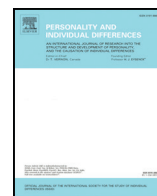




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Is mating psychology most closely tied to biological sex or preferred partner's sex?

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ABSTRACT

Most research into mating psychology focuses on heterosexual mating; however, it remains unknown whether the sex of the individual or the sex to whom that individual is attracted is most closely tied to mating psychology. In the current study, homosexual and heterosexual participants completed questionnaires designed to measure previously-documented sex differences in mating psychology from heterosexual samples. These included men's higher sociosexual orientation and number of lifetime sex partners, women's greater emotional attachment to casual sex partners, men's greater likelihood to overestimate women's sexual intent, women's greater likelihood to underestimate men's commitment intent, and differences in responses to emotional versus sexual infidelity. Based on our results, it appears that the sex of the individual and not the sex to whom that person is attracted tends to determine mating psychology. In particular, women, regardless of orientation, seem to share a similar mating psychology – supporting the idea female sexuality is relatively fluid. In comparison, there was greater variation between heterosexual men and gay men – consistent with the view that that male sexuality is more canalized. We conclude that homosexual mating strategies are complex: they represent neither a simple continuation of heterosexual evolved mating psychology nor a complete gender-role reversal.

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1. Introduction

It is hardly novel to suggest that men and women show differences in some of the characteristics they find attractive in a potential mate. However, it has only been in the past few decades that scientists have taken an evolutionary approach to studying these consistent sex differences systematically (e.g., Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, 2005). From this perspective, sex differences only evolve when men and women recurrently faced dissimilar adaptive problems – and therefore selection pressures – over the course of human evolution (Buss, 2003, 2007; Symons, 1979). Nowhere are the selection pressures more sex-differentiated than in the domain of mating, and thus it is unsurprising that strong sex differences are reliably documented across a range of mechanisms involved in human mating such as sexual jealousy (Buss, 2013; Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992), desire for casual sex (Kennair, Schmitt, Fjeldavli, & Harkem, 2009; Schmitt, 2005; Schmitt, Shackelford, & Buss, 2001), interest in visual sexual stimuli (Murnen & Stockton, 1997; Symons, 1979), mate preferences for social status (Buss, 1989; Okami & Shackelford, 2001), mate preferences for physical attractiveness (Buss, 1989; Meltzer, McNulty, Jackson, &

Karney, 2008), and perception of sexual interest (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Perilloux, Easton, & Buss, 2012).

However, while the documented sex differences in the human mating domain are robust, the vast majority of studies have been conducted with heterosexual samples. Those studies that have explored the interplay of mating psychology and sexual orientation (e.g. Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr, & Brown, 1995; Lawson, James, Jansson, Koyama, & Hill, 2014; Lippa, 2007; Schmitt, 2006) have emphasized orientation instead of the sex to whom one is attracted as the relevant divergence from heterosexuality. Because heterosexual men are attracted to women and heterosexual women are attracted to men, by definition, most data cannot speak to the degree to which these known sex differences are due to adaptations based on the individual's biological sex or due to adaptations that take into account the target's sex. In the following investigation, we attempted to disentangle the degree to which biological sex and target sex influence human mating psychology.

1.1. Has homosexuality resulted in the evolution of a unique mating psychology?

It is not surprising that most mating research from an evolutionary perspective has focused on heterosexual mating strategies as mating behavior evolved to increase reproductive success via opposite-sex sexual encounters. Given that homosexuals reproduce at significantly lower rates than heterosexuals (Schwartz, Kim, Kolundzija, Rieger, & Sanders, 2010), there should have been recurrent selection pressure

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against exclusive homosexual orientation. Nevertheless, the frequency of homosexuality in the population remains relatively stable, with recent reports estimating that 3.4% (Gates & Newport, 2012) of the U.S. population self-identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Similar rates are reported in other countries such as Australia (3–4%; Richters et al., 2014), the U.K. (1.6%; Office for National Statistics, 2015), and France (6.5%; Kraus, 2012). How could same-sex attraction – a seemingly evolutionarily disadvantageous sexual preference – have been maintained across populations, even at a low rate?

While the literature on the origins of homosexuality is hardly conclusive, there is converging evidence that homosexuality is attributable, at least in part, to genetic factors (e.g., Bailey & Bell, 1993; Hu et al., 1995; Kendler, Thornton, Gilmen, & Kessler, 2000; Sanders et al., 2015). In particular, male homosexuality appears to be heritable through the maternal line (Camperio-Ciani, Corna, & Capuluppi, 2004). The most cogent explanation is that when the genes that contribute to male homosexuality are present in women, they increase fecundity (Camperio Ciani, Cermelli, & Zanzotto, 2008; Iemmola & Camperio Ciani, 2009; Camperio Ciani & Pellizzari, 2012), and, indeed, female relatives of male homosexuals do have more children (Camperio Ciani et al., 2012). However, while the biological basis of male homosexuality is relatively well-documented (for a review, see Wilson & Rahman, 2005), male and female homosexuality might not necessarily be the same phenomenon (Mustanski, Chivers, & Bailey, 2002; Garnets & Peplau, 2000). That is, while heterosexual men are reliably attracted to women and homosexual men are reliably attracted to men, heterosexual and homosexual women display more similarity in their preferences.

Heterosexual and homosexual women report greater sexual fluidity over their lifespan (Diamond, 2008) than do heterosexual or homosexual men; furthermore, women's sexuality is affected to a greater degree by sociocultural variables such as religiosity and educational background than is men's (Baumeister, 2000). Women also display lower synchronicity in sexual attitudes and behaviors. For example, compared to gay or heterosexual men, lesbian and heterosexual women produce similar genital arousal patterns when viewing both homosexual and heterosexual sexual acts (Chivers, Rieger, Latty, & Bailey, 2004) and show more similar brain activation patterns in response to preferred and non-preferred sexual stimuli (Syla et al., 2013). Furthermore, while women (1.1%) are less likely to identify as homosexual than men (1.7%), they are more likely to identify as bisexual (3.5% vs. 1.1% of men) and are more than twice as likely to report having had any same-sex sexual contact (Chandra, Mosher, Copen, & Sionean, 2011). Perhaps for women, sexual fluidity, rather than homosexual orientation per se, was more adaptive: homosexual behavior could have encouraged strong pair bonds between women, increasing their own survival rates and that of their offspring through allomothering, in the face of abuse or abandonment by a male mate (Radtke, 2013).

Given that securing successful heterosexual mateships would have been the predominant selection pressure over human evolutionary history and that opposite-sex attraction is likely “assumed” by downstream mechanisms, we do not anticipate that sexual orientation will be associated with entirely unique evolved mating psychologies. This should be particularly true for women whose sexual fluidity suggests that female homosexuality is not a discrete mechanism. Given the stronger evidence for a direct biological mechanism for male homosexuality, as well as heterosexual and gay men's more canalized sexual preferences, it is possible that gay men might display divergent mating psychology from heterosexual men.

1.2. The current study

Most studies of sex differences in mating psychology begin with the inherent sex difference in reproductive biology: compared to men, women necessarily have greater costs associated with successful reproduction (e.g., ovulation, gestation, lactation) and can therefore produce fewer offspring in a lifetime. The opportunity cost of poor mate choice is

consequently higher for women and thus they have evolved to be relatively more discriminating when selecting mates; men, conversely, experience lower opportunity costs of mating and have evolved to be relatively less discriminating (Trivers, 1972). This led to the evolution of divergent mating strategies: men have evolved a mating psychology which tends toward greater pursuit of more casual sexual interactions (characterized as short-term mating orientation) whereas women have evolved a mating psychology which tends toward selection of a high quality mate who will invest over time (long-term mating orientation), and of course these strategies can and do overlap (see Sexual Strategies Theory; Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

In the present investigation, we collected data from both homosexual and heterosexual participants to examine the influence of biological sex and preferred partner's sex on mating psychology. There are at least two ways we might find that mating psychology is regulated. (1) Mating psychology has evolved to be sex-specific and biological sex is consequently the determining factor: individuals of the same sex have similar mating psychology regardless of sexual orientation (i.e., lesbians display similar mating psychology to heterosexual women and gay men display similar mating psychology to heterosexual men). (2) Mating psychology has evolved specifically in relation to the sex to whom one is attracted: homosexual individuals display a mating psychology that is more similar to opposite-sex heterosexuals (i.e., lesbians are similar to heterosexual men in mating psychology and gay men are similar to heterosexual women in mating psychology).

We selected several well-documented sex differences in mating psychology as test cases to explore these two possibilities. While each is conceptually possible, and might be applied on a mechanism-by-mechanism basis, our overarching hypothesis is that homosexual participants will display mating psychology and behavior that generally matches heterosexual members of their same sex (because mating psychology has evolved to solve problems related to reproduction wherein opposite-sex attraction is the default) and discrepancies from this pattern will be more likely to occur among men than women (since heterosexual men's behavior is limited by heterosexual women's mating psychology, whereas gay men's behavior is not).

1.3. Predictions

Prediction 1: Sociosexual orientation. We predicted that heterosexual and gay men would show similarly high sociosexual orientation – more positive attitudes toward and experience engaging in casual sex without deeper emotional commitment (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) – significantly higher than lesbians and heterosexual women who would not differ.

Prediction 2: Attachment to sex partners. Previous research has documented that heterosexual women report feeling more attached to casual sex partners than men do (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011); this follows from an evolutionary perspective as casual sex could result in pregnancy without paternal investment and is thus costlier for women (Buss, 2003; Trivers, 1972). We therefore predicted that women, regardless of orientation, would report feeling greater emotional attachment to casual sex partners than heterosexual or gay men.

Prediction 3: Sexual and commitment intent perception. Error Management Theory proposes that because, particularly in ancestral environments, missing a potential mating opportunity would have been costlier for men than wasted courtship effort, heterosexual men evolved to overestimate women's sexual interest (Haselton & Buss, 2000; Perilloux et al., 2012). Women, conversely, tend to underestimate men's level of interest in developing a committed relationship with them because falsely assuming a man is romantically committed would have been the costlier error. We thus predicted that gay men, like heterosexual men, would tend toward over-estimating targets' sexual interest, whereas lesbians, like homosexual women, would tend toward underestimating targets' commitment intention.

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