



# Consistency in preferences for masculinity in faces, bodies, voices, and personality characteristics among homosexual men in China



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## ABSTRACT

Previous studies have demonstrated that women who prefer masculinized features in one domain (e.g., face) also tend to prefer masculinized features in other domains. In the present study, we examined the consistency of homosexual males' preferences for masculinity across four domains: face, body, voice, and personality characteristics. Participants were recruited via the Internet, and comprised 191 bottoms, 99 versatiles, and 54 tops. The results indicated that masculinity preferences remain consistent across the modalities of vision, audition, and personality characteristics, which indicates that gay men who prefer masculine faces tend to prefer masculine bodies, voices, and personality characteristics. Further, significant positive correlations were identified between the masculinity preferences for the four domains, respectively. Our results suggest that preference for masculinity across the four domains represents a common underlying quality of gay men, indicating multiple cues are integrated when forming partner preferences.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Preferences for masculinity of homosexual males

Masculine characteristics were valued in partnership by women because they signal long-term health (Thornhill & Gangestad, 2006) and productive fitness (Puts, 2005). In homosexual men, masculine characteristics as well as other male-typical appearances were also non-negligible factors in partner choice. Researchers showed that most homosexual men display stronger preference for partners who described themselves as more masculine (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997) and relative taller (Valentová, Stulp, Třebický, & Havlíček, 2014). Another study reported that gay men who self-rated as more masculine have been shown to be more preferred by other homosexual men (Muscarella, 2002). Recent studies on gay men's masculine preference have mainly focused on masculinized features on faces and bodies. For example, when homosexual men were asked to view manipulated and non-manipulated male face and body images, they tended to prefer masculinized faces and more muscular and athletic individuals than feminized versions (Glassenberg, Feinberg, Jones, Little, & DeBruine, 2010; Swami & Tove'e, 2008). However, there exists an inconsistency, as Welling, Singh, Puts, Jones, and Burriss (2013) found neither masculine nor feminine facial preference in homosexual males when rating both manipulated and non-manipulated portraits.

Expect for masculine faces and bodies, the lower-pitched voice was another typical characteristic of masculinity that was given little concern in partner preference studies of homosexuals. High testosterone level, a reliable signal of immune function, significantly predicts low voice pitch in both adult and pubertal men. Therefore, men with lower-pitched voices (e.g., masculine) may have strong immune systems and maintain good health (Folstad & Karter, 1992). Similarly, some studies indicated that voice pitch in males was negatively correlated with dominance, health, mating success, and masculine characteristics; thus, men with lower pitch voices were considered as more attractive (Feinberg et al., 2006; Puts, 2005). For example, Puts (2005) found that women generally prefer lower-pitched voices of males than higher-pitched voices, although this relationship only exists in the context of short-term relationships. In addition, women's lower-pitched voices preference was more stronger in the fertile phase of the menstrual cycle. Similarly, men generally showed stronger preferences for women's voices with raised pitch (Jones, Feinberg, DeBruine, Little, & Vukovic, 2010). Previous research demonstrated that homosexual preferences for same-sex faces and heterosexual preferences for opposite-sex faces are directionally similar (Glassenberg et al., 2010). Given that, it is reasonable that homosexual men show stronger preference for the masculine cues in voices. So far, only one related study revealed that masculine voices were more preferred by single homosexual men than feminine versions (Valentová, Roberts, & Havlíček, 2013). Our research

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will focus on extending gay men's masculine preference to the domain of voices.

### 1.2. Consistency in preferences for masculinity

According to the “multiple message” hypothesis, different features of individuals communicate specific qualities; these features are good indicators of gene quality (Verthelyi, 2006). Candolin (2003) suggested that several features across different channels communicate different gene qualities, and that individuals evaluate potential mates' overall qualities by considering all features together. For instance, past studies indicated that in heterosexuals, there was consistency in preference for gender-typical characteristics across physical domains of vision, audition, and olfaction. Little, Connely, Feinberg, Jones, and Roberts (2011) suggested that women's preferences regarding masculinity across the domains of faces, bodies, voices, and smell are highly consistent; specifically, their consistent masculine preference was greater in the context of short-term relationships than in long-term relationships (Little, Connely, Feinberg, Jones, & Roberts, 2011). For heterosexual men, preferences for more feminine faces, voices, bodies, or smell were significantly correlated, with a stronger attributes more preferable in short-term contexts than in long-term contexts (Fracarro et al., 2010; Little, Connely, Feinberg, Jones, & Roberts, 2011). These results support the perspective that the preference for masculinity across the different domains represents a common underlying quality, such as estrogen level (Feinberg et al., 2006).

The influence of masculinization consistency on partner choice among homosexuals is equally non-negligible. A large number of investigations have been conducted in regard to heterosexual preferences concerning partners, while research on the consistency in masculinity preference across different domains of homosexual individuals remains limited. Recent studies have demonstrated that homosexual men generally prefer masculine cues in male faces (Glassenberg et al., 2010), voices (Valentová et al., 2013) and body features (Swami & Tove'e, 2008) than the feminine versions when selecting potential sexual partners. In light of the above, it would appear that homosexuals also show consistency in regard to preference for masculine characteristics across different physical domains. Further, a recent study indicated that there is a high consistency in gay men's masculinity preferences across faces, bodies, and personality traits (Zheng & Zheng, 2016). However, Valentová et al. (2013) found that homosexual men prefer masculine voices but feminine male faces, which contradicted previous studies. While, this issue remains unresolved.

### 1.3. Sexual self-labels and masculine preference

Among gay men, who self-label as “top” prefer the insertive role, who self-label as “bottom” prefer the receptive role, and who self-label as “versatile” prefer neither (Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2000). Past research has indicated that the score of tops on self-perceived masculinity, instrumentality, and gender-related interest were significantly higher than among bottoms, while the score of bottoms on the dimension of expressiveness was significantly higher than among tops (Zheng, Hart, & Zheng, 2012). Another study also indicated that tops are generally more likely to have masculine profiles, while bottoms are more likely to have feminine profiles (Moskowitz & Hart, 2011). Regarding the relationship between sexual self-labels and gendered features, the masculinity preference in terms of tops and bottoms is also different. For example, tops generally indicated greater preference for feminized faces than masculinized versions, while bottoms preferred the masculinized versions over the feminine ones. Versatiles showed preference for neither (Valentová et al., 2014; Zheng, Hart, & Zheng, 2013). Further, a recent study found that compared to tops, bottoms and versatiles are more likely to prefer masculine faces, bodies, and personality traits (Zheng & Zheng, 2016).

Taken together, these analyses illustrate that sexual self-labels play

a crucial role in guiding gay men's masculinity-preference behaviors, and supporting the perspective that tops prefer more feminized male partners while bottoms prefer more masculinized partners. In our study, we first explore the consistent preference for masculinity across the domains of faces, voices, bodies, and personality characteristics; we then test the differences among sexual self-labels in regard to masculine preference across the four domains.

### 1.4. Aims of the current study

The main aim of our study is to test whether gay men's preferences for masculinity are highly consistent across faces, bodies, voices, and personality characteristics. Previous studies have found positive correlations among masculinity preferences for the faces, bodies, and personality characteristics of gay men. However, no studies have examined the consistency between gay men's preference for masculinity in voices and other physical domains. Hence, it is important in our study to consider whether the consistent preference for masculinity among gay men extends to the voice domain. Then, we test this preference consistency across gay men's self-labels, investigating the differences in preference consistency between tops, versatiles, and bottoms.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants included 344 homosexual and bisexual males from China aged 16–51 years (mean age 24.99 years, SD = 6.37). Among these participants, 315 (91.57%) were homosexual and 29 (8.43%) were bisexual. When asked about their sexual self-labels, among homosexual men, 47 (14.92%) identified themselves as tops, 180 (57.14%) as bottoms, and 88 (27.94%) as versatiles; among bisexual men, 7 (24.14%) identified themselves as tops, 11 (37.93%) as bottoms, and 11 (37.93%) as versatiles. Demographic data are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Demographic variables of participants by sexual self-labels.

	Tops (n = 54) <sup>a</sup>	Versatiles (n = 99)	Bottoms (n = 191)
Age (in years) M (SD)	25.49 (5.65)	27.81 (7.46)	23.94 (6.14)
Education level N (%)			
Junior high school or less	1 (1.8)	6 (6.1)	7 (3.7)
Senior high school	7 (13)	13 (13.1)	25 (13.1)
College	42 (77.8)	74 (74.7)	141 (73.8)
Postgraduate or higher	4 (7.4)	6 (6.1)	18 (9.4)
Occupation N (%)			
Students	12 (22.2)	34 (34.3)	88 (46.1)
Employed	32 (59.3)	58 (58.6)	89 (46.6)
Job-seeking	4 (7.4)	2 (2)	6 (3.1)
Other	6 (11.1)	5 (5.1)	8 (4.2)
Relationship N (%) (multiple choices)			
Single	28 (51.9)	57 (57.6)	147 (77.0)
Married	5 (9.8)	9 (9.1)	2 (1.0)
Have same-sex partner	20 (37.0)	36 (36.4)	47 (24.6)
Have opposite-sex partner	0 (0)	1 (1.0)	2 (1.0)
Divorced	4 (7.4)	4 (4.0)	1 (0.5)
Sexual orientation N (%)			
Homosexual	47 (87.04)	88 (88.89)	180 (94.24)
Bisexual	7 (12.96)	11 (11.11)	11 (5.76)

<sup>a</sup> The “tops” in the sample are far less than “bottoms” and “versatiles”, after verification we speculate that “tops” are probably less likely to participate in research compare to “bottoms” and “versatiles”.

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