



Original Article

Mate preferences and choices for facial and body hair in heterosexual women and homosexual men: influence of sex, population, homogamy, and imprinting-like effect



Jaroslava Varella Valentova^{a,*}, Marco Antonio Corrêa Varella^a, Klára Bártová^{b,c},
Zuzana Štěrbová^{c,d}, Barnaby James Wylid Dixon^e

^a Department of Experimental Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Sao Paulo, Av. Prof. Mello Moraes 1721, Sao Paulo, 05508-030, – SP, Brazil

^b Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, U Kříže 8, 158 00, Prague, Czech Republic

^c National Institute of Mental Health, Topolová 748, 250 67, Klecany, Czech Republic

^d Institute of Sexology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague, Ke Karlovu 11, 128 08, Prague, Czech Republic

^e School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane, 4072, QLD, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has reported that male body and facial hair influence women's mate preferences. However, it is not clear whether such preferences are typical for women or for individuals who prefer males as sexual partners. Here we explored body and facial hair in preferred and actual partners among men and women who prefer men as sexual partners. Including homosexual individuals provides a unique opportunity to investigate whether evolved mating psychologies are specific to the sex of the individual or sex of the partner. Based on an online survey of 1577 participants from Brazil and the Czech Republic, we found that, on average, homosexual men preferred hairier stimuli than heterosexual women, supporting past findings that homosexual men have strong preferences for masculine traits. Preferences for facial and body hair appear to be influenced less by sex of the preferred partner than sex of the individual, pointing to a possible sex-specific mating psychology. Further, Brazilians preferred bigger beards than Czechs, which was positively associated with the self-reported amount of beardedness in Brazil, suggesting that familiarity effects underpin cross-cultural differences in preferences for facial hair. Moreover, homosexual men preferred a self-similar degree of beardedness, and Czech women preferred a similar degree of beardedness as their fathers had during their childhood. However, these effects were not associated with the level of facial hair in their actual partners; in general, mate preferences and actual mate choices for facial and body hair differed. Thus, individual differences in some self-reported characteristics, cultural factors, and aspects of personal experience may modulate differences in preferences for masculine traits.

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1. Introduction

Humans differ from other primates in their marked reduction in body hair (Sandel, 2013). Estimates of the onset of reduced hirsutism range from 240kya–3 million years ago (Reed, Light, Allen, & Kirchman, 2007; Rogers, Iltis, & Wooding, 2004; Winter et al., 2001) and may reflect natural selection to meet thermoregulatory requirements (Ruxton & Wilkinson, 2011), reduce ectoparasite loads (Rantala, 2007), or originated as a by-product of neoteny (De Marinis & Asprea, 2006; Meyer, 2009).

Yet humans retain highly conspicuous patches of hair. The patterned distribution and sexual dimorphism of men's beards and body hair suggest that sexual selection has shaped their evolution, either as an attractive ornament to women or as a badge of status between men (Archer, 2009; Dixon, Dixon, & Anderson, 2005; Grueter, Isler, & Dixon, 2015; Puts, 2010). While female preferences for facial hair are partially heritable (Verweij, Burri, & Zietsch, 2012), the evidence that beards and body hair enhances men's attractiveness to heterosexual women is very mixed (for review, see Dixon & Rantala, 2016). In some studies, women prefer beards (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986; Pellegrini, 1973; Reed and Blunk, 1990), while in others intermediate levels of stubble (Dixon & Brooks, 2013; Janif, Brooks, & Dixon, 2014; Neave & Shields, 2008), or clean-shaven faces (Dixon & Vasey, 2012; Geniole & McCormick, 2015; Muscarella & Cunningham, 1996). Likewise, women's preferences for chest hair range from pronounced in the UK (Dixon, Halliwell, East, Wignarajah, & Anderson, 2003), to moderate in Cameroon (Dixon, Dixon, Morgan, & Anderson, 2007),

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jaroslava@usp.br (J.V. Valentova), macvarella@gmail.com (M.A.C. Varella), Klara.Bartova@fhs.cuni.cz (K. Bártová), zuzana.sterbova@nudz.cz (Z. Štěrbová), b.dixon@uq.edu.au (B.J.W. Dixon).

and hairless chests in the USA, New Zealand, China, Finland, Turkey, and Slovakia (Dixon, Dixon, Bishop, & Parish, 2010; Dixon, Dixon, Li, & Anderson, 2007; Prokop, Rantala, & Fančovičová, 2012; Prokop, Rantala, Usak, & Senay, 2013; Rantala, Pölkki, Rantala, Polkki, & Rantala, 2010). Besides the varying methods used between studies, these mixed findings may have arisen due to the associations between facial and body hair and perceptions of dominance and aggressiveness (Puts, 2010; Saxton, Mackey, McCarty, & Neave, 2016; Sherlock, Tegg, Sullikowski, & Dixon, 2016).

These equivocal patterns are similar to studies of women's preferences for men's facial masculinity, where some studies found that women preferred masculinized over less masculinized male faces (DeBruine, Jones, Crawford, Welling, & Little, 2010), while others reported stronger preferences for less masculinized male faces (Perrett et al., 1998) or no differences in preferences between more or less masculine male faces (Valentová, Roberts & Havlíček, 2013). Female preferences for male facial masculinity may be influenced by environmental variables, such as national health (DeBruine et al., 2010), the distribution of the trait in the given population (Scott et al., 2014), prevailing income inequality and socioeconomic development (Brooks et al., 2011), by individual differences in relationship status (Little, Jones, Penton-Voak, Burt, & Perrett, 2002) or fertility (Gildersleeve, Haselton, & Fales, 2014). Thus, the ambiguous findings of past studies on female preferences for male facial and body hair may be due, in part, to both population and individual level differences.

While preferences for masculine traits have been extensively studied among heterosexual women, there remains less information on preferences among homosexual men. From an evolutionary perspective, homosexual participants represent a unique opportunity to test whether evolved mating psychologies are specific to the sex of the individual or the sex of the preferred partner (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). For example, heterosexual men tend to prefer relatively younger female partners, while heterosexual women tend to prefer relatively older male partners (Kenrick & Keefe, 1992). Thus, if being male leads to higher preferences for younger partners, and being female leads to higher preferences for older partners, mate preferences should be sex-specific irrespective of sexual orientation. Alternatively, if preferences are specific to the target of sexual preferences, homosexual men should show concordance with heterosexual women in preferring older males as mates. Previous research reported that like heterosexual men, homosexual men placed a strong emphasis on youth and attractiveness in a potential mate (Hayes, 1995; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1987; Muscarella, 2002; Silverthorne & Quinsey, 2000), and reported greater interest and involvement in more casual sexual relationships (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Howard & Perilloux, 2016; Schmitt, 2007). This suggests that mechanisms of mating psychology are specific to the sex of the individual rather than the sex of the partner. Further, homosexual men prefer, on average, masculine physical characteristics in their ideal partners (Zheng & Zheng, 2015), partners of equal height or those taller than themselves (Valentova, Bártová, Štěrbová, & Varella, 2016; Valentova, Stulp, Třebický, & Havlíček, 2014), low-pitched voices (Valentová et al., 2013), and masculine faces (Glassenberg, Feinberg, Jones, Little, & DeBruine, 2010; Petterson, Dixon, Little, & Vasey, 2015, 2016; Zheng & Zheng, 2015). Thus, homosexual men tend to prefer sex-typical characteristics in their potential mates. However, preferences of homosexual men are also influenced by participants' own masculinity-femininity (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Bártová et al., in press; Boyden, Carroll, & Maier, 1984), personality (Valentova, Štěrbová, Bártová, & Varella, 2016), and relationship status (Valentová et al., 2013).

To our knowledge, only one study among North American homosexual men has quantified preferences of facial and body hair (Muscarella, 2002). In that study, homosexual men preferred an average amount of body hair that was similar to their own and their partner's amount, suggesting a preference for self-similarity and concordance between preferences and actual partner choice. For facial hair, men desired significantly more facial hair than they had themselves or that

their actual partners had (Muscarella, 2002). Although studies on mate preferences among homosexual men have been undertaken in various populations, such as China, the Czech Republic, or Great Britain, the US, direct cross-cultural comparisons are almost absent from the literature, as are comparisons between preferences of homosexual men and heterosexual women. Additionally, most studies have focused on preferences, rather than actual partner choices (for exceptions, see Muscarella, 2002; Valentova et al., 2014; Valentova, Bártová, Štěrbová, & Varella, 2016; Valentova, Štěrbová, Bártová, & Varella, 2016). However, mate preferences differ to some degree from actual mate choices, for instance in BMI (Courtiol, Raymond, Godelle, & Ferdy, 2010), personality (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006), height (Valentova et al., 2014), and overall attractiveness (Todd et al., 2007). Moreover, homosexual men tend to state stronger preferences for masculine traits, in particular beards, in ideal compared to actual partners (Muscarella, 2002).

In the current study, we tested effects of sex and population on facial and bodily hirsutism in ideal and actual partners among homosexual men and heterosexual women from Brazil and the Czech Republic. Homosexual men might be expected to prefer and choose more masculine physical traits in ideal and actual partners, respectively, compared to heterosexual women. Further, we tested whether preferences for facial and body hair differ from the degree of facial and body hair in the actual partners of both groups of participants (homosexual men and heterosexual women). Because ideal preferences and actual partner choices may be influenced by the distribution of the particular trait in the given population (Janif, Brooks, & Dixon, 2015; Scott et al., 2014), we also tested whether the distribution of self-reported male facial and body hair differed between men from the two countries (Brazil and the Czech Republic). Furthermore, preferences for homogamy, which refers to the degree of self-resemblance in actual or preferred mates, occur for some characteristics among heterosexual individuals and opposite-sex couples (for a review, see Štěrbová & Valentová, 2012). Partner preferences and choices may also be shaped by early childhood experience, when individuals internalize parental characteristics that are used as a template for partner choice in adulthood. This mechanism is known as a sexual imprinting-like effect (for review, see Rantala & Marcinkowska, 2011). So far, homosexual individuals have been overlooked in the studies on both homogamy and imprinting-like effects. Here we tested effects of homogamy (self-similarity) and imprinting-like effects (father-similarity) on partner preferences and choices for beardedness and body hair among heterosexual women and homosexual men.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The total sample consisted of 2765 participants (mean age = 27.00 years, range 17–78, SD = 7.84) from the Czech Republic (mostly from Prague) and Brazil (mostly from São Paulo state and Brasília) who were recruited as part of a larger study measuring ideal partner preferences and actual partner choices. In both countries, participants were recruited primarily via snowball sampling through mailing-lists obtained from our previous studies, through posts on Facebook, and LGBT oriented Web pages. In the current analyses, we only included data from participants between 18–50 years old.

Participants declared their sexual orientation via the Kinsey scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948). Women who reported they were exclusively heterosexual (66.6%, $N = 589$), predominantly heterosexual (28.8%, $N = 255$), and mostly heterosexual (4.5%, $N = 40$) were categorized as “heterosexual”. Men who reported they were either exclusively heterosexual (43.3%, $N = 309$), predominantly heterosexual (8.7%, $N = 62$), and mostly heterosexual (2.9%, $N = 21$) were treated as “heterosexual” men in the analyses. Men who indicated they were somewhat homosexual (1.1%, $N = 8$), predominantly homosexual

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