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Effects of Attractiveness and Status in Dating Desire in Homosexual and Heterosexual Men and Women

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Abstract The present study examined partner preferences of homosexual and heterosexual men and woman, focusing on attractiveness and status. Homosexual ($N = 591$ men; M age $= 28.87$ years, $SD = 10.21$; $N = 249$ women; M age $= 33.36$ years, $SD = 13.12$) and heterosexual participants ($N = 346$ men; M age $= 39.74$ years, $SD = 14.26$; $N = 400$ women; M age $= 35.93$ years, $SD = 13.72$) rated the importance of attractiveness and social status of potential partners and then, in a vignette test, expressed their desire to date hypothetical potential partners based on photographs that varied in attractiveness and status-related profiles. With ratings, heterosexual men valued attractiveness the most, followed by homosexual men, heterosexual women, and homosexual women. Heterosexual women rated social status as most important. When status profiles were manipulated and accompanied with photographs of faces, the pattern of differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals supported the self-reported results. Overall, homosexual men and women have similar mate preferences to heterosexual men and women by showing more dating desire for attractive and high social status persons. Compared to attractiveness, status played a smaller role in dating desire.

Keywords Sexual orientation · Homosexuality · Heterosexuality · Mate preference · Attractiveness · Status

Introduction

When it comes to desirable partners, people generally agree on which characteristics are important. In a cross-cultural study among 37 different countries it was found that humans—both men and women—indicate that traits like honesty, intelligence, kindness, and trustworthiness in a partner are most desirable (Buss, 1989; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). However, interesting gender differences appeared concerning the importance of attractiveness and social status of a potential partner. Attractiveness (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005; Van Straaten, Engels, Finkenauer, & Holland, 2008) was more important for men and status has been found to be important for women (Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998). The relative importance of attractiveness and status has been shown to apply to various populations, such as singles (Sprecher et al., 1994), people in romantic relationships (Buss & Barnes, 1986), college students (Van Straaten et al., 2008), and adolescents (Ha, Overbeek, & Engels, 2010), and across cultures (Buss, 1989; Buss et al., 1990; Khallad, 2009; Shackelford et al., 2005). The importance of these characteristics has been demonstrated using a variety of methods, including questionnaires and personal advertisements (e.g., Feingold, 1992a), vignette designs (e.g., Townsend & Wasserman, 1998), experiments (e.g., Van Straaten et al., 2008), and speed dates (e.g., Todd, Penske, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). However, previous studies have focused primarily on heterosexuals. Although it has been shown that gay men and lesbians also show partner preferences related to attractiveness and status (e.g., Lippa, 2007), their partner preferences have been understudied. The present study examined whether attractiveness and status are also important partner preferences in gay men and lesbians and whether partner preferences of gay men and lesbians are different from heterosexual men and women.

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From an evolutionary perspective, the primary concern of humans (and other animals) is to find the most fertile and healthy partners to ensure the successful transmission of genes (Buss & Kenrick, 1998; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Therefore, both men and women prefer physically attractive partners since attractiveness is considered an indicator of good genes (Thornhill & Grammar, 1999). According to the evolutionary perspective differences exist between men and women in the minimum parental investment that is required to produce healthy offspring. While men can invest minimally by having intercourse, women at least invest nine months in pregnancy and even more time in the upbringing of a child. Therefore, women must also consider the availability of resources for their own and their children's support, so they highly value status in their potential partners (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Feingold, 1992a; Shackelford et al., 2005). In other words, partner preferences of heterosexuals are partly based on the human desire to procreate in order to maximize reproductive success. In research that addresses gay preferences, it is often assumed that the preferences of gay men and lesbians differ from those of heterosexuals because gay men and lesbians do not have sex for the purpose of procreation (e.g., Gobrogge et al., 2007; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr, & Brown, 1995). However, it may be that evolutionary mechanisms underlying adaptive mate choices operate similarly for all humans (Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1987), regardless of sexual orientation. More specifically, we may expect similarities between heterosexual and gay men and women in terms of their partner preferences.

In addition, sociocultural theories assume that cultural norms and practices shape partner preferences (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Reiss, 1986). Partner preferences of homosexuals and heterosexuals might be more similar as the influence of cultural norms and practices might equally apply to homosexual and heterosexual individuals. In Western societies, physical attractiveness is highly valued by men and women alike (Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009), as has been shown in experiments in which participants ascribe positive characteristics, such as an interesting personality, to physically attractive persons (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Feingold, 1992b). Status is more important for women in Western cultures because women generally earn less than men (Bayard, Hellerstein, Neumark, & Troske, 2003; Lips & Lawson, 2009) and rely more on their partner's status for resources (Hrdy, 1997).

Previous studies have found that mate preferences (e.g., intelligence, humour, honesty, kindness, and good looks) of homosexuals resemble those of heterosexuals to a large extent (Lippa, 2007). With respect to attractiveness, Child, Graff Low, McDonell McCormick, and Cocciarella (1996) and Heffernan (1999) found that attractiveness was a relevant partner preference for gay men and lesbians (see also Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Lippa, 2007). Gonzales and Meyers (1993) and Smith and Stillman (2002) found that gay men and lesbians desire physical attractiveness based on their choice of partners in

personal advertisements and Hayes (1995) found that gay men and lesbians preferred younger partners, which can be an indicator of attractiveness, since youth implies physical attractiveness (Teuscher & Teuscher, 2007).

In addition, Lippa (2007) demonstrated that lesbians also prefer high-status partners, and VanderLaan and Vasey (2008) showed that lesbians tend to display resources to attract potential partners more than heterosexual women do. However, compared to heterosexuals, lesbians seem to be less interested in status than heterosexual women, and gay men show less interest in status than heterosexual men (Bailey et al., 1994). Gay men also seem to use less resource display than heterosexual men in their strategies for attracting partners (VanderLaan & Vasey, 2008), which may indicate that showing their status is not effective since men do not find status important. Thus, a good deal of previous research suggests that, similar to heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians find attractiveness a pivotal characteristic in a partner and that, while gay men do not find status important when choosing a partner, lesbians may.

These studies have provided valuable information concerning gay and heterosexual preferences, although some methodological limitations may have biased their results. Previous studies have often been based on self-reported ratings of importance of partner characteristics (e.g., Lippa, 2007); however, such responses may be biased by the desire to provide socially acceptable answers and reveal general beliefs about preferences, rather than actual preferences. By asking whether participants would like to date hypothetical persons who differed in terms of attractiveness and status, we aimed to decrease the influence of social expectations. In addition, we tried to enhance external validity by using visual stimuli and profiles to reflect real-life partners (Ha et al., 2010; Townsend & Levy, 1990; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998). Furthermore, few studies explicitly compared partner preferences in one single study. We conducted a large study comparing both male and female homosexuals and heterosexuals.

In sum, the present study examined the role of attractiveness and status in both homosexual and heterosexual men's and women's dating preferences using visual stimuli of attractiveness and experimentally manipulated status profiles. The role of attractiveness and status for gay men and women and heterosexual men and women was tested with self-reported ratings of the importance of partner characteristics and with dating desire scores for hypothetical persons based on photographs and profiles.

Method

Participants

Homosexual participants were recruited through approximately 20 websites of gay communities (e.g., www.gay.nl) and via e-mail

networks (e.g., Dito, a Dutch organization for gay students). A general invitation to complete an online questionnaire without specific information about the content or goals of the study was displayed on the websites for 2 months. For several reasons (e.g., participants who indicated they were heterosexual, men who indicated they were lesbian, and participants who did not get a high or a low status profile for technical problems), 26 cases were excluded. Participants indicated their sexual orientation by answering which of the following six descriptions fitted them best. Descriptions for homosexual men were: gay, gay but sometimes attracted to women, bisexual, heterosexual but sometimes bisexual, no label or other. Descriptions for lesbians were: lesbian, lesbian but sometimes attracted to men, bisexual, heterosexual but sometimes bisexual, no label or other. For subsequent analyses, we selected men and women who indicated to be exclusively homosexual oriented. The final sample consisted of 840 participants ($n = 591$ homosexual men; 70.4%). Men were aged 18–65 ($M = 28.87, SD = 10.21$) and women were aged 18–70 ($M = 33.36, SD = 13.12$). In addition, the majority of the homosexual men and women had a paid job (respective ns = 425; 71.9%; $n = 171$; 68.7%) and participants' nationalities were Dutch (respective percentages, 89.2 and 90.8%).

Heterosexual participants were recruited through approximately 10 websites (e.g., www.menshealth.nl) and via e-mail networks (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). A general invitation to complete an online questionnaire, which was similar as in the homosexual sample, was displayed on the websites for 2 months. The final sample consisted of 746 participants who reported to be exclusively heterosexual ($n = 346$ men; 46.3%; and $n = 400$ women). Men were aged 18–70 ($M = 39.74, SD = 14.26$) and women were aged 18–71 ($M = 35.93, SD = 13.72$). In addition, the majority of the heterosexual men and women had a paid job (respective ns = 254; 73.4%; $n = 284$; 71%) and participants' nationalities were Dutch (respective percentages, 78.3 and 89.9%).

Measures

Importance of Personal Characteristics of a Partner

Participants first rated the importance of 21 partner characteristics. For this study, only the characteristics that indicated attractiveness and social status were used (Buss, 1989; Buston & Emlen, 2003; Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, & Simonson, 2006; see Table 2). Participants rated on a 10-point scale ranging from (1) *not important at all* to (10) *very important* the importance of attractive appearance, ambition, finished education, and high salary.[1]

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[1] The total list of partner characteristics were: reliable, honest, kind, interesting personality, sense of humor, intelligence, caring, good health, flexible, can get along with friends, attractive appearance, romantic, ambition,

Dating Desire

Dating desire was measured with one item: "Would you like to date this person?" Participants could answer on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *absolutely not* to (7) *absolutely*.

Design and Procedure

Homosexual and heterosexual participants first completed several questions about general background and relationship status. This was followed by a questionnaire in which participants were explicitly asked to rate various partner preferences. Finally, participants were shown 10 morphed photographs of a potential partner's face presented in random order and accompanied by either a low-status or a high-status profile for each series of photographs. Thus, a mixed between–within design was created with attractiveness, i.e., 10 photographs, as a within-subjects factor and status of the profiles as a between-subjects factor. Homosexual participants were shown morphed photographs of same sex potential partners and heterosexual participants of opposite sex partners. Participants indicated their interest in dating the person in each photograph. At the end of the questionnaire, participants had the opportunity to provide their e-mail addresses for a chance to win a prize (an I-pod or a gift voucher). The total questionnaire took 10 min to fill in.

The photographs of faces that were used in this study had been rated in Germany by 500 heterosexual individuals on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *very unattractive* to (7) *very attractive* (M. Gruendl, personal communication, September 15, 2009). Mean ratings for attractiveness were: 5.55 ($SD = 1.01$) for the attractive men; 2.19 ($SD = 1.19$) for the unattractive men; 6.19 ($SD = 0.80$) for the attractive women; and 2.46 ($SD = 0.97$) for the unattractive women. In this study, a gay panel (three lesbians and three gay men) chose the most attractive picture out of the German stock of attractive faces and the least attractive face out of the stock of less attractive faces. Gay men chose pictures of male faces and lesbians chose pictures of female faces. The photograph of the attractive face was morphed with the photograph of the unattractive face using Face Morpher Multi software (Version 2.51, Luxand Inc., Alexandria, VA).

Photographs of male and female faces were morphed separately to get a set of male and female pictures varying in attractiveness. The original photograph of the less attractive faces was used as the least attractive face (photo 1), 8 morphed pictures were used to vary attractiveness (photo 2-photo 9), and the original most attractive picture was used as the very attractive picture (photo 10). Only the male photographs were shown to gay men and heterosexual women and only the

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Footnote 1 continued
creative, easy-going, finished education, good family background, high salary, relationship experience, wants to have children in future, and religion.

female photographs to lesbians and heterosexual men. Previous research has shown that the agreement on who is attractive and who is not is high between homosexuals and heterosexuals (Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009). Therefore, the same male photographs were used as stimuli for the homosexual men and heterosexual woman and the same female photographs were used for the homosexual women and heterosexual men.

To examine the role of social status in dating desire, the 10 photographs were each accompanied by either a low-status or a high-status profile of a hypothetical person (see Appendix). These profiles were adapted from a previous study on preferences for potential partner's attractiveness and social status (Van Straaten et al., 2008). To test the manipulation, an independent sample of 53 single homosexual individuals (27 women) was recruited in gay bars and an independent sample of 49 single heterosexual individuals (26 women) was recruited in heterosexual bars. The profiles were rated on having status, having career prospects, and being ambitious on a 7-point scale from (1) *absolutely not* to (7) *absolutely*. Results of the *t*-tests showed that the manipulation of status was successfully achieved through these vignettes for homosexuals as well as heterosexuals (see Table 1).

Results

Sample Characteristics

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to investigate whether age was different in the four groups (homosexual

Table 1 *t*-tests for testing manipulation of social status for the four groups

	Homosexual							
	Men				Women			
	Low status		High status		Low status		High status	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Having status[a]	3.15	1.22	5.23***	5.08	3.44	1.09	5.37***	1.12
Career prospects[a]	3.19	1.30	5.08***	1.13	3.52	1.25	5.33***	1.18
Ambition[a]	3.42	1.07	4.85*	1.05	3.81	1.33	4.96*	1.06

	Heterosexual							
	Men				Women			
	Low status		High status		Low status		High status	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Having status[a]	2.83	1.44	5.39***	1.20	2.81	0.90	5.46***	1.36
Career prospects[a]	2.91	1.44	5.22***	1.17	2.77	0.95	5.38***	1.33
Ambition[a]	3.17	1.37	5.17***	1.54	3.00	1.10	5.31***	1.29

[a] Absolute range, 1–7

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

men, homosexual women, heterosexual men, heterosexual women). Results showed that age was significantly different in the groups, $F(3, 1582) = 60.04$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using LSD contrasts indicated that the homosexual men ($M = 28.87$, $SD = 10.21$) were younger than homosexual women ($M = 33.36$, $SD = 13.12$), heterosexual men ($M = 39.74$, $SD = 14.26$), and heterosexual women ($M = 35.93$, $SD = 13.73$). The homosexual women were younger than heterosexual men. However, homosexual women did not differ in age from heterosexual women. Finally, heterosexual men were older than heterosexual women. In addition, relationship status differed significantly among the groups $\chi(3) = 16.78$, $p < .01$. Homosexual ($n = 362$, 61.3%) and heterosexual men ($n = 231$, 66.8%) were more often single than homosexual ($n = 129$, 51.8%) and heterosexual women ($n = 223$, 55.8%). Results showed that there were no significant differences among the groups for having a paid job.

Correlations Between Attractiveness Ratings and Photographs

Correlations between the self-report measure of the importance of attractiveness and the manipulated levels of attractiveness in the ten photographs were used to investigate the correspondence in the two types of measures. When participants rated attractiveness as highly important they showed less desire to date the person from the most unattractive photograph ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$) and more desire to date the person from the most attractive photograph ($r = .11$, $p < .001$).

Importance of Personal Characteristics of a Partner

To test group differences (homosexual men, homosexual women, heterosexual men, heterosexual women) on the self-ratings of personal partner characteristics, we conducted ANCOVAs controlling for age and relationship status (Table 2). Results for the importance of attractiveness showed that age was significantly related, $F(1, 1580) = 68.60$, $\eta_p^2 = .042$, $p < .001$. Attractiveness was rated as more important by older homosexual and heterosexual men and women. In addition, group was significant, $F(3, 1580) = 12.81$, $\eta_p^2 = .024$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using LSD contrasts showed that homosexual men rated attractiveness as more important than homosexual women ($p < .001$) and less important than heterosexual men ($p < .05$). However, no differences were found between homosexual men and heterosexual women. Homosexual women rated attractiveness as less important than heterosexual men ($p < .001$) and heterosexual women ($p < .001$). Heterosexual men rated attractiveness as a more desirable mate characteristic than heterosexual women ($p < .001$).

Results for the importance of ambition showed that age was significantly related, $F(1, 1580) = 127.75$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, $p < .001$.

Table 2 ANCOVA's for importance of partners characteristics for the four groups

	Homosexual				Heterosexual			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE
Attractive appearance[a]	7.28	.06	6.78	.09	7.51	.08	7.11	.07
Ambitious[a]	6.95	.08	6.70	.12	6.61	.10	7.04	.09
Finished education[a]	6.00	.10	5.96	.15	5.61	.13	6.72	.12
High salary[a]	5.27	.09	4.69	.14	4.50	.12	5.98	.11

These are adjusted means corrected for age and relationship status

[a] Absolute range, 1–10

Ambition was rated as more important by older homosexual and heterosexual men and women. In addition, group was significant, $F(3, 1580) = 15.13$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$, $p < .01$. Post hoc comparisons using LSD contrasts showed that homosexual men did not differ from homosexual women, but rated ambition as more important than heterosexual men ($p < .01$). Further, ratings of the importance of ambition were not different for homosexual men and heterosexual women. Homosexual women were also not different from heterosexual men. However, ambition was less important to homosexual women than to heterosexual women ($p < .05$). Heterosexual men also rated ambition as less important than heterosexual women ($p < .001$).

Results for the importance of having a finished education showed that age was significantly related, $F(1, 1580) = 5.99$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, $p < .05$. Finished education was rated as more important by older homosexual and heterosexual men and women. In addition, group was significant, $F(3, 1580) = 35.14$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using LSD contrasts showed that homosexual men did not differ from homosexual women, but rated finished education as more important than heterosexual men ($p < .05$) and less important than heterosexual women ($p < .001$). Homosexual women did not differ from heterosexual men, but finished education was rated as less important as compared to heterosexual women ($p < .001$). Heterosexual men rated finished education also as less important than heterosexual women ($p < .001$).

Results for the importance of high salary showed that age was significantly related, $F(1, 1580) = 7.37$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$, $p < .05$. High salary was rated as more important by older homosexual and heterosexual men and women. In addition, group was significant, $F(3, 1580) = 34.39$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using LSD contrasts showed that homosexual men differed from all groups. They rated a high salary as more important than homosexual women ($p < .001$) and heterosexual men ($p < .001$), but as less important than heterosexual women ($p < .001$). Homosexual women did not differ from heterosexual men, but rated high salary as less important than heterosexual women ($p < .001$). Heterosexual men attached less importance to a high salary of a potential mate than heterosexual women ($p < .001$).

Dating Desire: Attractiveness and Status

A 4 (Group) × 2 (Status) × 10 (Attractiveness) repeated ANCOVA was conducted on dating desire. Attractiveness was used as within-subjects factor with 10 levels (i.e., the 10 photographs), group (homosexual men, homosexual women, heterosexual men, heterosexual women) and status of the profiles (high status, low status) were between-subjects factors. Relationship status and age were covariates. The average ratings of dating desire for each photo are shown in Table 3 for homosexuals and Table 4 for heterosexuals, and test results are reported in Table 5.

Results showed that relationship status and age were significantly related to dating desire. In general, older and singles reported more dating desire. After controlling for these variables, we found a significant main effect of attractiveness, $F(9, 14157) = 421.57$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$, $p < .001$, and a small but significant main effect of status, $F(1, 1573) = 51.15$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, $p < .001$. In addition, there was a significant main effect of group, $F(3, 1573) = 27.70$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc contrasts revealed that homosexual men ($M = 3.10$, $SE = .05$) on average did not differ on dating desire from homosexual women ($M = 3.03$, $SE = .08$). Homosexual men showed less dating desire as compared to heterosexual men ($M = 3.63$, $SE = .07$; $p < .001$) and more dating desire than heterosexual women ($M = 2.78$, $SE = .06$; $p < .001$). Homosexual women showed significantly less dating desire than heterosexual men ($p < .001$) and significantly more than heterosexual women ($p < .05$). Finally, heterosexual men showed more dating desire as compared to heterosexual women ($p < .001$). The groups significantly differed on all levels of attractiveness, $F(3, 1573) = 3.10–28.25$, $\eta_p^2 = .01–.07$, $p < .001$, except for level 8 of attractiveness as compared to level 10. The interaction between group and social status was not significant indicating that effects of social status on dating desire were not different for homosexual and heterosexual men and women.

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of partner characteristics among homosexual and heterosexual men and women on dating desire. In self-reported questionnaires, heterosexual men valued attractiveness the most, followed by respectively homosexual men, heterosexual women, and homosexual women. Additionally, heterosexual women valued indicators of social status, ambition, finished education, and high salary the most. Respectively, homosexual and heterosexual men in general followed, and homosexual women valued indicators of social status the least. When status profiles were manipulated and accompanied with photographs of faces ranging from less attractive to highly attractive, the pattern of differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals supported the self-reports. Again, heterosexual men showed the most dating desire based

Table 3 Means and SDs of dating desire for gender on within level (photo) and condition (status) for homosexual participants

Condition	Men				Women			
	Low status ($n = 288$)		High status ($n = 303$)		Low status ($n = 136$)		High status ($n = 113$)	
Level	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Photo 1	1.52	1.13	1.70	1.26	1.83	1.29	2.04	1.37
Photo 2	1.57	1.14	1.83	1.33	1.76	1.16	2.22	1.46
Photo 3	1.72	1.21	1.94	1.39	1.96	1.31	2.35	1.56
Photo 4	1.88	1.31	2.18	1.50	2.15	1.42	2.66	1.57
Photo 5	2.15	1.50	2.50	1.65	2.43	1.44	2.97	1.56
Photo 6	2.87	1.71	3.17	1.76	2.88	1.53	3.69	1.73
Photo 7	3.44	1.76	3.90	1.79	3.22	1.67	4.03	1.63
Photo 8	4.35	1.75	4.97	1.68	3.56	1.73	4.24	1.59
Photo 9	4.58	1.76	5.17	1.67	3.72	1.73	4.55	1.51
Photo 10	4.53	1.79	5.26	1.67	3.82	1.74	4.53	1.58

Photo 1 represents a less attractive face and photo 10 an attractive face

Table 4 Means and SDs of dating desire for gender on within level (photo) and condition (status) for heterosexual participants

Condition	Men				Women			
	Low status ($n = 167$)		High status ($n = 179$)		Low status ($n = 206$)		High status ($n = 194$)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Photo 1	2.42	1.20	2.69	1.73	1.77	1.20	1.89	1.31
Photo 2	2.53	1.91	2.88	1.77	1.85	1.23	2.03	1.41
Photo 3	2.72	1.87	3.21	1.82	2.04	1.35	2.40	1.50
Photo 4	3.09	1.96	3.37	1.75	2.20	1.38	2.59	1.52
Photo 5	3.28	2.00	3.80	1.82	2.37	1.42	2.85	1.61
Photo 6	3.86	1.91	4.47	1.72	2.72	1.55	3.27	1.68
Photo 7	4.10	1.88	4.70	1.66	3.00	1.67	3.43	1.71
Photo 8	4.36	1.89	5.08	1.48	3.31	1.81	3.76	1.87
Photo 9	4.49	1.89	5.18	1.50	3.34	1.89	3.71	1.89
Photo 10	4.64	1.89	5.27	1.49	3.48	1.95	3.86	1.93

Photo 1 represents a less attractive face and photo 10 an attractive face

on attractiveness, followed by homosexual men. Opposite to the self-report results, however, homosexual women showed more dating desire as compared to heterosexual women. The experimental results extended the self-reports by showing that the role of sexual orientation was relatively small compared to the effects of attractiveness on dating desire. In addition, status played a significant but small role in dating desire for all four groups.

These results were in line with the findings of previous studies that have shown that attractiveness of a potential partner is pivotal for both homosexual and heterosexual men and women (Child et al., 1996; Gonzales & Meyer, 1993; Heffernan, 1999; Smith & Stillman, 2002). Attractiveness as a strong predictor of dating desire for both homosexual and heterosexual men and women might suggest that socialization factors, which are common to all men and women, underlie mate preferences.

Moreover, gender-specific explanations for the importance of attractiveness are less plausible. For example, the preference for attractive mates is not merely a result of the mass medias' emphasis on female beauty as attractiveness of a potential partner is not only valued by heterosexual men and lesbians but also by homosexual men and heterosexual women (Bailey et al., 1994). The present findings support the universal importance of attractiveness for partner preferences (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Ha et al., 2010; Khallad, 2009; Shackelford et al., 2005; Van Straaten et al., 2008) and provide evidence for the constructive features of attractiveness, that is, that attractive partners are favored over less attractive partners.

This positive feature of attractiveness has also been found in research involving other social and cognitive consequences of attractiveness. The "beautiful is good effect" (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) highlights the calibre of attractiveness on

Table 5 Mixed between-within ANCOVA of dating desire on attractiveness and status

Source	df	F	Effect size	p
Between subjects				
Relationship status	1	9.25	.01	<.001
Age	1	30.98	.02	<.001
Status	1	51.15	.03	<.001
Group	3	27.70	.05	<.001
Group × status	3	<1	.00	ns
Within subjects				
Attractiveness	9	421.57	.21	<.001
Attractiveness × relationship status	9	1.42	.00	ns
Attractiveness × age	9	81.41	.05	<.001
Attractiveness × status	9	8.15	.01	<.001
Attractiveness × group	27	24.72	.05	<.001
Attractiveness × group × status	27	1.06	.00	ns

Effect size is measured with η_p^2

social and cognitive functioning. Individuals interpret that what is beautiful is also good. For example, attractive persons are assumed to have more desirable personality traits and better health, greater wealth, and greater wisdom than less attractive persons have. Attractive people also get more attention from others (Langlois, Ritter, Roggman, & Vaughn, 1991; Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007) and facial attractiveness, which is perceived and processed at a glance, induces positive emotions (Olson & Marshuetz, 2005). Thus, attractiveness plays an important role in people's lives and affects the judgment, treatment, and behavior of people (Langlois et al., 2000).

Acknowledging that socialization plays an important role in shaping preferences for attractive partners does not imply, however, that evolutionary theories are not important in explaining the finding that both homosexual and heterosexual men and women highly value attractiveness in a potential mate. Even though short-term mating of homosexuals might be less embedded in the focus or goal of procreation, their mate preferences might be similar to heterosexuals because of the modular system of mating behavior (Bailey et al., 1994; Gobrogge et al., 2007; Kenrick et al., 1995). This theory proposes that mating behavior is composed of a set of psychological mechanisms called modules. More specifically, a difference in the module for same or opposite partner preference does not automatically lead to a difference in the module for mating preferences. It is not likely that the brain adjusts all behaviors when there is a change in another module, like a change from opposite sex partners to prefer same sex partners. Thus, it is possible that gays prefer attractive potential mates for the same reasons that heterosexuals do.

Interestingly, facial attractiveness was more important for heterosexual than homosexual men, using both self-report and experimental methods. Although it has been suggested in the literature (Bailey et al., 1994) that homosexual persons may exhibit a pattern that exaggerates heterosexual mate preferences, this has not been shown in empirical studies before. Lippa (2007) did not find differences between homosexual and heterosexual men in ratings of importance of a partners' facial attractiveness. Further, homosexual men have been found to show similar mate preferences as compared to heterosexual men; they both value physical attractiveness, visual sexual stimuli, and show same age preferences (Bailey et al., 1994; Kenrick et al., 1995; Silverthorne & Quinsey, 2000). Future research is required to verify whether this slightly higher significance of attractiveness for heterosexual men holds across replication studies and cultures.

Lesbians have been found to attach less importance to attractiveness when asked to report this preference explicitly, which is confirmed in our self-report data (Bailey et al., 1994; Peplau, 2001). Like heterosexual women, lesbians are less interested in casual sex than men, which place less emphasis on the importance of attractiveness of a potential mate (Diamond, 2003). However, when we measured the importance of attractiveness more unobtrusively, attractiveness was more valued by lesbians than heterosexual women. Accordingly, previous studies have found that age preferences of older lesbians were more similar to heterosexual men with a preference for younger partners indicating an emphasis on health and beauty (Kenrick et al., 1995). In addition, lesbians differed from heterosexual women in respect to their greater preference for visual features of sexual stimuli (Bailey et al., 1994). Thus, the measurement of attractiveness with pictures of faces instead of self-reports might explain why we found that attractiveness was more prominent for dating desire in lesbians than heterosexual women.

Interestingly, both homosexual and heterosexual men and women reported significantly more dating desire for persons with high-status profiles than for those with low-status profiles, although these effects were smaller than the effects of attractiveness. Evolutionary theories propose that heterosexual women's preference for high status men can be explained by the fact that women have to invest more than men in case of a pregnancy (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). However, the study's findings show that both homosexual and heterosexual women and men prefer high status partners. This seems to suggest that cultural contexts shape the preference for high status partner (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Reiss, 1986).

This sample was taken from a Dutch population. Dutch women's status is somewhat comparable to that of men in the Netherlands, based on the division of resources and opportunities in terms of education, economic participation, politics, and health (World Economic Forum, 2009). Thus, Dutch women may be less likely to rely on their partners' status for resources and, as a result, value status in their partner less than would women in another cultural context. Indeed, Eagly and Wood (1999) found in a cross-cultural study that in countries in which gender differences were more pronounced, preferences

for high social status partners were valued more by women. Our results may indicate that when women gain more economic power their mate preferences increasingly resemble that of men and that this social change is more important than sexual orientation.

This study expands the research field on partner preferences by using a large sample of homosexual and heterosexual men and women and by including both self-reported ratings of potential partner's characteristics as well as dating desire scores for hypothetical potential partners with profiles and photographs. However, the study was not without limitations. First, the sample may have been biased as a result of the use of convenience sampling. Participants were recruited via several online networks that may focus on specific subtypes of gay men and lesbians (e.g., persons involved in the gay community who may be more interested in appearance and status-related aspects of partners). Other probability sampling procedures may improve the generalizability of the results (Meyer & Colten, 1999; Meyer, Rossano, Ellis, & Bradford, 2002). Second, we used pictures to represent facial attractiveness, which enhanced its ecological validity and is essential for evolutionary studies on mate preferences as the assessment of reproductive fitness is critical in mate evaluation (Bailey et al., 1994; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998). However, "paper" partner choices may still be inadequate in their ability to reflect "real-life" partner choices (Fisman et al., 2006; Kurzban & Weeden, 2005). Furthermore, we did not measure attractiveness based on body shape, such as height, weight, and hip–waist ratio. Although previous studies have shown that facial attractiveness is a good proxy of global attractiveness based on face and body (e.g., Currie & Little, 2009; Saxton, Burris, Murray, Rowland, & Roberts, 2009), it is possible that other patterns could emerge between homosexuals and heterosexuals when attractiveness of the body is included. Unlike heterosexuals, gay men showed a preference for masculine bodies and lesbians preferred feminine and heavier women (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Cohen & Tannenbaum, 2001; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). In addition, whereas attractiveness can be evaluated at a glance because visual attention occurs automatically and without need for conscious processing (Krupp, 2008), it might take more time to cognitively process the value of social status as a mate preference. Although our status manipulation successfully distinguished between high and low social status, these social status profiles might not capture more subtle aspects of social status that may be necessary to accurately assess a potential partners' mate value. For example, the communication of a person's *willingness* to share resources might be an important factor in assessing one's mate value. Speed-dating sessions (Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007; Todd et al., 2007) or observational experiments (Van Straaten et al., 2008) that focus on choices made in real-life contexts and allow the participants to assess social status more carefully should be considered for future research. Moreover, in these "real life" contexts, it is possible to investigate how people

communicate their level of social status and whether they are willing to share it.

Despite these limitations, this study showed that mate preferences of homosexual men and women were remarkably similar to heterosexual men and women when mate preferences were measured unobtrusively with manipulated status profiles and a range of photographs ranging from less attractive to highly attractive. Attractiveness is an important factor for homosexuals and heterosexuals in terms of dating desire and status is also relevant but to a far lower degree. This suggests that rather than emphasizing differences it may be more important to focus on the commonalities in mating psychology between homosexuals and heterosexuals and disentangle the relative contribution of biological and social factors that shape mate preferences.

Appendix

Vignettes to indicate high and low social status

Person with a high-status profile:

Name: Tom (female: Anne)
Gender: Male (or female)
Place: Utrecht
Education: University degree in medicine
Profession: Medical doctor
Gross salary: €7000 per month
Hobbies: Meeting with friends, going out
Favorite television programs: Network, Nova (these are shows
   for upper-class persons in the Netherlands)
Relationship: None

Male with a low-status profile:

Name: Tom (female: Anne)
Gender: Male (or female)
Place: Utrecht
Education: low-level educational degree
Profession: work on a conveyor belt
Gross salary: €1100 per month
Hobbies: Meeting with friends, going out
Favorite television programs: Hart van Nederland, Editie NL
   (these are shows for lower-class persons in the Netherlands)
Relationship: None

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