Intergenerational Effects of Parental Personality and Relationship Traits on Mate Choice Among Gay Male and Lesbian Offspring

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Abstract:
Data from 33 lesbian and 54 gay male cohabiting couples were used to examine the relation between parental identification and mate selection. Theories of mate selection and parental identification are reviewed. Effects of gender and sexual orientation as they relate to parental identification and mate selection in gay male and lesbian couples also are reviewed. The results demonstrate significant associations between the similarity of perceived parental personality and relationship styling traits with those of the partner. Socio-economic status, age, and culture also were significantly associated between parents and partners. Taken together, the results demonstrate little support for any specific theory and allude to the need for further research in this area. Limitations and implications are discussed.
Keywords: Gay men and lesbians, personal relationships, mate se-lection, parental identification, theory, personality, cohabiting

Article:
Today's society is shifting to include a broader definition of couples and families. Among this shift is the inclusion of step-, single-parent, grandparent, and gay male and lesbian families. As a result of this paradigm change, the area of couple and family research is expanding as family scientists attempt to determine the applicability of existing theories and research findings to these less traditional family forms. One of the areas about which little is known is the process by which gay men and lesbians select partners with whom to form long-term relationships and, perhaps, with whom to create families.

As children, we are often told that we will grow up to resemble one or both of our parents in terms of personality and relationship styles. We are also told that we will marry individuals who are like our opposite-sex parents. In other words, young girls will grow up to select mates that are similar to their fathers while males will select mates that are similar to their mothers. This commonly held belief that has entered the popular culture is based on Freudian theory (Freud, 1927). However, this widespread belief about how we choose our life partners fails to take into account other theories of mate selection, and fails to account for the formation of gay male and lesbian couples. For the most part, family scientists have not addressed this issue either, with most research on mate selection focusing on heterosexuals. The purpose of this study is to remedy this knowledge gap by investigating the relationship between parental identification and mate selection among gay men and lesbians.

LITERATURE REVIEW
This review highlights theories and research findings related to parental identification and mate selection, in general, with specific attention paid to previous attempts to apply these concepts to gay male and lesbian couples. In addition, literature on gay and lesbian couples relevant to mate selection and parental identification is summarized.

Parental Identification

Parental identification theory is based largely on psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1927). Parental identification is defined as the process whereby children acquire similar values, roles, ideals, and personality attributes to those of one or both parents (Feinberg, 1980). The acquisition of these traits is termed the parental template (Daly & Wilson, 1990). According to Freudian theory, children identify with their same-sex parent, while identification signifies successful completion of the phallic stage and superego development (Freud, 1927). After completion of this stage, desires for the opposite-sex parent are repressed and manifest themselves in the adulthood choice of a romantic partner whom is similar to the opposite-sex parent. Unlike many theorists who followed him, Freud (1927) addressed homosexuality and parental identification. Freud believed that the concept of parental identification could be applied to gay men and lesbians, as well as to heterosexuals. In fact, Freud asserted that all people are born bisexual and take on sex-typical roles as they grow, mature, and are socialized.

In 1980, Feinberg found partial support for this aspect of psychoanalytic theory in a study that compared male and female parental identification. Feinberg found males to be highly identified with their fathers, while females identified equally with both parents. These patterns revealed high levels of parental identification leading to strong identification with sex-typical roles. The more defined a sex-role was in the family (father or mother: masculine or feminine), the more likely participants were to identify with their sex-typical parent.

Several other researchers have found support for nonpsychoanalytic explanations of parental identification. McDonald (1977) found a relationship between parental identification and social power: children identify with the parent whom they perceive to have the most control or power over family resources, regardless of gender. Stephens and Day (1979) investigated differences in parental identification between females from mother-absent, father-absent, and intact families. Results indicated that identification with both parents was greater in intact family homes than in father/mother absent homes. There were no statistically significant differences regarding identification with a single parent and the type of family. Mackey, O'Brien, and Mackey (1997) found that gay men and lesbians were more likely than heterosexuals to identify with one parent as a primary role model. Both gay men and lesbians identified highly with such parental characteristics as love, respect, and commitment to the relationship.

Mate Selection

Most of the theories on mate selection come from the fields of biology and social psychology. These theories tend to pertain to heterosexual mate selection, as they specifically address how males and females select each other as marital partners. Only one theory, Exotic Becomes Erotic (Bem, 1996), deals specifically with sexual orientation.

Biological or evolutionary theories suggest that people choose mates who will increase the chance of species survival (Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1987). In other words, individuals choose mates based on physical and health related attributes and qualities that will enable them to procreate and raise healthy children to adulthood.

Social psychologists also have examined the impact of physical characteristics on mate selection, but have emphasized personal choice, learned desires, and roles (Murstein, 1976). Social psychologists have espoused several mate selection theories. According to propinquity theory, individuals select mates based on geographical proximity (Hendrix, 1988; Murstein, 1976). This theory is less relevant now than in the past due to increases in transportation and mobility. Exchange theory, based on an evaluation of relationship costs and benefits, suggests that individuals prefer mates who will provide a measure of reciprocity in the relationship or at least an acceptable balance between costs and benefits (Hendrix, 1988). Homogamy theory notes the significance of culture to mate selection, asserting that individuals choose a mate based on shared racial, economic, and social characteristics.

Other social psychological theories look specifically at other dimensions of similarity and self-enhancement. Compatibility theory proposes that individuals prefer mates who display feelings and life philosophies that are

similar to their own (Murstein, 1976). Likewise, according to congruence in values theory, mates will display similar values, and these similar value systems increase mutual attraction (Knox, Zusman & Nieves, 1997). Persona theory suggests that individuals choose mates that can enhance their self-esteem (Hendrix, 1988).

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), based on psychoanalytic theory, posits that behavior and relationships in adulthood are manifested and guided by childhood attachments and relationships with caregivers, which result in internal templates. Thus, people seek romantic partners that are similar to their opposite-sex parent in terms of attachment styles (Geher, 2000).

While many of the above theories could be used to explain mate selection among homosexuals, only one theory specifically addresses romantic attraction among this population. According to the Exotic Becomes Erotic theory (EBE), gay males and lesbians are attracted to those from whom they feel most different as a child (Bem, 1996). EBE theory further asserts that preference for a partner stems from one's own childhood temperament, which is biologically predisposed. As temperament develops, one's predisposed preference for sex-typical or sex-atypical peers emerges, and one experiences exotic arousal toward the unfamiliar individual. Thus, a gay male's biologically influenced temperament attracts him to another male, whom he would find exotic. The converse would be true for lesbians (Bem, 1996).

Gender and Sexual Orientation Differences in Mate Selection
A number of studies have addressed gender and sexual orientation differences in mate selection. Howard, Blumstein, and Schwartz (1987) found few differences regarding mate selection that were attributable to gender or sexual orientation. However, gay males were more likely than heterosexual males to desire a partner who is expressive, aggressive, and athletic. They also found that lesbians, but not heterosexual women, tended to prefer more stereotypical feminine traits in a mate, while gay men tended to prefer mates with more stereotypical masculine traits.

Bailey, Gaulin, Agyeri, and Gladue (1994) examined gender differences in mate selection between heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian participants. Overall, gender had a larger impact on mate selection than did sexual orientation. However, some scales revealed a significant effect for sexual orientation. Heterosexual males, more than homosexual males, preferred younger partners and displayed increased sexual jealousy upon feeling that another male might threaten their relationship. Lesbians and heterosexual women were more likely than all males to rate status as unimportant to their choice of a mate.

Elise (1998) reviewed the literature on relationship patterns with regard to gender differences and found support for the idea that lesbians prefer partners that reflect traits similar to those of the female stereotype (or mother) and that gay men prefer partners that reflect more stereotypical male traits (those of the father). She concluded that both lesbian and heterosexual women prefer emotional intimacy and expressive language in their mates. Additionally, both gay and heterosexual men valued autonomy, separateness, and competition values, indicative of father identification and identification with the male stereotype. However, gay men were more likely than heterosexual men to seek those qualities in a partner.

Parental Identification and Mate Selection
Several studies have examined the relationship between parental identification and mate selection, again, primarily among heterosexuals. von der Lippe (1965) studied heterosexual patterns of parental identification and similarity between mates and parents. Results did not indicate a significant relationship between parental identification and parent-mate similarity. However, there was a significant relationship between compatibility and the male concept. Husbands and fathers were similar for females, and the self and father were similar for males. This finding is partially congruent with psychoanalytic theory, which asserts that we select mates that are similar to our opposite-sex parent.

More recently, Geher (2000) studied the influence of parental identification on mate selection. Results indicated that heterosexuals perceive their significant other to be similar to both of their parents, with a trend toward

higher degrees of similarity with the same-sex parent, which would support Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Geher found no relationship between parental identification and gender in his study.

Much of the current research on parental identification and mate selection is contradictory and inconclusive. The studies that are available suggest a similarity between partner choice and parental similarity, although the results for similarity between partner choice and parent vary by gender. Various theories suggest that individuals choose mates based on some type of similarity with their partners. Such similarities include values, religion, physical attractiveness, or expressiveness (Bailey et al., 1994; Boyden, Carroll, & Maier, 1984; Howard et al., 1987; Murstein, 1976).

Parental identification research also is inconclusive, with some studies finding same-sex parent identification and others finding opposite-sex parent or both parent identification (Geher, 2000; von der Lippe, 1965). More conclusive evidence could lend insight into clinical practice, which especially is salient due to the effect of parents on the coming out process (Elizur & Ziv, 2001). For example, Elizur and Ziv found that family acceptance and knowledge of sexual orientation was associated with a strong sense of a gay identity and of self, which could affect later relationships. However, few studies are available that examine the effects of parental identification on mate selection.

In general, there is a significant deficit of research available about gay male and lesbian couples. Although gay and lesbian mate selection has been studied more widely than has gay and lesbian parental identification, many gaps remain. Mate selection research has focused on the traits and values that attract mates to one another, but has failed to draw a connection between the development of these preferred traits and mate selection.

Purpose of the Present Study
The present study examines the relationship between parental identification and mate selection among gay men and lesbians. The purpose of this research is to clarify the applicability of current theory and research, regarding heterosexual parental identification and mate selection, to the gay and lesbian population. Additionally, when studying marginalized populations, effects of oppression (Adelman, 1991) and historical context (Arnup, 1999) also must be considered. Specifically, previous findings have demonstrated cohort affects among gay men and lesbians (e.g., Dube, 2000). As such, age is considered as a factor effecting mate selection and parental identification. Because the family of origin plays a significant part in this study, it is expected that clinical implications will be espoused. This study will address the following specific hypotheses:

1. Gay males are more likely to identify with their mothers than with their fathers.

2. Lesbians are more likely to identify equally with both parents than to identify strongly with one parent.

3. Of gay males that identify most strongly with their mothers, there will be no relationship between maternal attributes and partner choice.

4. Of those lesbians that identify strongly with both parents, there will be no relationship between parental attributes and partner choice.

5. Cohort will effect parental identification and mate selection for both gay men and lesbians.

METHOD
The methods used in the present study involved a survey of gay male and lesbian couples.

Sample
All participants were in their current cohabiting relationship for at least four months. The study obtained participants using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods. First, the researcher made contact with local faith communities, organizations, and community groups to ask for participation. Second,

participants were asked to identify additional couples who would be willing to participate in the study. The sample ($N = 174$) consisted of two groups, lesbian couples ($n = 33$) and gay male couples ($n = 54$).

The average age of lesbian participants was 35.18 with a range of 21 to 55 years ($SD = 8.59$). Of the lesbian participants, 88.2% were Caucasian, and 11.8% were African-American. The majority of lesbian couples (85.3%) had been in their relationship for over two years, 2.9% had been together for one to two years, and 11.8% had been together for 8 to 11 months. During the participants' childhood, constituting the years the child lived in the parents' home, 44. 1 % of the participants' parents were married, 20.6% were separated or divorced, and 5.9% were remarried. Twenty-nine percent of the participants did not answer this question. Parents' educational levels ranged from no high school diploma to professional/graduate degrees.

The average age of gay male participants was 36.35 with a range of 22 to 56 years ($SD = 8.91$). Of gay male participants, 77.8% were Caucasian, 13.9% were African-American, and 8.3% were Latino. Table 1 displays major life events affecting gay men and lesbians. Events were matched with participants, who became dating age during that time period, in order to place a participant within a specific cohort.

The majority of gay male participants, 81.5%, had been in their current partnership for over two years, with 11.1% of gay male participants in their partnership for 1 to 2 years, and 7.5% partnered for less than one year. During the participants' childhood, 50.9% reported that their parents were married, 19.5% reported their parents were separated or divorced, 5.6% lived with single parents, and 11.1% lived with remarried parents, while 13.0% did not answer the question. Parents' educational levels ranged from no high school diploma to professional/graduate degrees.

MEASUREMENT

Materials included the Semantic Differential of Sex Roles (SDSR), Parent-Child Relationship Survey (PCRS), and a demographic questionnaire. The SDSR (Hafner, 1984) and PCRS (Fine & Schwebel, 1983) were altered by changing the words wife and husband to partner to make them adaptable to gay male and lesbian participants. For H_1 and H_2, parental identification was measured using a combined subscale score on the SDSR. For H_3 and H_4, combined subscale scores from the PCRS are compared between mother, father, and partner. Comparisons for each individual subscale score are also examined between, self, mother, father, and partner measures to identify specific areas in which similarities most strongly occur.

TABLE 1. Major Life Events Related to Determination of Cohort Status

Cohort Years	Selected Major Event(s)	Age During Current Study
1961-1970	Women's Movement	48-56
	Stonewall Riots	
1971-1981	Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement	38-47
	First Reported Case of AIDS	
1982-1986	US Immigration and Naturalization Services Policy Banning Gay and Immigrants to the US Rules Unconstitutional	33-37
1987-1993	ACT UP Established	27-32
	Hate Crimes Statistics Act Passed	
1994-2000	Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy	21-26
	Defense of Marriage Act	
	Hawaii Lawsuits	
	Vermont Domestic Partnership Law	
	Matthew Shepard Murder	

Note. For a more complete gay rights history see www.publicagenda.org

SDSR

The SDSR is a 15-item instrument with subscales that measure levels of perceived relationship power, empathy, and autonomy between self, mother, father, and partner (Hafner, 1984). Each of the 15 items is rated on a 7-

point likert scale. Higher scores denote higher levels of power, empathy, and autonomy. Subscale scores are obtained by averaging subscale items. In the present study, participants rated their mother, father, partner, and self. Reliability is not reported for the SDSR. Concurrent validity was determined through a correlation of self-concept and sex-roles with an unreported similar measure of sex-roles.

PCRS

The PCRS is a 24-item instrument that measures perceptions of parent-child relationships; both mother and father (Fine & Schwebel, 1983). The PCRS measures positive affect, father involvement, communication, and anger in the father-child relationship. In the mother-child relationship, the PCRS measures anger, positive affect, resentment/role confusion, identification, and communication. For the purpose of the present study, the research team created a third version of the PCRS by replacing the word "mother/father" with "partner." A lack of available measurements for gay male and lesbian families prompted the revision. The third scale was created to provide an assessment of the self-partner relationship that was consistent with the assessment of the mother/father-self relationship as originally examined by the PCRS. Both the mother and father subscales were scored for the partner questionnaire. Scoring is completed by averaging each subscale item. The overall reliability alpha for the mother subscales is .94 and .96 for the father subscales.

Data Collection

Data was gained through a group-administered survey, which asked the participants to rate measures of personality/sex role and relationship styles for self, partner, mother, and father.

Participants completed the questionnaires in groups ranging in size from six to sixteen. Standard university protocol for assuring compliance with human subject research was employed. During each administration, participants were given packets containing a consent form, three versions of the PCRS (father, mother, and partner), four versions of the SDSR (self, father, mother, and partner), and a demographic questionnaire. During the administration, each couple was asked to identify an identical four digit number to place at the top of their questionnaires along with either an A or B signifying that these questionnaires comprised one couple. For example, participant 1111A and participant 1111 B comprise couple 1111. Couples were then asked to sit on opposite sides of the room to enhance measurement validity. Completion of the packet took less than 45 minutes. After the participants completed their packets, they were asked to identify additional couples who might be willing to participate in the study, if they were willing to do so.

TABLE 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations for SDSR Scales

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4
			Gay Males ($n = 108$)			
1. SSDSR	4.96	.62		.408**	.224*	.250**
2. MSDSR	4.92	1.09	.408**		.006	.486**
3. FSDSR	4.11	1.23	.224*	.006		.076
4. PSDSR	5.08	.72	.250**	.486**	.076	
			Lesbians ($n = 68$)			
1. SSDSR	4.95	.64		.344**	−.157	−.015
2. MSDSR	4.13	1.09	.344**		.343**	.356**
3. FSDSR	4.63	1.14	−.157	.343**		.062
4. PSDSR	5.19	1.41	−.157	.356**	.062	

Note. SSDSR = Self Score, MSDSR = Mother Score, FSDSR = Father Score, PSDSR = Partner Score.
* = p < .01
** = p < .05

RESULTS

Parental Identification

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant relationships be-tween personality traits of gay males, lesbians, and their parents, which can be found in Table 2. In reference to personality traits scored on the SDSR, a significant correlation was found in the identification of gay males with both their mother ($r = .408, p < .01$),

and their father (r = .224, p <.01). The SDSR subscales for gay males also revealed several significant relations. There was a significant relation between the participants' perception of their level of power with that of their mother (r = .60, p <.01) and their father (r = .25, p <.01). Similarly, there was a significant relation between the perception of the level of autonomy of the self and the mother (r =.29, p <.0 1) and father (r =. 18, p <.05). Finally, there was a significant relation between the perception of the level of empathy between the self and the mother (r = .38, p < .01) and father (r = .19, p < .05). These results suggest that, in terms of personality characteristics, gay males identify with both their mothers and fathers.

There also was a significant correlation between lesbian personality traits and mother personality traits (r = .34, p < .01) (see Table 2). Lesbian identification with her father's personality traits was not significant. Thus, in terms of personality traits, lesbians identified with their mothers. The subscales for lesbians also revealed several significant relationships. There was a significant relationship between the participants' perceptions of their level of power with that of their mothers (r = .31, p < .01). There was also a significant relationship between the perception of the level of autonomy between the self and the mother (r = .39, p < .01). There was not a significant relationship between the perception of the level of empathy between the self and the mother. These results suggest that, in terms of autonomy and power, lesbians identify with their mothers.

Cohort Effects. For gay men, a Kruskal Wallis ANOVA revealed a significant effect between cohort and father identification, $x^2(4) = 32.20$, $p = .00$, indicating differential paternal identification across cohorts. The same effects were found for maternal identification, $x^2(4) = 14.01$, $p = .007$. However, in terms of personality traits, cohort effects were significant only for mother identification $x^2(4) = 13.16$, $p = .011$, and not for father identification $x^2(4) = 2.76$, $p = .60$. Table 3 provides mean ranks by cohort.

For lesbians, a Kruskal Wallis ANOVA revealed a significant effect between cohort and mother identification, $x^2(4) = 16.7 1$, $p = .002$, indicating differential maternal identification across cohorts. The same effects were not found for paternal identification, $x^2(4) = 5.72$, $p = .22$. The same held true in terms of personality traits. Cohort effects were significant only for mother identification $x^2(4) = 16.62$, $p = .002$, and not for father identification $x^2(4) = 4.52$, $p = .34$ (see Table 3).

Mate Selection

Table 2 also shows correlations between the partner's personality traits and those of the gay male's mother and/or father. The results demonstrate a significant relation between the partners' and mothers' personalities (r = .49, p < .01), but not with the fathers. These findings suggest that gay males select a mate who has a personality similar to that of their mother. For the autonomy subscale, there was a significant positive correlation between participants' perception of their partner's level of autonomy and that of their mothers (r = .33, p < .01). For power, there was a significant relation between partners and both mothers (r = .55, p < .0 1) and fathers (r = . 18, p < .05). Similarly, there was a significant correlation between the level of perceived partner empathy and that of mothers (r = .48, p < .01) and fathers (r = .28, p < .01).

TABLE 3. Parental Identification Mean Rank Scores by Cohort and Gender

Gender	Cohort	FCOMBO	MCOMBO	MSDSR	FSDSR
Gay Men	1	23.57	36.00	46.00	48.29
	2	47.93	70.53	73.00	49.39
	3	64.49	49.97	46.08	55.86
	4	69.00	48.60	68.30	61.80
	5	44.40	63.33	52.75	48.08
Lesbians	1	26.83	4.50	25.50	25.17
	2	34.59	34.95	33.23	36.23
	3	34.25	24.36	18.75	33.64
	4	26.30	35.10	41.10	23.50
	5	43.79	42.93	44.67	35.50

Note. F = father score, M = mother score, COMBO = relationship score, SDSR = person-ality score. Cohort (age in years) 1 = 48-56, 2 = 38-47, 3 = 33-37, 4 = 27-32, 5 = 21-26.

The results demonstrate a significant relationship between the personalities of lesbians' partners and their mothers ($r = .36$, $p < .01$), but not their fathers. This finding suggests that lesbians select a mate who has a personality similar to that of their mothers. For the autonomy subscale, there was a significant positive correlation between participants' perceptions of their partners' level of autonomy and that of their mother ($r = .26$, $p < .0 1$). There was no significant correlation between levels of autonomy for partners and fathers. For power, there was a significant relationship between partners and both mothers ($r = .40$, $p < .01$) and fathers ($r = .50$, $p < .01$). Finally, there was a significant correlation between the level of perceived partners' empathy and that of fathers ($r = .2 1$, $p < .05$).

TABLE 4. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations for PCRS Scales

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4
			Gay Males (n = 108)			
1. PMPCRS	4.75	.44		.273**	.717**	.410**
2. MPCRS	4.12	.61	.273**		.151	−.009
3. PFPCRS	5.12	.47	.717**	.151		.368**
4. FPCRS	3.34	1.02	.410**	−.009	.368**	
			Lesbians (n = 68)			
1. PMPCRS	4.70	.61		−.054	.819**	.184
2. MPCRS	3.82	.70	−.054		.107	−.036
3. PFPCRS	5.18	.99	.819**	.107		.265*
4. FPCRS	3.63	1.09	.184	−.036	.265*	

Note. PMPCRS = Partner-Mother Relationship Similarity, MPCRS = Self-Mother Relationship, PFPCRS = Partner-Father Relationship Similarity, FPCRS = Self-Father Relationship
* = p < .01
** = p < .05

Table 4 highlights findings for gay males that suggest a positive correlation between the type of relationship they have with their mothers and with their partners ($r = .27$, $p < .0 1$). There is also a significant correlation between the type of relationship gay men have with their partners and with their fathers ($r = .37$, $p < .01$). This result suggests that gay males select a mate who demonstrates a similar relationship style to that between he and his mother and father. Upon examining the subscales, there are significant correlations between relationship styles with partner and mother for positive affect ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), identification ($r = .38$, $p < .01$), and communication ($r = .22$, $p = .013$). Subscales for father and partner relationship styles demonstrate a significant correlation only for communication ($r = .28$, $p = .01$).

Table 4 also exhibits findings for lesbians that indicate a positive correlation between the type of relationship they have with their fathers and with their partners ($r = .27$, $p = .0 14$). However, there is not a significant correlation between the type of relationship they have with their partners and with their mothers. This finding suggests that lesbians select mates based on their ability to portray a relationship style similar to that participants have with their fathers. Upon examining the subscales, there is a significant negative correlation between relationship styles with partner and mother for positive affect ($r = —.38$, $p < .01$). Subscales for father and partner relationship styles demonstrate a significant correlation for positive affect ($r = .23$, $p = .03$).

Finally, when gay male participants were asked with which parent they identified, 76% reported identification with their mother, while 24% reported identification with their father. Sixty-five percent of lesbian participants reported identification with their father, 29% reported identification with their mother, and 6% reported no parental identification. Participants were then asked to report which parent their partner most reminded them of. Fifty-four percent of gay males reported that their parent reminded them of their father, and 46% reported that their partner reminded them of their mother. For lesbian participants, 41% reported mother-partner similarity, 35% reported father-partner similarity, and 24% reported neither.

Cohort Effects, For gay men, a Kruskal Wallis ANOVA revealed a significant effect between cohort and partner-father similarity, $x^2(4) = 15.436$, $p = .004$, indicating differential partner-father similarity across cohorts. The same effects were not found for partner-mother similarity, $x^2(4) = 6.944$, $p = .14$. Partner personality traits

were differentially perceived, by the participant, between cohorts $x^2(4) = 29.26$, $p = .00$. Table 5 provides mean ranks by cohort.

TABLE 5. Mate Selection Mean Rank Scores by Cohort and Gender

Gender	Cohort	PSDSR	PFCOM	PMCOM
Gay Men	1	58.79	50.43	46.86
	2	66.26	76.62	68.97
	3	42.89	56.74	52.23
	4	85.90	51.80	62.60
	5	36.08	36.00	47.67
Lesbians	1	37.17	24.17	26.50
	2	35.86	41.77	37.86
	3	26.50	22.75	35.75
	4	38.50	27.70	24.90
	5	37.50	45.79	38.07

Note. P = partner score, PF = partner-father similarity score, PM = partner-mother similarity score, COM = relationship score, SDSR = personality score. Cohort (age in years) 1 = 48-56, 2 = 38-47, 3 = 33-37, 4 = 27-32, 5 = 21-26.

For lesbians, a Kruskal Wallis ANOVA revealed a significant effect between cohort and partner-father similarity, $x^2(4) = 16.03$, $p = .003$, indicating differential partner-father similarity across cohorts. The same effects were not found for partner-mother similarity, $x^2(4) = 4.50$, $p = .34$. Partner personality traits were not differentially perceived, by the participant, between cohorts $x^2(4) = 3.58$, $p = .47$. Table 5 provides mean ranks by cohort.

Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Factors

This study also examined the effect of race and socioeconomic status (SES) on participants' perceptions of personality and relationship styling identification traits. For gay males, there was a significant effect between race and mother personality trait identification scores, $F(2, 107) = 6.16$, $p = .003$. Post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the scores of Latino and African American participants ($p < .05$), and Latino and Caucasian participants ($p < .05$). African American and Caucasian participants were more likely than Latino participants to display higher mother personality trait identification scores. There were no significant differences between the scores of African American and Caucasian participants. There were also no significant effects for father personality trait identification scores. For lesbian participants, there were no significant effects between race and mother or father personality trait identification scores. Also, there was no effect between race and relationship styling identification traits for gay male or lesbian participants.

Upon examining the effect of SES on participants' perceptions of personality trait and relationship styling trait identification scores, no significant differences are found for gay male or lesbian participants. However, there was a significant effect between SES and mother personality trait identification scores for gay males, $F(2, 107) = 6.99$, $p < .05$. Higher SES resulted in higher mother identification. There was no significant effect for father personality trait identification scores for gay male participants. For lesbian participants, there was not a significant effect between SES and mother scores; however there was a significant effect between SES and father scores $F(2, 59) = 16.8$ 1, $p < .05$). Lesbian participants from a middle or upper SES were more likely than those from a lower SES to identify with their fathers' personality traits.

DISCUSSION

The current study examines the relationship between parental identification and mate selection among gay male and lesbian couples with special attention given to the applicability of heterosexual theories and previous research with this population. The results indicate that gay males identify with the personality traits and relationship styles of both their mother and father, while lesbians identified with both parents' relationship styles but only their mothers' personality traits. These findings are at odds with previous research, and do not fully support the hypotheses of the current study.

The present study predicted that gay males would identify with their opposite-sex parent, namely their mother, and lesbians would identify equally with both parents. However, gay males identified with both parents, and lesbians identified partially with their father and wholly with their mother. These results are most similar to those of Stephens and Day (1979), who found dual parent identification. Partial support is ac-counted for in the research of Freud (1927), who found same-sex parental identification, and in Feinberg (1980), who found son-father identification and daughter dual parent identification. Finally, the current results partially differ from those of Mackey, O'Brien, and Mackey (1997), who found that individuals are more likely to identify with only one parent, which was only partially observed in the current study.

Mackey et al. (1997) found love, respect, and commitment to be important predictors of identification. The current study replicated similar results evidenced by a strong correlation between identification and perceived level of empathy. Additionally, Elise (1998) found autonomy to be a predictive factor for males only. The current results demonstrate the effect of autonomy to be equally important in parental identification for gay males and lesbians. McDonald (1977) suggested that parental identification is affected by the level of parental power, which also is partially congruent with the current findings that demonstrate a positive correlation between identification and perceived parental power. Although the power levels were similar for both parents, as opposed to one parent holding a majority of familial power, a significant effect between identification and SES was observed. Generally in society, higher SES accounts for higher levels of power and opportunity than lower SES.

The current study did yield results supportive of psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1927) regarding identification with the same-sex parent only when power and higher SES are combined with parental identification. This suggests that SES may be a stronger predictor of parental identification than gender. It also demonstrates a need to include individuals from all SES backgrounds in future studies.

Cultural background also affected parental identification among gay male participants. Overall, Latino participants were more likely than African American and Caucasian participants to identify with their fathers rather than their mothers. In the Latino culture, gender role expectations are more concrete than in African American and Caucasian cultures (Falicov, 1999). Hence, Latinos have a higher male role expectation because of cultural and familial norms and responsibilities. It would be interesting to examine these differences controlling for the level of acculturation of the Latino participants and their parents.

The results of the current study find few congruencies with previous studies and virtually no conclusive applicability for any one theory of mate selection. The current study predicted that gay males would choose a partner that most resembles their father (based on personality and relationship styling traits), while lesbians would choose a partner whom is not similar to either parent. However, the results indicate that the partners of both lesbians and gay males are similar in personality and relationship styling to both their mothers and fathers. von der Lippe (1965) found no similarity between parental identification and partner choice in the heterosexual population, while Freud (1927) found partners to be similar to the opposite-sex parent of the individual.

The current results do provide support for Geher's (2000) findings of perceived similarity between partner choice and both mother and father traits. The results of the current study provide additional information in an area of limited knowledge. Although no conclusive evidence was found for support of any one theory of mate selection, inferences can be made. It appears that families of origin (regardless of their heterosexual status) do effect gay male and lesbian parental identification and choice of a mate. Additionally, parental identification and mate selection are differentially influenced by cohort status comprising major life events reflective of changes levels of acceptance and oppression. As such, additional research focusing on cohort effects would expand our knowledge greatly. Finally, it also appears that gender, cultural background, and SES also effect the choice of a mate and parental identification in the gay male and lesbian population.

Limitations
There are several limitations within the current study. Most obviously is the use of a non-probability sample.

However, the descriptive statistics for the sample do indicate a variety of backgrounds, including cultures, educational levels, socio-economic levels, and cohorts. From this, we can conclude that the sample is somewhat representative of the population, in accordance with these variables. An important factor that was not addressed was if the participant was "out" to his/her family and community, and how traumatic, if at all, the participants' "coming out" process was, which may have impacted their parental perceptions and familial stability, and may be associated with their cohort status.

Another limitation was the lack of existing measures for use with this population. Due to this, the measures used in the current study were altered for sensitivity to the gay male and lesbian population; therefore, reliability and validity are unknown. However, it is suspected that the reliability and validity are virtually unchanged since only references to people were changed (i.e., wife/husband changed to partner). Finally, history may have effected the outcome of this study. During the course of this study, the state of Vermont voted to recognize same-sex unions, which may have influenced participants' perceptions of their relationships.

Implications

The results of this study point to several theoretical and clinical implications. Given that several variables affect the development of parental identification and mate choice in the gay male and lesbian population, it appears that no one theory can explain the process of parental identification and mate selection. It may be appropriate for future studies to examine the concept of parental identification and mate selection in the gay male and lesbian population from an ecological. Using an ecological perspective to study and understand how gay men and lesbians develop, identify with their parent(s), and subsequently choose a mate would allow for a more complete and accurate account of their experiences with reference to person, process, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Clinically, a similar approach should be taken. A gay male, lesbian, or couple that presents for treatment should be assessed and treated using an eclectic approach grounded in the context of person-in-environment. Such an approach would ensure a full assessment and understanding of the per-son/couple and the effect, on that person/couple, of their environment and interacting systems (i.e., family of origin, SES, culture, development, community, etc.). The results from the current study also suggest the importance of the family of origin and cultural background on the development of interpersonal skills gay men and lesbians develop and use in their everyday romantic and personal lives. This knowledge can be used to interpret the multigenerational transmission of functional and dysfunctional behaviors and interactions between partners, and direct a more appropriate choice of clinical intervention.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the way gay men and lesbians process information, learn from their parents and culture, and transition that learning to their adulthood choice of a mate is contingent on many of the same variables associated with heterosexual mate selection. Gay male and lesbian couples and families are being included in the new definition of the American family. With this paradigm change, we must also embrace not only the diversity and uniqueness of gay male and lesbian families, but also the similarities that affect coupling, family life, and development within this population. Finally, it is hoped that the similarities found between heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian couples in their processes of parental identification and mate selection will further normalize the way society views and conceptualizes their perceptions of this emerging "new" American family without distracting from the unique and distinct lives of this population.

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