



Mate-preference drives mate-choice: Men's self-rated masculinity predicts their female partner's preference for masculinity

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 May 2011

Received in revised form 12 August 2011

Accepted 17 August 2011

Available online 13 September 2011

Keywords:

Attractiveness

Face

Masculinity

Mate-choice

Preferences

ABSTRACT

Women who rate their male partner as more masculine tend to prefer more masculine faces. However, it is unclear whether a preference for masculinity causes women to select masculine partners, or to perceive their current partner as more masculine. By incorporating multiple measures of male masculinity, we establish that women's preference for facial masculinity in short-term partners is correlated with their rating of their partner's masculinity and with their partner's self-rated masculinity, but with neither independent ratings of men's facial masculinity nor a facialmetric masculinity index. Facial masculinity preference in long-term partners is correlated with women's rating of partner masculinity, with a similar trend for men's self-rating. Multiple regression analyses demonstrated that these relationships were independent of age, although only for short-term preference. We conclude that women who prefer masculine men tend to have more masculine partners, and therefore that mate-preferences do drive mate-choice.

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1. Introduction

Male facial masculinity is a putative indicator of heritable immunocompetence (Moore et al., 2011) and signals dominance and physical formidability (Fink, Neave, & Seydel, 2007; Mueller & Mazur, 1996), but the hypothesis that male facial masculinity is attractive (Perrett et al., 1998) has received mixed empirical support. Some studies show that women prefer facially masculine men (DeBruine et al., 2006; Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, & Grammer, 2001), while others suggest that femininity is preferable (Perrett et al., 1998; Rhodes, Hickford, & Jeffery, 2000; Welling, DeBruine, Little, & Jones, 2009). This disparity may be explained by methodological differences (but see DeBruine, Jones, Smith, & Little, 2010; DeBruine et al., 2006), or by effects of individual differences and the context in which images are judged. For example, women tend to prefer masculinity if their own market-value is higher (Little, Burt, Penton-Voak, & Perrett, 2001; Vukovic et al., 2010), and during the fertile phase of the ovulatory cycle (Penton-Voak et al., 1999), when attractiveness is greater (Roberts et al., 2004). Although evidence for simple masculinity preferences remains equivocal, masculinity appears to be a valued trait because it is preferred by women who are better placed to compete for attractive mates.

Research assessing mate-preferences in the laboratory often tacitly assumes that preferences drive choice. Recent efforts have focused on determining whether possession of attractive traits predicts real-world reproductive success. For example, men who are more dominant (Wolff & Puts, 2010), muscular (Frederick & Haselton, 2007) and physically and facially masculine (Rhodes, Simmons, & Peters, 2005) report more short-term sexual partners. Men with high incomes (Hopcroft, 2006), attractive faces (Jokela, 2009), and deep-voices (Apicella, Feinberg, & Marlowe, 2007) have more offspring. Moreover, attractive persons expect their dating partners to be more attractive (Montoya, 2008), and attractiveness ratings of romantically involved persons are positively correlated (Feingold, 1988). Young and middle-aged couples tend not to assort for facial masculinity (Burriss, Roberts, Welling, Puts, & Little, 2011; Cornwell & Perrett, 2008), but, as DeBruine (2005) points out, mate-preferences and mating behavior may be discrepant because preferences are unconstrained, whereas behavior is a compromise between what is desired and what is available.

DeBruine et al. (2006) conducted the first study of the relationship between masculinity preference and actual partner masculinity. In a sample of 69 heterosexual partnered women, those who preferred male facial masculinity tended to rate their own partners as more masculine (DeBruine et al., 2006). However, it is unclear whether women select partners who meet their criteria for masculinity or instead impute desirable characteristics to their current partner. The latter possibility could be adaptive if it promotes relationship stability. To determine whether women's preferences are

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associated with their male partner's masculinity, it is necessary to obtain estimates of male masculinity from sources other than the women whose preferences are tested.

We recruited a large sample of heterosexual couples, assessed women's preferences for facial masculinity, and made multiple measures of male masculinity. We collected ratings of men's masculinity from both women and men, and had men's faces rated for masculinity by judges who did not know the participants. We also measured men's faces and calculated an index of the extent to which they embodied a male-typical morphology (Burriss, Roberts, et al., 2011; Penton-Voak et al., 2001). Following previous studies (Jones et al., 2007; Little, DeBruine, & Jones, 2011; Little et al., 2001), we also had women express a preference for masculinity in same-sex faces. If women's preferences for masculinity in the faces of men, but not women, are predicted by male partner masculinity, this will provide evidence that women's masculinity preferences are specially designed for acquiring masculine mates, as opposed to more general purpose mechanisms of face perception. Because women's facial masculinity preference varies as a function of context (Little, Jones, Penton-Voak, Burt, & Perrett, 2002), we assessed preferences for male facial masculinity in both prospective long- and short-term partners.

If women's preferences for male masculinity are associated with measures of partner masculinity derived from external sources, these relationships cannot be explained by a simple halo effect. Instead, they would provide stronger evidence that preferences for attractive traits drive real-world mate-choice.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

We recruited 117 heterosexual romantic couples from a psychology department at a university in northeastern USA. Participants received course credit or \$14 USD. After excluding participants and the partners of participants who later withdrew, the sample comprised 112 women (M age = 20.10 years, SD = 1.91, range = 18–28) and 112 men (M = 20.74 years, SD = 3.34, range = 18–45). We recruited an additional nine women and nine men from a university in northwest UK (hereafter referred to as judges) to rate photographs of the couples. There may be some between-group variation in face perception, but we expect differences between US and UK citizens to be limited due to similarities in health and culture.

2.2. Stimuli

We created masculinized and feminized versions of ten male and ten female faces by transforming apparent masculinity by $\pm 50\%$ of the shape differences between symmetrical prototype male and female faces (for more information, see Burriss, Welling, & Puts, 2011).

2.3. Procedure

Participants attended two half-hour laboratory sessions seven days apart. In session one, we took the participants' neutral facial photographs (for more information on the photographic methods, see Burriss, Welling, et al., 2011). Participants then undertook a series of tasks at a private computer workstation. In the first session, they completed a questionnaire and three facial masculinity preference tasks. Participants attended a second session to complete additional tasks that are not the focus of this paper. Participants repeated the questionnaire during session two, thereby permitting the calculation of mean ratings that may more accu-

rately reflect perceptions over time. Age data were collected for use as additional predictors; previous research has shown that age is positively correlated with both facial masculinity preferences (Little et al., 2001, 2010; Saxton, DeBruine, Jones, Little, & Roberts, 2009) and a masculine facial appearance (Boothroyd et al., 2005). Male participants self-rated masculinity, and female participants rated their partner's masculinity, using a ten-point Likert scale (anchors: 1 = *Not at all masculine*, 10 = *Very masculine*). We did not define masculinity. Across sessions one and two there were strong correlations between women's ratings of partner masculinity, $r = .77$, $p < .001$, and men's self-rated masculinity, $r = .86$, $p < .001$.

Female participants read definitions of long- and short-term relationships (see e.g. Penton-Voak et al., 2003) and then judged ten pairs of male faces on their attractiveness for long- and short-term relationships. Female participants also judged ten female face pairs on how attractive they would appear to the average heterosexual man of about the participant's age. Task order was random. Each face pair consisted of a masculinized and feminized version of the same face (see Fig. 1). Trial order and the side of the screen on which any given image appeared were fully random. Participants expressed the extent to which they preferred one face over the other using eight on-screen buttons. We coded each participant's responses on an eight-point scale (1 = *Strong preference for femininity*, 8 = *Strong preference for masculinity*) and calculated mean scores across the ten trials in each of the three tasks.

Seventy-one of the male participants consented to their photographs being rated. One man exhibited evidence of recent facial trauma; therefore his photograph was neither rated nor measured. Photographs were masked to obscure hair and neck. Judges rated photographs for masculinity (7 point scale: 1 = *Very feminine* and 7 = *Very masculine*) in a random order using a laptop computer. Inter-rater reliability was high (inter-rater reliability coefficient: female faces = .87, male faces = .91). We averaged ratings so that each participant received a mean independently rated masculinity score.

We measured men's photographs for seven sexually dimorphic face traits (e.g., jaw angle) and calculated a masculinity index by summing these measures (Burriss, Roberts, et al., 2011; Penton-Voak et al., 2001). A higher index denotes an exaggeratedly male face shape. See Burriss, Roberts, et al. (2011) for further information and for analyses confirming that these traits are sexually dimorphic in this sample. As can be seen in Table 1, the masculinity index correlated significantly with the other measures of male masculinity (the correlation with self-ratings fell just short of significance), but the strongest relationship was with independent ratings. This suggests that the masculinity index captures information similar to that which is used to make subjective ratings of facial masculinity.

2.4. Statistical analyses

We used t -tests to ascertain whether women's preferences were for masculine or feminine faces. Next, we explored zero-order correlations between women's preferences for facial masculinity and the masculinity of their partners. We then used multiple regression to explore the independent contributions of the masculinity measures to variation in women's masculinity preferences. All p -values are two-tailed and considered statistically significant if $< .05$. Independent ratings of masculinity, $D(70) = 0.08$, $p = .20$, and the masculinity index, $D(70) = 0.08$, $p = .20$, were normally distributed. Female ratings of partner masculinity, $D(110) = 0.15$, $p < .001$, and male self-ratings of masculinity, $D(110) = 0.10$, $p = .005$, were significantly non-normal and were log-transformed prior to analysis.

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