Personality and Individual Differences 112 (2017) 90–96

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Assortative mating in personality among heterosexual and male homosexual couples from Brazil and the Czech Republic

Zuzana Štěrbová [a,b,*], Klára Bártová [b,c], Lenka Martinec Nováková [b,c], Marco Antonio Correa Varella [d], Jan Havlíček [b,e], Jaroslava Varella Valentova [d]

[a] Institute of Sexology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University, Ke Karlovu 11, 128 08 Prague, Czech Republic
[b] National Institute of Mental Health, Topolová 748, 250 67 Klecany, Czech Republic
[c] Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, U Kříže 8, 158 00 Prague, Czech Republic
[d] Department of Experimental Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of São Paulo, Av. Prof. Mello Moraes 1721, CEP 05508-030, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP, Brazil
[e] Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, Charles University, Viničná 7, 128 44 Prague, Czech Republic

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 November 2016
Received in revised form 13 February 2017
Accepted 15 February 2017

Keywords:
Actual homogamy
Perceived homogamy
Preferences
Mate choice
Sexual orientation
Male same-sex couples
Big Five

ABSTRACT

Studies of homogamy in personality in heterosexual couples have arrived at inconsistent results and research of this issue in same-sex couples is almost non-existent. Moreover, homogamy in actual couples can differ from preferred homogamy in ideal partners. In Study 1, preferences for personality homogamy and perceived homogamy in actual relationships as measured by a Ten-Item Personality Inventory were assessed in heterosexual and homosexual men from Brazil and the Czech Republic. In men of both sexual orientations, we found preferences for homogamy in all personality characteristics except for Emotional Stability, while perceived homogamy in actual couples was limited to Extraversion in heterosexual couples. The results were nearly identical for both studied populations.

In Study 2, resemblance in the Big Five personality traits measured by a 60-item NEO-FFI was tested in 49 actual heterosexual and 40 male same-sex long-term couples from the Czech Republic. Heterosexual partners resembled each other in Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness, whereas homosexuals only in Extraversion. Our results thus indicate that while preferences for personality homogamy exist in both heterosexual and homosexual men, they translate only partially into actual mate choice, especially in homosexual men.

1. Introduction

It is a well-established fact that human mate preferences and mate choice are far from random. One of the most widespread theories states that people tend to prefer and choose partners based on self-similarity (homogamy), and/or dissimilarity (heterogamy). This mechanism is also known as positive/negative assortative mating (Vandenberg, 1972). Previous research reports that long-term heterosexual partners show some degree of similarity in many of the characteristics studied: they resemble each other in various demographic characteristics (such as age or social status), physical appearance (e.g., body height, hair colour), and attitudes (e.g., political orientation and religiosity) (for a review see, Štěrbová & Valentová, 2012).

Some research suggests that spousal similarity might contribute to relationship quality. It has been reported that opposite-sex partners who are more similar in a variety of characteristics, such as age, educational level, socioeconomic status, intelligence, attitudes, and physical attractiveness, tend to perceive their relationships as happier, have more children and a lower likelihood of separation than less similar couples (e.g., Arrindell & Luteijn, 2000; Bereczkei & Csanaky, 1996; Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999). Homosexual individuals also express a higher level of relationship satisfaction when they share similar values and beliefs (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987). When it comes to personality characteristics, however, heterosexual couple similarity consistently explains <0.5% of variance in relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010).

A substantial body of research conducted mostly in North American and European countries has shown that heterosexual partners score similarly on some of the Big Five personality dimensions. The observed pattern, however, varies highly across the individual studies. Some found spousal homogamy in Conscientiousness, Openness, and Agreeableness (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1987; Rammstedt & Schupp, 2008), while another study (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997) reports homogamy in Conscientiousness and Openness, but not in Agreeableness. Homogamy in Openness and Extraversion has also been observed by Gyuris, Járai, and Bereczkei (2010). Other studies, however, found personality homogamy only in Extraversion (e.g., Keller, Thiessen, &

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: zuzana.sterbova@nudz.cz (Z. Štěrbová), klara.bartova@fhs.cuni.cz (K. Bártová), lenka.novakova@fhs.cuni.cz (L. Martinec Nováková), jhavlicek@natur.cuni.cz (J. Havlíček), jaroslava@usp.br (J.V. Valentova).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.02.036
0191-8869/

Young, 1996; Little, Burt, & Perrett, 2006), while yet other research failed to find evidence of homogamy in any of the personality characteristics studied (e.g., Gyuris, Bernáth, & Bereczkei, 2005). Neuroticism is the only personality factor in which similarity has not been observed.

These discrepancies may be partly due to differences in methodology, such as the use of different personality measures or computations of self-similarity (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Moreover, actual mate choice is limited by many external and internal factors, such as availability of a potential partner or own mate value (e.g., Regan, 1998). Also, homogamy in actual couples is due to several distinct mechanisms (for a review, see Štěrbová & Valentová, 2012). Active assortment, i.e., preferences for self-similarity, is considered one of the primary mechanisms at work (Kalmijn, 1998). So far, it has been shown that people tend to prefer partners who are similar to themselves in Openness and Conscientiousness (Botwin et al., 1997) and along the same line, Figueredo, Sefcek, and Jones (2006) found preferences for self-similarity in all the Big Five personality traits, but most notably in Openness. Only a handful of studies have investigated both preferred and actual homogamy in the same sample in order to ascertain whether active assortment is associated with similarity between actual partners. Thus far, two studies found that preferred homogamy correlates with actual homogamy between partners in Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (Botwin et al., 1997; Watson, Beer, & McDade-Montez, 2014) but on the other hand, Figueredo et al. (2006) did not find any correlation between preferred and actual homogamy in any of the Big Five personality traits.

Vast majority of previous research on actual and preferred homogamy focused on heterosexual individuals or couples. As far as we know, the only study which dealt with same-sex male partners did not find any homogamy in the Big Five personality characteristics (Gyuris et al., 2005). Other studies have shown that same-sex male partners tend to resemble each other in age and education level, but to a smaller degree than opposite-sex couples (Andersson, Noack, Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006; Jepsen & Jepsen, 2002; Schwartz & Graff, 2009; Verbakel & Kalmijn, 2014). To the best of our knowledge, there are currently no other studies on preferences for self-similar personality characteristics in homosexual individuals, although it has been shown that homosexual men prefer potential partners who are close to them in age (Harry & DeVall, 1978) and resemble them in terms of height (Valentova, Stulp, Třebický, & Havlíček, 2014; Valentova, Bártová, Štěrbová & Varella, 2016), beardedness (Valentova, Varella, Bártová, Štěrbová, & Dixson, 2017), and masculinity (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997).

Moreover, homosexual individuals offer a unique opportunity to study differences both within and between the sexes. Previous studies have shown small to moderate differences in self-assessed personality between men and women, in particular in Agreeableness and Neuroticism (for a meta-analysis, see Lippa, 2005). Somewhat similarly to heterosexual women, homosexual men reported higher scores in Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, and Openness than heterosexual men (Lippa, 2005, 2008). Along the same line, a recent cross-cultural study reported higher self-assessed Conscientiousness and Neuroticism in homosexual than in heterosexual men (Valentova, Štěrbová, Bártová, & Varella, 2016) and in the same study, homosexual men have also shown higher preferences for Conscientiousness in their ideal partner than heterosexual men did. These intra-sexual differences in self-reported and preferred personality traits could lead to differences in results for heterosexual and homosexual individuals also in preferred and actual personality homogamy. In particular, the 'mating market' of homosexual individuals is considerably smaller, which might complicate the finding of a preferred partner (McFarland, 1975). Thus, same-sex couples could display lower homogamy level than opposite-sex couples. Therefore, in order to shed light on between- and within-sex variation in preferred and actual homogamy, it is important to compare individuals who prefer same-sex partners with individuals who prefer partners of the opposite sex.

1.1. Current research

The general aim of our study was to test preferred and perceived/actual homogamy in personality in heterosexual and homosexual men from Brazil and the Czech Republic. In other words, we tested whether preferred and actual partners of heterosexual and homosexual men are more self-similar than randomly paired individuals from a given sample.

In Study 1, we examined whether heterosexual and homosexual men prefer partners with self-similar personality characteristics and whether these preferences translate into actual mate choices. A previous study had shown that in both heterosexual and homosexual individuals, preferences for personality differ from the reported personality of actual partners (Valentova et al., 2016). This may be because actual mate choice is more limited by various constrains than mate preferences. Furthermore, if actual homogamy between partners results primarily from preferences for self-similarity, one might expect that the degree of preferred homogamy in an ideal partner would be higher than perceived homogamy in the actual partners.

Moreover, it has not yet been tested whether preferences for homogamy vary between single and coupled individuals. It has been previously shown that coupled people tend to overestimate the actual similarity with their partner (Buunk & Bosman, 1986; Klohnen & Bera, 1998), which may, in turn, affect their preferences. Therefore, we have tested preferences for homogamy in singles and coupled participants separately.

In order to test whether preferred and actual homogamy can be generalised across different cultures, we employed samples from populations which tend to be underrepresented in psychological research. Participants in Study 1 were recruited from Brazil and the Czech Republic. The two countries differ substantially in terms of history, culture, and socio-demographic data. Brazil is with its 203 million inhabitants the largest country in Latin America (Brazil Demographics Profile, 2014), while the Czech Republic is a small Central European state with a population of approximately 10.6 million inhabitants (Czech Statistical Office, 2015). The GDP per capita in Brazil is $15,800, which is significantly less than the $31,500 in the Czech Republic (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015). In terms of legislation, Brazil is liberal on the issue of same-sex couples, currently allowing full marriages and the adoption of children. The Czech Republic is also considered legislatively liberal and same-sex couples can enter civil unions. On the other hand, as far as public acceptance of homosexuality is concerned, only 60% of Brazilian population expressed support, whereas in the Czech Republic 80% of population report acceptance of homosexuality (The Global Divide on Homosexuality, 2013). Based on previous research (e.g., Heine, Foster, & Spina, 2009), we expected cross-cultural consistency in preferences for homogamy, while actual homogamy can vary across cultures due to factors such as relational mobility and the opportunity to form a relationship (Schug, Yuki, Horikawa, & Takemura, 2009). In particular, we hypothesised that both heterosexual and homosexual men would exhibit preferences for self-similarity in all the Big Five personality characteristics except for Emotional Stability (i.e., low Neuroticism). In the same vein, we expected that actual couples would tend to be rather similar in all personality characteristics with the exception of Emotional Stability.

The main aim of Study 2, which employed a sample from the Czech Republic, was to determine whether personality characteristics of male respondents resemble those of their long-term opposite-sex or same-sex partners. To test actual homogamy in couples, both partners were recruited to participate in the study.

As mentioned above, previous research on homogamy focused almost exclusively on opposite-sex couples, and thus little is known about assortative mating in homosexual individuals. For both our studies, we have thus recruited both heterosexual and homosexual men.