



Do men prefer women who are attracted to women? A cross-cultural evolutionary investigation



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ABSTRACT

The current study aims to investigate whether heterosexual men prefer women who experience same-sex attractions as partners across different cultural settings. Data from a sample of 949 Chinese heterosexual participants and a sample of 305 British heterosexual participants was used to investigate this hypothesis. Across the two samples, we found that men would prefer same-sex sexual attraction and contact in a partner more than women. Specifically, about one in four men in the Chinese sample and two in three men in the British sample have indicated a desire for their opposite-sex heterosexual partners to be additionally attracted to, and have sexual contact with same-sex individuals. In addition, across samples, heterosexual participants who have experienced same-sex attractions were more likely than those who did not indicate a preference for same-sex attraction and contact in an opposite-sex partner. Results were also compared with data from a previous study involving Greek-Cypriot participants – preferences for same-sex sexual attraction and contact in heterosexual partners were highest in the UK, moderate in Cyprus and lowest in China. The implications of these findings for the evolution of same-sex attraction were discussed.

1. Introduction

Prevalence studies indicate that about one in five women experience some degree of attraction to individuals of the same-sex (Calzo, Masyn, Austin, Jun, & Corliss, 2017; Dickson, Paul, & Herbison, 2003; Gates, 2011; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Stuart, 1994; Savin-Williams, Joyner, & Rieger, 2012). Such an attraction appears to impair reproductive success, rendering it a challenging puzzle from an evolutionary perspective. In this regard, there have been several attempts to elucidate the evolutionary origins of same-sex attraction (for a review see Bailey et al., 2016; LeVay, 2010). One of the most recent propositions argued that same-sex attraction in women has been favored by evolutionary selection forces because a considerable proportion of men finds it desirable in an opposite-sex partner (Apostolou & Christoforou, 2018a; Apostolou, Shialos, Khalil, & Paschali, 2017). The current research aims to test novel hypotheses emanating from such a formulation from a cross-cultural perspective.

2. The male-choice hypothesis

Throughout human evolutionary history, men have been vulnerable

to cuckoldry: Due to the fact that the process of gestation occurs internally in a female's body, women (but not men) are always certain that their children are indeed their own (Buss, 2000). As a consequence, in order to avoid the risk of investing substantial resources to care for other individuals' offspring, it is conceivable that men would have evolved adaptations geared toward mitigating such a likelihood (Buss, 2000, 2017). Indeed, such adaptations are believed to be reflected in men's mating attitudes: For instance, men would typically prefer chastity and sexual restraint in a long-term partner (Buss, 2017); while feelings of sexual jealousy would tend to motivate men to guard their partners against potential suitors, occasionally even engaging in punitive behaviors in order to deter cheating and to decrease the risk of cuckoldry (Buss, 2000; Goetz, Shackelford, Romero, Kaighobadi, & Miner, 2008 see also Edlund & Sagarin, 2017; Scherer, Akers, & Kolbe, 2013). Another mechanism that has also been proposed to serve such a function is a preference among men for women who might experience some form of same-sex attraction (Apostolou et al., 2017).

More specifically, this mechanism was proposed to be more effective than others because men who are endowed with preferences for chastity in their partners will not always be effective in screening prospective mates for this trait, as it is not something that is readily

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observable. In addition, mate choice typically involves finding a compromise between people's desires and limitations (Apostolou, 2011; Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002), and hence men may have to settle for women who are not necessarily chaste. Moreover, because men cannot be around all the time to guard their partners against other men, there is always the likelihood that their partners might cheat on them. Women may exploit such opportunities in order to gain benefits (e.g., such as gifts or good genes) from extra-pair partners (Buss, 2017), or in order to identify alternatives in view of potential mate-switching in the future (Buss, Goetz, Duntley, Asao, & Conroy-Beam, 2017). Furthermore, women may utilize such opportunities in order to attain sexual satisfaction beyond what their legitimate partner could offer. This is likely to happen, as some women may lose interest in their partner over time, while others may have partners who might gradually experience issues with sexual intercourse due to aging.

By the same token, a significant minority of men did have more than one established partner in pre-industrial societies (i.e., polygyny), and most likely during much of the human evolutionary history (Zeitzen, 2008). In such familial arrangements, males would have to divide their sexual attention among several women, which would then likely result in one or more wives not receiving an adequate amount of sexual satisfaction. Such a scenario might prompt some women to seek for extramarital relationships. Women would likely also have evolved to be efficient in bypassing their partners' cuckoldry-protection mechanisms because cheating can be evolutionarily beneficial for females on certain occasions.

In light of these challenges, it is believed that men would similarly have evolved additional means of cuckoldry prevention strategies – more specifically, the desire for partners with same-sex attractions (Apostolou, 2016). Same-sex sexual contacts could potentially address some women's unfulfilled sexual needs and would yet not lead to conception, thereby eliminating the risk of cuckoldry for their male partners (Apostolou, 2016). Put it differently, because adaptations such as sexual jealousy and a preference for chastity in men might be inadequate to reliably prevent their female partners from cheating, there is always the likelihood that some will end up with mates who would do so. Nevertheless, if these women would rather cheat on their male partners by mating with other women instead of men, it would be beneficial in terms of doing away with the risk of investing in other individuals' offspring.

In addition, same-sex sexual liaisons for a male's female partner could likewise present opportunities for the former to engage in extra sexual activities as well (Apostolou et al., 2017; Apostolou & Christoforou, 2018a). Such a scenario would be evolutionarily-beneficial for men, because they could increase their reproductive success without needing to allocate resources in acquiring an additional mate (Apostolou et al., 2017). Nonetheless, because a woman would risk missing out on gaining long-term access to her male partner's resources to another woman if such a sexual liaison is to be for the long term, she is predicted to be more open to short-term arrangements of such an affair (Apostolou et al., 2017).

On the other hand, because women are not confronted with the issue of parental uncertainty, they are likely to be more concerned about the continued provision of resources from their male partners than the biological sex of any individual their partners might be involved with in an extramarital relationship (Apostolou et al., 2017). Similarly, due to the nature of gestation in humans, having simultaneous access to several men as a result of a male partner's homosexual affairs would not comparatively enhance a woman's reproductive success (Apostolou et al., 2017). On this basis, men are predicted to be more likely to prefer same-sex sexual attractions in a short-term than in a long term partner (Apostolou et al., 2017).

It is important to note that, women who experience same-sex attractions and are in a heterosexual relationship, will not only consider same-sex partners when choosing to cheat. Instead, it is contended that if they are to cheat, heterosexual women with such attractions are more

likely to cheat with other woman than with other men in comparison to exclusively heterosexual women. Correspondingly, a recent study found that heterosexual women with same-sex attractions were more willing to cheat with other women than with other men, than heterosexual women without such attractions (Apostolou & Christoforou, 2018b).

On the basis of this theoretical framework, it was predicted that men would be more likely to find same-sex attraction in a partner desirable, and would be more likely to endorse homosexual activities in their female partners, while women are expected not to find same-sex attraction as desirable in a male partner and would be less inclined to indicate a preference for their male partners to have sex with other men (Apostolou et al., 2017). In addition, when engage in mating, people adopt a long-term strategy –they look for long-term partners- or a short-term strategy- they look for casual mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men can benefit from the same-sex attractions of their partners through gaining access to additional women, but this is more likely to happen in a short-term than in a long-term relationship. The reason is that, in the latter, a woman risks losing her partner's long-term investment to another woman, so she may be less likely to consent to her male partner having sex with her female partner. On this basis, men were predicted to prefer same-sex attraction more in a short-term than in a long term partner (Apostolou et al., 2017).

These predictions were tested in a recent study involving Greek-speaking participants and it was found that the vast majority of heterosexual women did indicate a preference for both short- and long-term partners who were only attracted to women and that they did not want their partners to have any sexual contact with other men (Apostolou et al., 2017). On the other hand, about one in five heterosexual men indicated a desire for their long term partners, and about one in three for their short-term partners to also be attracted to other women and that they would like them to have sex with these other women as well (Apostolou et al., 2017). These findings were subsequently replicated in a different sample of Greek-speaking participants (Apostolou & Christoforou, 2018a). However, because at present these two studies, conducted in a specific cultural context were the only evidence available in the literature, questions remain with regards to the validity of the findings in assessing the veracity of the theory. Thus, the current study aims to examine these findings in different cultural settings, in addition to testing novel predictions emanating from the theory.

2.1. Predictions to be tested

The potential benefits from having women who experience same-sex attractions as partners are expected to be similar across different cultural settings. In particular, because cheating in a romantic relationship appears to be a universal phenomenon (Schmitt, 2004), men across cultures are expected to increase their reproductive success more so than women by having sex with additional partners. On this basis, having a female partner who experiences same-sex attractions is expected to be beneficial for men across different cultural settings. Hence, we expect that such a sex difference – with more men than women preferring same-sex sexual attraction in an opposite-sex partner – would be consistent across cultures.

The fitness-related contributions in relation to desirable traits in a partner can vary depending on the environmental context. For instance, good health is a more valuable trait in a period of plague than in an environment whereby most people are relative healthy. Accordingly, mate preferences are similarly believed to have been shaped by selection forces to be flexible and responsive to the prevailing environmental conditions as well (Buss, 2017). The benefits of same-sex sexual attraction in a male's female partner are likewise also likely to vary with the cultural context. For instance, in an environment whereby cheating is more common and where men could face a higher risk of cuckoldry, same-sex sexual attraction in a female partner would conceivably be more beneficial for men than otherwise. In this regard, we expect that

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