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For gay and straight men, gauging facial attraction appears to operate similarly

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Examples of masculinized (right) and feminized (left) versions of a male face. A new study from a researcher at Harvard University finds that gay men are most attracted to the most masculine-faced men, while straight men prefer the most feminine-faced women. Courtesy of Aaron Glassenberg

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study from a researcher at Harvard University finds that gay men are most attracted to the most masculine-faced men, while straight men prefer the most feminine-faced women.

The findings suggest that regardless of sexual orientation, men's brains are wired for attraction to sexually dimorphic faces — those with facial features that are most synonymous with gender.

The research is published online in the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, and was led by Aaron Glassenberg, while completing his

master's degree in the Department of Psychology at Harvard. Glassenberg is a doctoral student in organizational behavior in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Harvard Business School. Glassenberg's co-authors are David Feinberg of McMaster University in Ontario, Benedict Jones and Lisa DeBruine of the University of Aberdeen, and Anthony Little of the University of Stirling, both in Scotland.

"Our work showed that gay men found highly masculine male faces to be significantly more attractive than feminine male faces. Also, the types of male faces that gay men found attractive generally did not mirror the types of faces that straight women found attractive, on average," says Glassenberg. "Men, gay or straight, prefer high sexual dimorphism in the faces of the sex that they are attracted to. Gay men and straight men did not agree on the types of male faces they considered attractive."

The study is the first to examine the facial feature preferences of gay men and lesbian women. Women's preferences are more complex than men's, as indicated by prior research demonstrating that ovulation, contraceptive use, self-perceived attractiveness, and sex drive all affect face preference. In this particular study, straight women preferred more masculine-faced men than lesbian women, while lesbians preferred slightly more masculine female faces than straight women or men.

Participants viewed images of faces that were digitally manipulated to be more masculine or feminine, and then indicated which face they considered more attractive. The study was conducted online, and included more than 900 men and women.

Sexually dimorphic features in male faces include a broad jaw, broad forehead, and more pronounced brow ridge. A sexually dimorphic female face has a more tapered chin, larger lips, and a narrower forehead.

Prior research has also shown that women prefer more masculine male faces when ovulating, indicating an evolutionary function for facial attraction. Men who have faces that are higher in sexual dimorphism (masculinity) have been shown to have better health and dominance but lower investment in offspring.

Although it is difficult to make substantial evolutionary claims from this study, Glassenberg's work supports the idea that male attraction operates differently from female attraction, regardless of sexual orientation.

Provided by Harvard University (news : web)

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