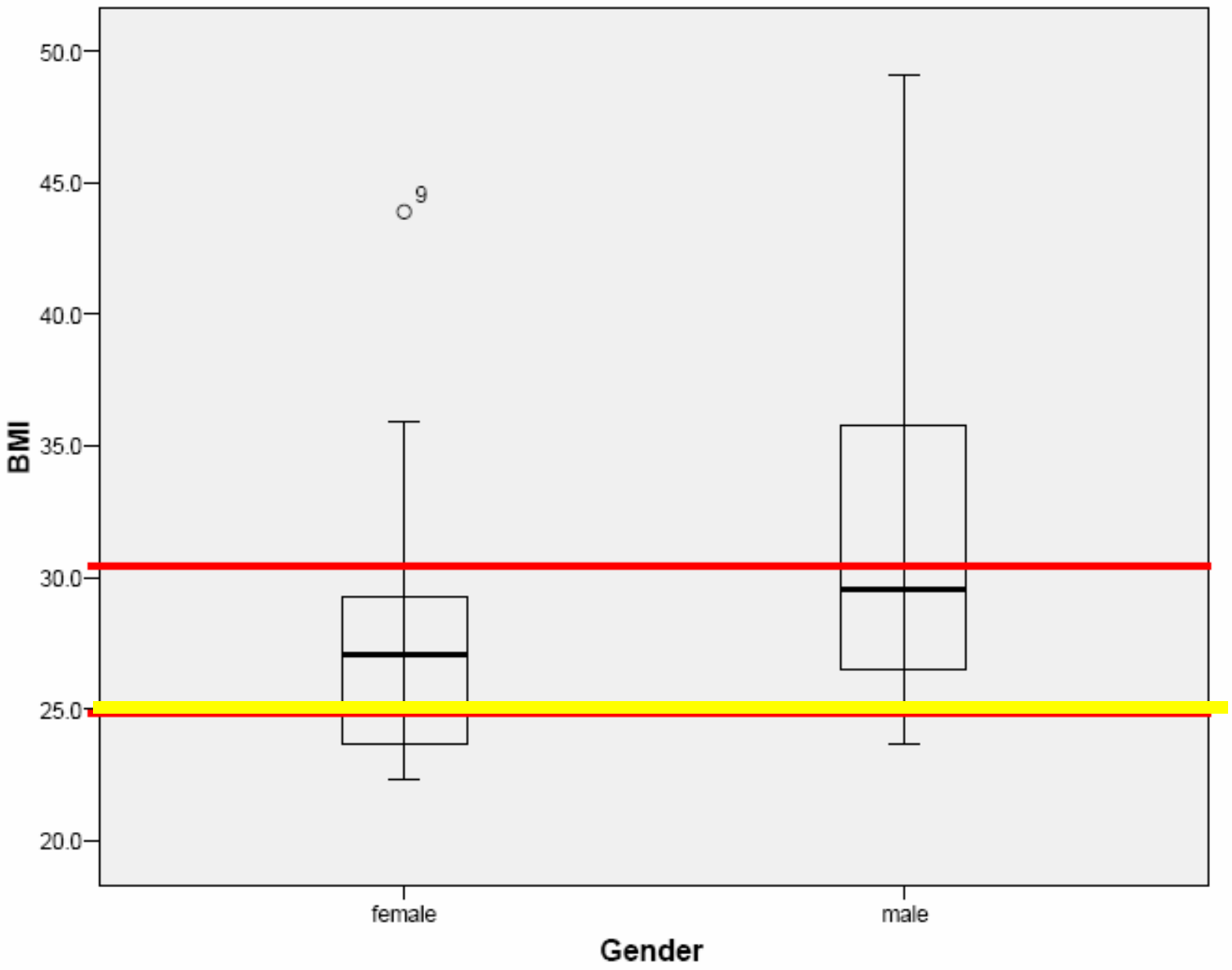
- Domains—what makes up the relevant areas of knowledge?
- Understanding of domains is guided by models/schemas
- Action stems from the interpretation of schematic cues
- Test for shared knowledge, do not assume it

Food consumption patterns among Undergraduates

- Exploratory—Identify domains
- Qualitative interviews
- Free lists and pile sorts
- BMI-SMT (Peterson et al. 2004)
- Structured interviews

Research Sample

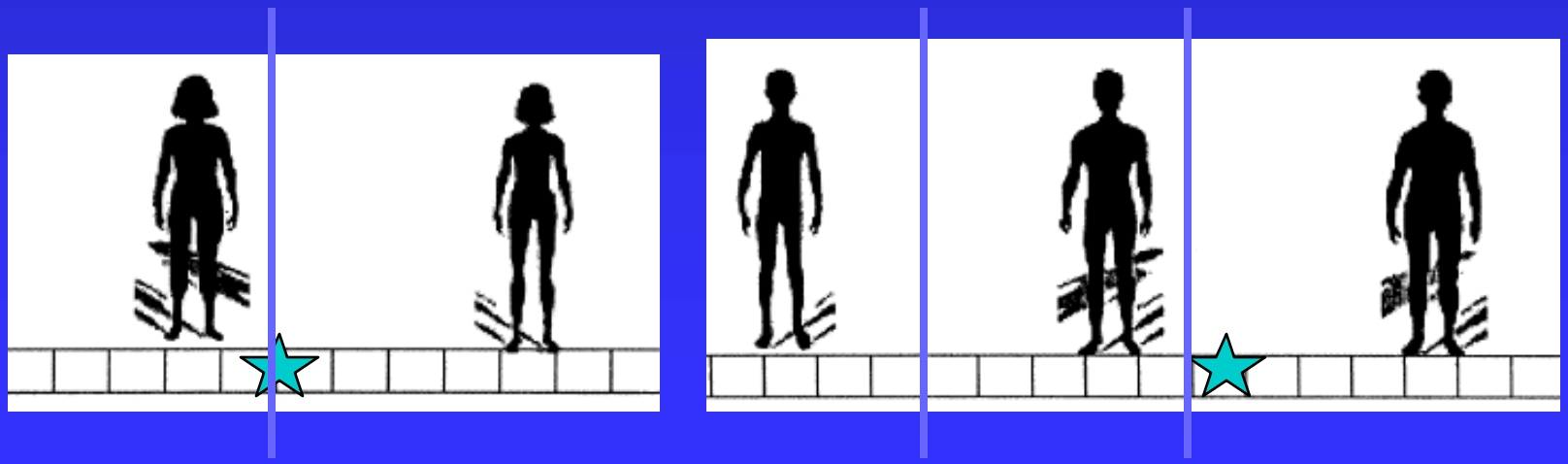
- USF Undergraduates (n = 49)
  - Caucasian (72.9%), Hispanic (8.3%)
  - Female (54.2%), Male (45.8%)
  - 20.4% currently dieting
  - Mean BMI = 29.2 (overweight)
    - 41.3% overweight
    - 32.6% obese

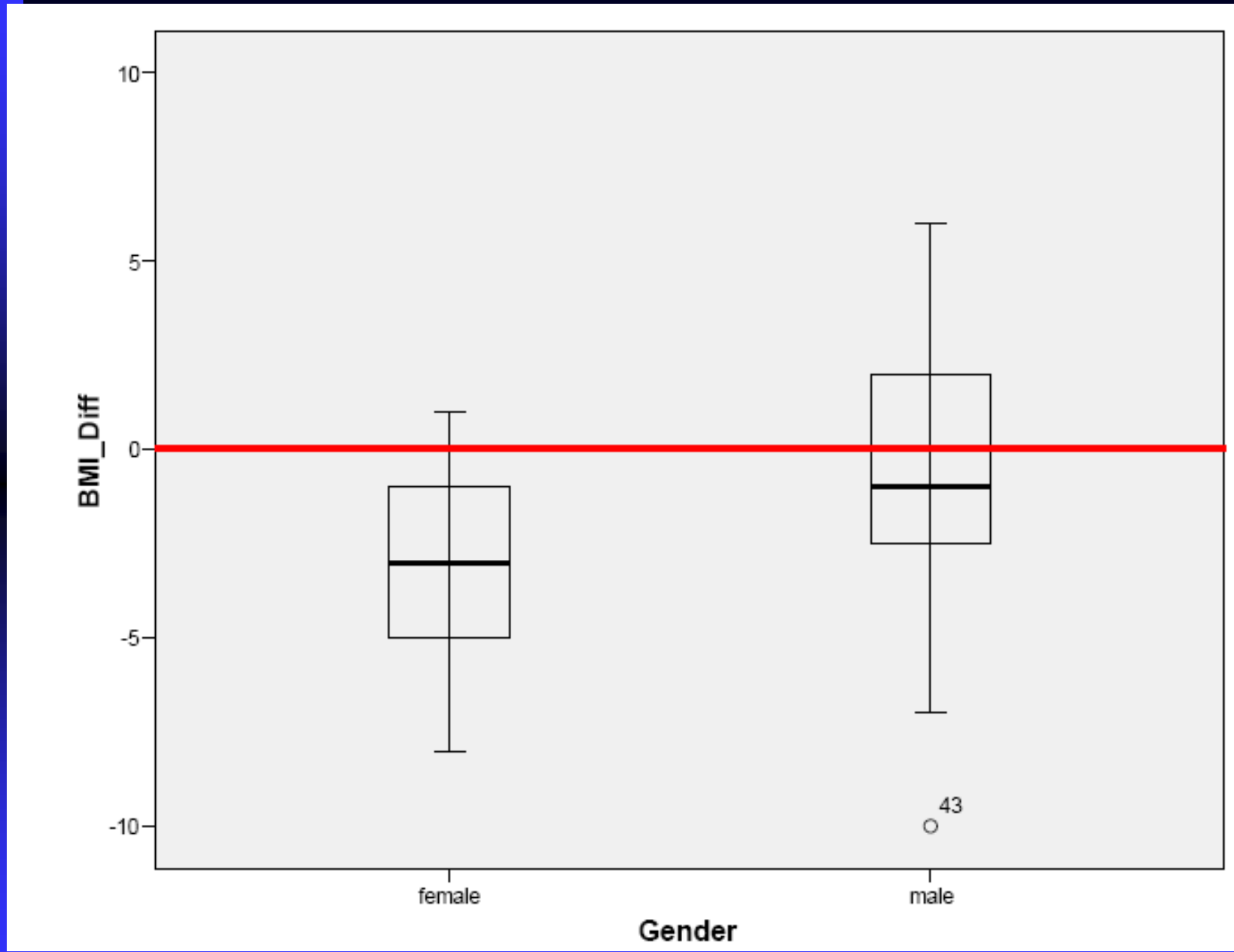


How are the food consumption patterns of USF undergraduates impacted?

Seeing Themselves

- Mean recognized BMI: 25.5
  - 24.6 female, 26.9 male
- 26.2 ideal BMI for males
- 21.6 ideal BMI for females



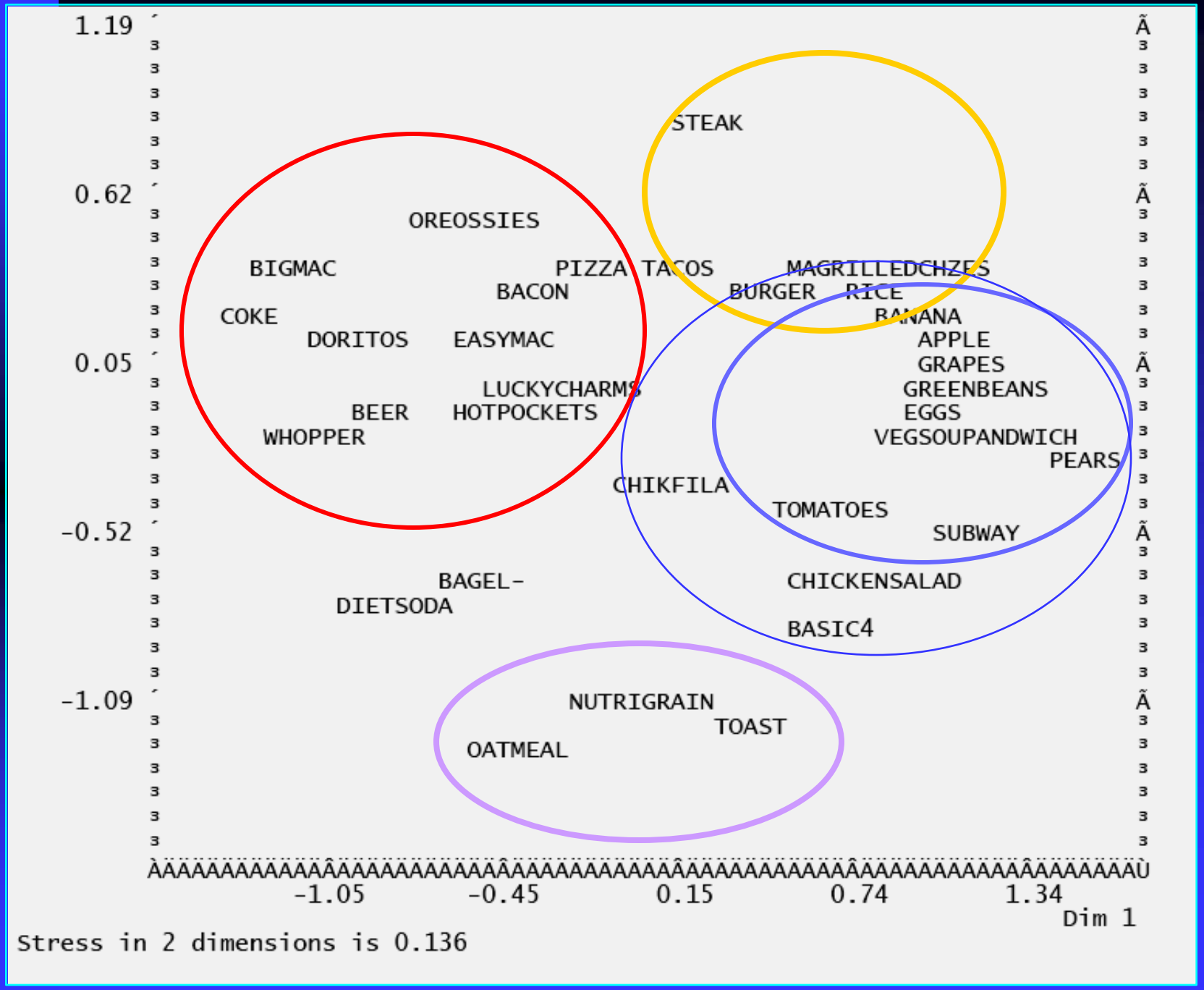


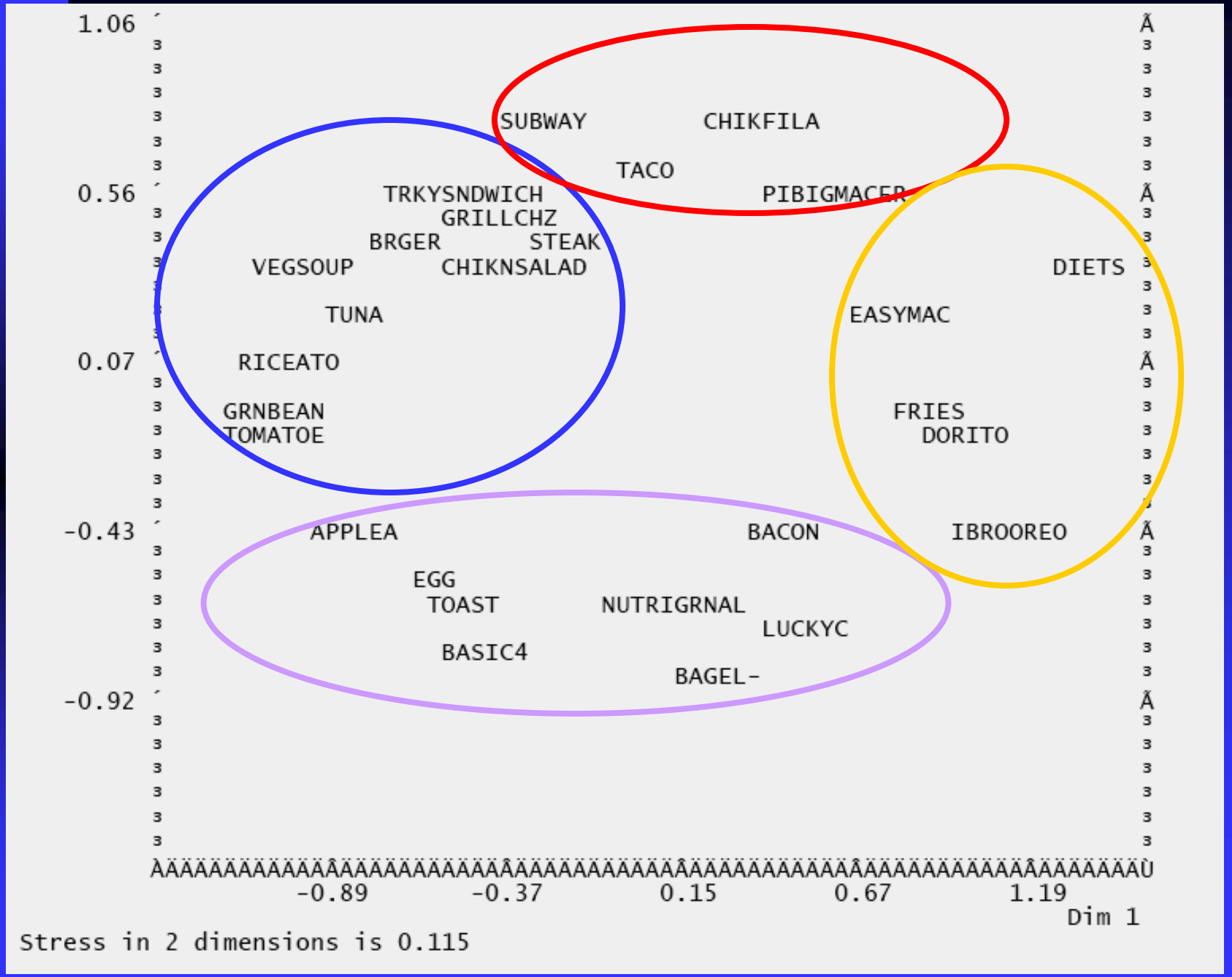
Impact of BMI Perception

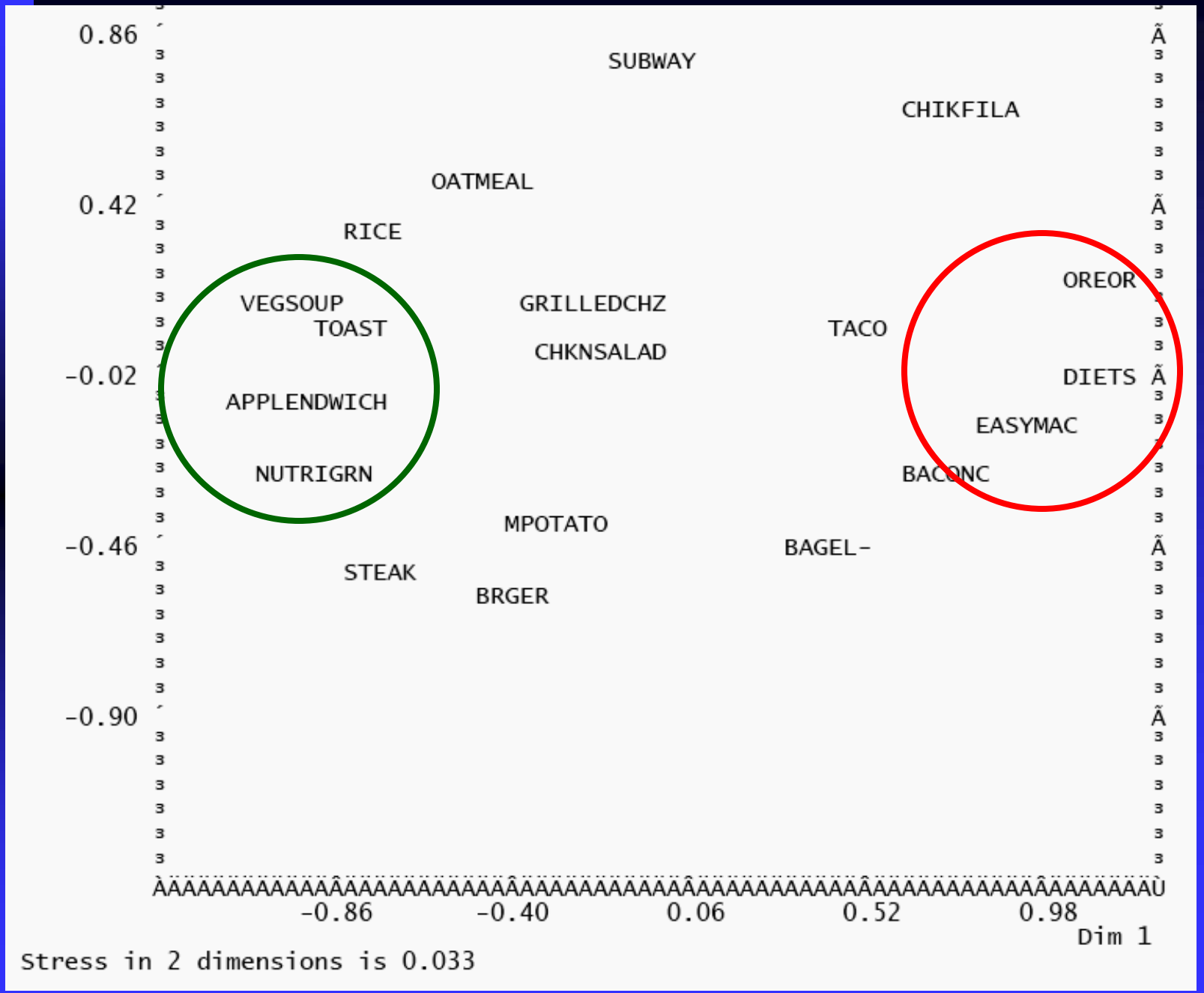
- Survey results do not support for either gender
- Most influential factors:
  - For women, taste (53.8%)
  - For men, cost (40.9%)

Construct Validity?

- Potential emotional impact
  - "Life style stress" (Dressler)
- Focus on Proximate rather than distal causes
  - Acquisition rather than decision
  - Structural barriers







Frequency of food consumption…