

GINA POTÂRCĂ *University of Lausanne*MELINDA MILLS *University of Oxford/Nuffield College\**WIEBKE NEBERICH *Affinitas GmbH\*\**

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## Relationship Preferences Among Gay and Lesbian Online Daters: Individual and Contextual Influences

*There is currently little knowledge about what gay men and lesbians seek in a romantic relationship. This study extends the literature on gay men and lesbians' partnership preferences by engaging in the first large-scale empirical study of the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay and lesbian online daters across 53 regions in 8 European countries (N = 24,598). Looking at profile and preference information, the authors examined both individual and contextual determinants in a series of multilevel logistic regression analyses. They show that lesbians give more importance to monogamy but show less interest in starting a long-term relationship. The data also reveal the importance of life course aspects such as relationship history and presence of children. Finally, the authors empirically demonstrate that social tolerance and legal recognition of same-sex unions are associated with higher long-term dating intentions and stronger monogamy beliefs.*

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LIVES, University of Lausanne, Bâtiment Géopolis, Quartier UNIL-Mouline, Lausanne CH-1015, Switzerland (gina.potarca@unil.nl).

\*Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, Manor Road, Oxford OX1 3UQ, England.

\*\*Affinitas GmbH, Kohlfurther Straße 41/43, 10999, Berlin, Germany.

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The past decades have witnessed a continued rise in the visibility and legal rights of same-sex unions (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). Although gay men and lesbian women establish various types of relationships “from courtship to cohabitation to marriage-like unions with high commitment” (Kurdek, 2005, p. 254), the topic remains largely empirically unexplored. Little is known about the relationship preferences that members of these sexual minority groups have in the initial stages of mate selection. Several studies have examined attractiveness standards and aspects that gay men and lesbians find desirable in a romantic partner (e.g., Gobrogge et al., 2007; Ha, van den Berg, Engels, & Lichtwarck-Aschoff, 2012; Lippa, 2007). The knowledge about what gay men and lesbians seek and value in a relationship, however, is underdeveloped.

In the current study we focused on two aspects of relationship preferences, namely (a) long-term dating intentions (i.e., interest in starting a long-lasting relationship) and (b) belief in monogamy (i.e., sociosexuality). Interest in long-term partnerships is generally found to correlate with strong norms favoring sexual exclusivity (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). This study jointly labels long-term dating intentions and strong beliefs in monogamy as high (or demanding) partnering standards. There is evidence, however, that willingness to engage in uncommitted sexual relations does not necessarily exclude long-term partnering intentions

(Gangestad & Simpson, 1990). This suggests that the two constructs might tap into different facets of mating preferences. Exploring an intentional as well as an attitudinal component of mating strategies will provide more depth into the understanding of gay men and lesbians' relationship preferences.

Any examination of the partnering standards of the two sexual minority groups needs to take into account the particularities of their dating markets (Schwartz & Graf, 2009). Gay men and lesbians tend to reside in heterogeneous neighborhoods located in large urban centers (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005). They also have increased geographical mobility, which reduces the immediate influence of family and friends (Schwartz & Graf, 2009). Apart from residing in different social settings (Kurdek, 2004), the limited size of their dating market means that they are also more prone to resort to nontraditional means for finding a partner. An increasingly popular way for gay men and lesbians to find available partners is via Internet dating (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Here they have greater chances of initiating romantic encounters by "minimizing their efforts and exposure to overt social scrutiny" (Lever, Grov, Royce, & Gillespie, 2008, p. 284). The Internet therefore increases the level of access, affordability, and privacy in searching for romantic and sexual encounters as well as providing a wider variety of prospective partners (Tikkanen & Ross, 2003). Despite the growing popularity of digital mating markets among individuals with same-sex preferences, no studies have yet examined gay men and lesbians' relationship intentions and values when searching for a partner online. Moreover, the partnering intentions and beliefs of gay men and lesbians have rarely been studied across different contextual settings. Because of the diverse levels of acceptance and legal recognition of same-sex relationships across different countries and subregions, we anticipated particular ties between contextual settings and gay men and lesbians' dating intentions and values.

The aim of this study was to examine how both individual and contextual determinants are related to the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay and lesbian online daters. At the individual level, we analyzed the links between life-course factors such as previous union experience and presence of children and gay men and lesbians' relationship

preferences. At the contextual level, we took into account variations in attitudes toward same-sex couples and legal recognition of same-sex partnerships across 53 regions in eight countries in Europe, namely, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. Using data provided by a multinational online dating platform, we analyzed the preferences and sociodemographic information provided by members who filled in an online dating profile. On the basis of the preference for a partner's gender expressed on users' profiles, we labeled women seeking women as lesbians and men seeking men as gay men. Despite the fact that seeking a same-sex partner on an online dating platform is not an unequivocal measure of sexual identity as enduring attraction toward the same sex, we believe that it does represent an active expression of one's (same-sex) sexual orientation.

Our study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, we extend the handful of literature on gay men and lesbians' partnering preferences with a large-scale empirical analysis. A second innovation is the examination of how relationship history or presence of children is related to the relationship values of gay men and lesbians, known to have distinct legal and reproductive contexts for both partnering and parenting. Third, because of the comparative aspect of this study, it is the first to examine how the long-term dating intentions and the monogamy beliefs of gay men and lesbians are shaped by both individual characteristics and dating market conditions. This answers the call by Meier, Hull, and Ortyl (2009), who emphasized the need to study relationship values among sexual minorities across different social, legal, and cultural contexts. Because of the lack of cross-regional and cross-national comparative data on gay men and lesbians, this study is the first to provide unique insights into whether gay men and lesbians' dating intentions and monogamy beliefs vary across local and national settings. Fourth, research has yet to address this topic by looking at real-life choices and a genuine dating environment. During the past decade there has been a surge in studies examining various aspects of same-sex partnerships, such as division of household labor (Kurdek, 2006), relationship satisfaction (Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006), or partnership stability (Andersson, Noack, Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006; Kalmijn,

Loeve, & Manting, 2007). The limitation of previous studies is that they generally have relied on small convenience samples based on snowballing methods that usually target magazine readers or members of gay organizations, which often lead to an underrepresentation of non-White or low-socioeconomic-status gay men and lesbians (Andersson et al., 2006; Jepsen & Jepsen, 2002). This study is pioneering in that it relies on unique large-scale data that permit a more robust and detailed examination of gay men and lesbians' relationship goals and beliefs. Furthermore, the nonreactive nature of the data (i.e., data gathered from a naturalistic setting) has the potential to offer a more truthful assessment of gay men and lesbians' intentions and beliefs in the initial stages of dating. Finally, because of the weak public visibility of gay and lesbian communities in certain countries (e.g., Italy), this is among the first studies to examine the mate selection patterns of gay men and lesbians within such restrictive contexts.

#### BACKGROUND

##### *Short- Versus Long-Term Mating Strategies and Monogamy Beliefs*

*Sexual strategy theory* (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) assumes that both men and women develop a plural set of approaches to mating, including long-term as well as short-term partnering. Buss and Schmitt (1993) proposed that short-term mating is pursued because it has several advantages for men (e.g., an increased number of children) as well as for women (e.g., immediate access to men's resources, the possibility of assessing the intentions and mate value of potential long-term partners). Long-term strategies, on the other hand, guarantee women a constant provision of men's resources and investments in rearing children. Long-term mating for men usually involves partnering with women of better mate value, avoiding the efforts of constantly pursuing potential partners, increasing the genetic quality of offspring, providing paternity certainty, dividing domestic and nondomestic labor tasks, and so forth. According to this theory, individuals select either one of the two mating tactics of short- versus long-term partnering depending on both gender and context (Asendorpf, Penke, & Back, 2011; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000).

An additional concept used to capture individual differences in human mating strategies is *sociosexuality*, which gauges variability in the disposition individuals have toward sexual relations outside of committed relationships (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). The two extremes on the sociosexual orientation continuum distinguish first between restricted individuals who place emphasis on sexual exclusivity, lengthy courtship, and substantial emotional investments in long-term relationships. The other extreme consists of unrestricted individuals who are more prone toward multiple sexual partners, more spontaneous sexual relations, and lower levels of investments and intimacy in relationships (Schmitt, 2005; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). In the current study, we focused on the attitudinal component of sociosexuality, which is the belief that a relationship should be exclusive and thus refers to the normative endorsement of committed sex (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). We hereafter refer to it as monogamy attitudes or beliefs.

The theoretical arguments presented until now, however, are largely based on heterosexual men and women and center around reproduction. The evidence regarding gay men and lesbians' mating strategies and monogamy is scarce, with the few studies that have examined this topic producing conflicting findings. In the absence of direct theories and research that address the actual partnering preferences of gay men and lesbians in genuine dating situations, we focus here on studies that have examined generic relationship values or levels of commitment and stability of established same-sex couples. Meier and colleagues (2009) found no significant differences between gay men and lesbians in the way they rated lifelong commitment and faithfulness as important components of a successful relationship. Bryant and Demian (1994) likewise demonstrated that gay and lesbian couples displayed similar levels of relationship commitment; nevertheless, lesbians were more likely to form sexually exclusive partnerships and rarely violated monogamy agreements. In fact, norms regarding sexual restrictiveness seem to distinguish gay men and lesbians the most. Gay men generally score higher in terms of interest in and acceptance of noncommitted sexual relations and non-monogamous partnerships (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). Moreover, Schmitt (2005) revealed that gay men have significantly higher levels of

non-monogamous relationships, possibly related to having access to a dating market with potential partners with similar open attitudes toward uncommitted sex.

Relationship commitment among same-sex couples is also assumed to depend on the barriers individuals encounter when ending a partnership (Kurdek, 2000; Peplau & Spalding, 2000). The level of relationship dependence and commitment decreases when the barriers that prevent a person from dissolving a union are low and the quality of alternatives to maintaining it is high (Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Lau (2012) contended that female same-sex couples are more stable than male same-sex couples due to the fact that lesbians perceive more barriers to ending a relationship (e.g., lesbian households are more likely to include children) and greater benefits from being in a relationship (e.g., women's lower income levels make it more advantageous to pool financial resources than for men) as well as scarcer partner alternatives (e.g., lesbians are less likely to inhabit large cities than gay men). Nevertheless, evidence is again inconclusive. Among same-sex couples, Andersson and colleagues (2006) found that female partnerships had higher divorce risks than male couples in Sweden and Norway, whereas Kalmijn et al. (2007) and Lau (2012) have revealed greater stability for female same-sex partnerships in the Netherlands and the United States, respectively. On the basis of previous research related to both relationship values and stability, we did not hypothesize dissimilarities between gay and lesbian daters in terms of willingness to start a long-term relationship. Nevertheless, existing evidence regarding monogamy led us to expect a stronger belief in sexual exclusivity among lesbian women compared to gay men (*Hypothesis 1*).

#### *Life-Course Determinants of Gay Men and Lesbians' Dating Intentions*

The life-course aspects of relationship history and presence of children can influence the views and expectations that people have when initiating new partnerships (Poortman, 2007), but this association has yet to be explored in relation to gay men and lesbians. The general lack of empirical evidence concerning the dissolution and repartnering process of gay men and lesbians is related to the difficulty of assessing

their pre- and postdissolution relationships and parenting arrangements. The relationship experience of gay and lesbian parents often refers to unions and children born with different-sex partners (Andersson et al., 2006; Lau, 2012; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Nevertheless, the dissolution of same-sex partnerships and the formal ties to children born or adopted within such unions are surrounded by a great deal of legal ambiguity, particularly in contexts where the legalization of same-sex unions is not permitted (Goldberg & Allen, 2013).

When a same-sex relationship dissolves, nonbiological parents often risk losing the relationship with their children who are legally bound only to the biological parent (Allen, 2007). When institutional support to guide the commitments and obligations between previous partners, on the one hand, and between ex-partners and their children, on the other hand, is missing, gay and lesbian parents have to self-determine child custody and visitation as well as stepfamily formation decisions (Allen, 2007; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). Even in countries that grant the legalization of partnerships for same-sex couples, parenting rights remain restrictive. Switzerland, for instance, provides legal recognition for same-sex unions via registered partnerships, but it does not entitle same-sex couples to joint or second-parent adoption (i.e., the legal process that allows same-sex partners to adopt their partner's biological or adopted child without ending the first parent's legal status as a parent). Despite the particularities of gay men and lesbians' socially and legally disputed family formation (Allen, 2007), we drew on the literature that addresses the impact of life course factors on heterosexuals' partnering. We therefore assumed that basic experiences such as forming partnerships and having children shape the dating agenda of individuals consistently across sexual orientation groups. On the basis of sometimes-conflicting empirical evidence related to the influence of life-course aspects on the repartnering process of heterosexuals, there is a series of competing expectations that we now specify for gay men and lesbians jointly.

#### *Relationship History*

Compared to the never-married, divorced individuals are often older. They also face a more constrained partnership market (i.e., a

short supply of available and suitable potential partners), leading to a particular set of relationship needs and criteria for partner selection (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Shafer, 2013; Sweeney, 1997). Frazier, Arikian, Benson, Losoff, and Maurer (1996) found that people who experienced divorce had weaker marital intentions than those who had never married, which likely can be attributed to previous negative marital experiences. People with previous union experience are less emotionally engaged and make fewer investments in subsequent relationships (Poortman, 2007). In particular among separated individuals—who are not legally divorced and therefore unable to enter or invest in a formalized union—demanding partnering arrangements would be even less preferred. If we consider separated individuals who exit a cohabiting union, we would also expect lower relationship demands given their tendency to form a union with lower levels of commitment and investment than marriage to begin with (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Cherlin, 2004; Poortman & Mills, 2012). Therefore, we anticipate that divorced—and, even more so, separated—individuals to have lower long-term dating intentions and weaker monogamy beliefs than those who had never married (*Hypothesis 2A*). A competing hypothesis is that, provided a wide enough pool of potential candidates, individuals with union experience fine-tune their preferences toward a better suited partner, entailing more selectiveness and higher requirements from subsequent relationships (Gelissen, 2004). This could translate into a greater concern for starting a long-term relationship and a stronger belief in sexual exclusivity compared to the never-married (*Hypothesis 2B*).

In regard to widowed persons, research shows a strong preference for dating instead of traditional long-lasting partnerships (Carr, 2004; McWilliams & Barrett, 2014). Reasons for avoiding long-term relationships include concern for losing newly found autonomy (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014); reluctance to engage in emotional and instrumental caregiving for a new, possibly unhealthy spouse (Davidson, 2001; Talbott, 1998); potential deprivation of social security benefits associated with the deceased spouse upon remarriage; unwanted prospect of residential relocation (Carr, 2004); or opposition of children to widowed parents' repartnering (Moorman, Booth, & Fingerman,

2006). Alterovitz and Mendelsohn (2013) showed that older ages are associated with less interest in sexual aspects and more concern with having a companion with whom to share activities. We would therefore expect fewer long-term dating intentions and weaker beliefs in sexual exclusivity among widowed daters in comparison to those who have never been married (*Hypothesis 2C*).

### *Presence of Children*

Having children could also shape the dating priorities of individuals looking for a new partner. On the one hand, the presence of children can be perceived as a constraint to repartnering. Across various national settings, multiple studies have found that resident children have a negative effect on parents' repartnering chances and the quality of their new match, especially among women (e.g., de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Qian, Lichter, & Mellott, 2005; Sweeney, 1997). In addition to restricting the time and opportunities to find a partner, the presence of children is believed to decrease parents' mate value and their ability to attract suitable partners (Qian et al., 2005). Prospective partners could perceive nonbiological children as a potential source of relationship conflict (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003) and undesired financial and caring responsibilities (Stewart, Manning, & Smock, 2003). In comparison to childless daters, gay and lesbian parents who wish to start a new relationship might therefore anticipate unfavorable mating prospects and express less demanding dating preferences, meaning weaker long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs (*Hypothesis 3A*). On the other hand, the presence of children has also been shown to enhance parents' repartnering prospects, particularly among men (Wu & Schimmele, 2005). A positive perception of own mate value for men and the motivation to ensure a proper parenting environment for both men and women could attract a certain level of cautiousness in selecting a new partner (Bzostek, McLanahan, & Carlson, 2012). Because of heightened expectations, the dating priorities of gay men and lesbians with resident children could point toward more long-term mating strategies and more value attached to sexual exclusivity in comparison to individuals without children (*Hypothesis 3B*).

*Contextual Determinants of Gay Men  
and Lesbians' Dating Intentions*

A thorough understanding of the complexity of same-sex partnering behavior should take into account the multitude of factors that shape the manner in which romantic unions are initiated, maintained, and ended (Kurdek, 2004). Sexual strategy theory suggests that the choice between short- and long-term mating strategies is highly dependent on context (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Adopting a certain orientation to commitment and monogamy is also sensitive to the characteristics of the environment (Schmitt, 2005). Therefore, when analyzing gay men and lesbians' dating intentions it is essential to account for contextual influences. This study focused on two types of contextual aspects: (a) the normative climate toward same-sex couples and (b) the legal context of initiating same-sex relationships. The normative contextual predictor was addressed at the regional instead of the national level because of significant local variations in normative attitudes toward same-sex partnerships within the same national borders (see Online Appendix Table OA1 on the *Journal of Marriage and Family* website [[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1741-3737](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1741-3737)]). The legal context was examined at the national level given that, in the European context, the same set of legal rights for same-sex unions often apply across all regions within a country.

*Social and Legal Recognition of Gay Men  
and Lesbians Across Europe*

Gay men and lesbians' partnering preferences and beliefs are influenced by the level of informal (attitudes) and formal (legislation) tolerance toward same-sex unions within their environment (Lau, 2012). After examining the U.S. context, Patterson (2000) asserted that the transformation in societal attitudes and legal regulations of same-sex partnerships during the last few decades have strongly influenced the outlook of gay men and lesbians' daily lives.

To help readers grasp the variability in legal regulations of same-sex partnerships, we outline below an overview of different national contexts. The European countries under focus in this study provide diverse landscapes of lesbian and gay rights and, more specifically, of legal recognition for same-sex couples. A summary of same-sex partnership and parenting rights across countries is provided in Table 1. In 2001, the Netherlands was the first country that provided same-sex couples access to civil marriage. In Spain, marriage became available for same-sex couples in 2005, and in Sweden it became legal in 2009.

The second group of countries that do not provide same-sex couples access to civil marriage but do allow for registered partnerships (i.e., legally recognized forms of partnership similar to marriage, also referred to as *civil unions*) is represented by France, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In France, lesbian and gay couples

Table 1. *Same-Sex Partnership and Parenting Rights Across Countries*

Country	Partnership recognition		Parenting rights		
	Registered partnership	Marriage	Joint adoption	Second parent adoption	Medically assisted insemination (lesbian couples)
The Netherlands	√ <sup>a</sup>	√	√	√	√
Sweden	√	√	√	√	√
Spain	√ <sup>b</sup>	√	√	√	√
France	√ <sup>c</sup>	× <sup>d</sup>	×	× <sup>e</sup>	× <sup>e</sup>
Germany	√	×	×	√	×
Austria	√	×	×	× <sup>e</sup>	×
Switzerland	√	×	×	×	×
Italy	×	×	×	×	×

Note: Data are from ILGA-Europe (2012).

<sup>a</sup>Cohabiting same-sex couples have virtually the same rights as cohabiting different sex couples. <sup>b</sup>In certain regions only.

<sup>c</sup>Limited rights. <sup>d</sup>Legalized since 2013. <sup>e</sup>Allowed since 2013.

have been able to benefit from a legal arrangement similar to marriage through the Civil Pact of Solidarity since 1999. Same-sex marriage actually became legal in France as of May 2013, but, given that the time of data access for this study is September 2011, France is included in the group of countries that allow for registered partnerships only. The Civil Pact of Solidarity allows couples, irrespective of gender composition, to sign a contract that defines their partnership along various aspects such as property, taxation, health insurance, and so on. Nevertheless, couples in registered partnerships have no rights of shared parental authority, adoption, or access to medically assisted reproduction (Waalwijk, 2009). In Germany, registered life partnerships for same-sex couples have been permitted since 2001, providing them several of the rights and benefits that married (different-sex) couples have, except for presumption of paternity or joint adoption. Since 2004, same-sex couples in Germany have been eligible to apply for second-parent adoption of each other's biological children, although the responsibilities assigned to the adopting parent remain limited (Waalwijk, 2009). In Austria, same-sex couples have been able to register their partnership since 2010, benefiting from rights similar to those of married couples with the exception of fertility treatments or joint adoption (second-parent adoption for same-sex couples was eventually enforced in August 2013). Switzerland has recognized same-sex registered partnerships since 2005, ensuring the same rights as marriages in terms of social security, insurance, taxation, or property. Swiss same-sex couples are not entitled, however, to fertility treatments or to joint or second-parent adoption rights.

A third category examined in this study and, represented by Italy, includes countries that do not recognize any type of same-sex unions or provide any parenting rights to same-sex couples. Italy was one of the first European countries to decriminalize same-sex sexual behavior in the second half of the 19th century. Nevertheless, any attempt at legalizing civil unions for same-sex couples in this staunchly Catholic country has failed. In Italy, same-sex partnering is therefore "neither persecuted nor protected by law, and it must remain private" (Lingiardi, Falanga, & D'Augelli, 2005, p. 91), leading to a repressed public awareness of gay and lesbian rights as well as a closeted life for same-sex couples.

The societal climate and degree of legal recognition of same-sex couples define gay men and lesbians' uniqueness in the way they initiate, maintain, and negotiate their partnerships (Lannutti, 2007). Social and legal sanctions are also believed to shape individual variation in mating strategies (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). The lack of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships has the potential to make gay men and lesbians less willing to invest in long-term arrangements because of increased uncertainty regarding the relationship's time horizon (Lau, 2012). Furthermore, the social marginalization of same-sex partnering often leads to the concealing of relationships for gay men and lesbians (Otis et al., 2006) as well as negative perceptions of relationship quality and longevity (e.g., Frost, 2011; Frost & Meyer, 2009). The legal possibility of marrying a same-sex partner alters individuals' expectations about their future, leading to a potential reconsideration of relationship values (Lannutti, 2007). Given increased relationship rewards and heightened feelings of security and stability, formalized same-sex partnerships are associated with higher levels of relationship commitment and investments (Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010). As opposed to homophobic environments, which might add multiple relationship stressors and uncertainty about the future among members of same-sex couples (Frost, 2011; Otis et al., 2006), societal acceptance could lead to less ambiguity for long-term prospects, more visible partnering behavior, and greater relationship investments. Contexts of both social and legal recognition of same-sex couples should therefore encourage gay men and lesbians to pursue longer term relationships and favor monogamy (*Hypothesis 4, Hypothesis 5*).

## METHOD

### *Data and Sample*

We analyzed anonymous profile and preference information of 24,598 gay and lesbian members registered at the eDarling online dating site in the following countries: the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. In an agreement with the company, data were accessed in September 2011. Launched in early 2009, eDarling is an online dating company that provides online matchmaking services targeted at a broad audience, allowing searches for different-sex as

well as same-sex partners (the website does not provide specific services for individuals with a bisexual orientation). It is currently based in 20 countries in Europe and Latin America, including the eight countries under focus in this study, and it had an active website and comparable database of users at the time of data access. The company is one of the largest European partner agencies on the web. In Germany, for instance, eDarling tops the ranking of online dating services, having roughly twice as many users as their main competitor (Süllhöfer, 2013).

Online Appendix Table OA2 provides information about the sample distribution across countries and subregions within countries for the full sample and the samples by sexual orientation. The gender distribution across regions is mostly balanced, with some exceptions of overrepresentation of gay men in Zurich (Switzerland) or Insular Italy (the islands of Sicily and Sardinia), as well as an overrepresentation of lesbian women in northwestern Switzerland. Because of the absence of official statistics concerning the size and composition of sexual minority groups across Europe (Festy, 2007), it was difficult to assess how representative our sample of online daters is of the entire lesbian and gay population in each of the eight countries. Nevertheless, a comparison using U.S. data of gay men and lesbians who met their partner through online dating sites versus elsewhere (e.g., via family, friends, school, religious venues, the workplace, etc.) showed few differences, although gay and lesbian online daters tend to be younger and non-White (see Online Appendix 3).

The eDarling website provides the possibility of enrolling as either a nonpremium (free) or a premium (paid) member. Nonpremium membership includes registration, filling in an entry questionnaire of 283 questions, and the chance of browsing through the proposed profiles of candidates without being able to inspect their photos or exchange e-mails. To gain access to pictures and to establish and react to contacts, a monthly subscription fee is required (premium membership). Because the data were accessed at one point in time, it may be that some nonpremium members eventually became premium members. The entry questionnaire includes a personality test, personal details (e.g., age, occupation, education level, race, religion, marital status, height, lifestyle habits, etc.), and importance awarded to partner's characteristics

(e.g., education, physical appearance), as well as preferences for potential partners in terms of age, height, geographical location, fertility history and plans, lifestyle habits, and race. The data analyzed in this study focused on the user profile information and the dating preferences and beliefs that people express when filling in the entry questionnaire. More precisely, we looked at how interested daters were in pursuing long-term relationships and their monogamy beliefs as main dependent variables as well as at their sociodemographic descriptors as either explanatory or control factors.

We used the postal code information in the data set to link individuals to a certain region within a particular country. We then attached macro-level variables that measure contextual aspects referring to attitudes and legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, which are taken from statistical offices or cross-national surveys, described in more detail below. The regional units correspond to the Eurostat's Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units classification scheme (NUTS). In order to comply with data confidentiality agreements, we coded regions at the NUTS-1 level, which corresponds to large-scale regions (ranging from 3 million to 7 million inhabitants), which led to a classification of 53 regions.

### Measures

*Individual-level variables.* Long-term dating intentions are measured on the eDarling site via the item "I am looking for a long-term relationship," which was rated along a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 = *not at all* through 4 = *somewhat* to 7 = *very much*). The belief in monogamy is measured on the same type of scale with the item "I believe a serious relationship needs to be exclusive (i.e. monogamous)." For both variables, most responses clustered at the right extreme of the distribution, with approximately three quarters of daters choosing 5, 6, or 7 on the scale. Given that not all of the seven categories contained enough cases (only 3.6% of individuals mentioned being "not at all" [value 1] interested in a long-term relationship, and 4.4% believed a serious relationship needs to be "not at all" exclusive) to support multilevel regression analyses with interaction terms (as described later), we opted to dichotomize the scale. Individuals who were highly interested in long-term dating and held strong beliefs in



monogamy (5–7 on the original scale) were coded as 1, whereas those who had low or only moderate long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs (1–4 on the original scale) were coded as 0.

*Gender* was created by combining the information on gender and the type of partner the online dater was seeking (man or woman) and was categorized as gay man (reference category) and lesbian woman. *Previous union experience* was gauged by looking at the answers to the following question: “Which of the following statements applies to your marital status?” Online daters could choose among four different options: “I have never been married,” “I’m divorced,” “I live in separation,” or “I am widowed.” No information is provided about whether the separation refers to a formal or informal union or whether people left a union with a different-sex or same-sex partner. *Resident children* was measured via the question “How many children under 18 live with you?”, with the following four options: “no children” (reference), “one child,” “two children,” and “three or more children.” As stated previously, this measure does not actually require the child to be biologically or legally related to any of the adults in the household.

Finally, we took into account a set of control variables that have been found to be important predictors from previous studies, including educational level (Alston & Tucker, 1973), age (Ha et al., 2012), race (Harris & Lee, 2006), religion (Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2008), and type of membership. For *educational level*, we harmonize and group each country’s particular categorization for education according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) code. We differentiated between three educational levels and created three dummy variables, which range between (a) the reference category of low (ISCED Levels 0 [preprimary education], 1 [primary education or first stage of basic education], and 2 [lower secondary or second stage of basic education]), (b) medium (ISCED 3 [upper secondary education] and 4 [postsecondary nontertiary education]), and (c) high (ISCED 5 [first stage of tertiary education] and 6 [second stage of tertiary education]). *Age* was a continuous variable ranging from 18 to 95 years. *Race* was a categorical variable with the following values: European, Hispanic (Latin American), Arabic, Asian, African, or other. The initial categorization included

Indian as racial group, but it was later recoded into the broader Asian category given that the differentiation between the two groups is not explicit. *Religion* distinguished among Christian (reference), Muslim, Buddhist, atheist, nonreligious believer (also referred to as *spiritual* without adhering to a particular religion), and other denominations. Finally, we controlled for user’s *type of membership*, nonpremium or premium.

*Contextual-level variables.* The first contextual-level independent variable referred to general *attitudes towards same-sex couples*, for which we used data from the 2008 wave of the European Values Study (2011) and the item “Homosexual couples should be able to adopt children.” Because the measure addressed same-sex couples’ parenting rights, it appropriately gauges the degree of tolerance and acceptance of same-sex partnering at a tangible level, which in this case is family formation. The variable was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*agree strongly*) to 5 (*disagree strongly*). We reversed the scale and computed an aggregated mean score at the regional level so that high values represent positive attitudes towards same-sex couples. To facilitate the interpretation of results, this measure was centered around the mean. Second, we used the information about the legal recognition of same-sex couples described in Table 1. We differentiated between no legal recognition (reference category), registered partnerships, and legal marriage.

#### Analytical Procedure

The first step in the analyses was to examine the main sociodemographic characteristics of the gay men and lesbian women in our sample. Using *runmlwin* (Leckie & Charlton, 2013) in Stata, we then engaged in multilevel logistic regression analyses (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Snijders & Bosker, 2012) for the two binary outcomes described above. We estimated random intercept models with two levels that account for the existence of variation in long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs across the 53 regions. This allowed us to take into consideration the hierarchical nature of our data and adjust standard errors for the nonindependence of observations (i.e., individuals) nested within the same context (i.e., region).

We first looked at associations between each outcome variable and gender, previous

union experience, resident children, and control measures (Model 1). Despite formulating hypotheses that broadly referred to both gay men and lesbians, we were nonetheless empirically interested in assessing further similarities and differences between the two groups. To see whether the link between life course characteristics and relationship preferences differs between gay men and lesbians, we subsequently included interactions of the main individual-level predictors by gender (Model 2). This was followed by the introduction of contextual-level variables. The correlation between the macro-level measures of attitudes toward same-sex couples and legal recognition of same-sex partnerships was moderately high ( $r = .66, p < .01$ ). Diagnostic checks using the *collin* option in Stata detected multicollinearity issues if both predictors were included in the same model. To avoid biased results, we estimated the two contextual predictors in separate models (Models 3 and 4). Finally, to examine whether the association between contextual aspects and relationship preferences differed between gay men and lesbians, we ran additional analyses in which we tested cross-level interactions between each macro-level measure and gender (Models 5 and 6). To reduce potential bias due to compositional effects, we also controlled for the regional level composition of the website by including aggregated percentages of key sociodemographic variables (i.e., education, age). All models were fitted using 10,000-iteration Monte Carlo Markov Chain estimations, which lead to more accurate results when multilevel nonlinear analyses are run (Browne, 2009). To compare the overall fit of models, we used the Deviance Information Criterion (DIC) diagnostic; models with lower DIC values were preferred over models with higher values.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive Results*

Descriptive statistics for the individual-level variables used in the analyses of long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs are presented in Table 2. First, we found that gay men had slightly higher long-term dating intentions, whereas lesbians rated monogamy as important to a somewhat higher extent. The correlation between the two outcome variables was significantly positive for both gay men and lesbians. This demonstrated that individuals who

preferred long-term dating indeed also tended to have positive attitudes toward monogamy (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Nevertheless, the modest correlation scores confirmed that the two variables captured distinct concepts of relationship preferences. Moreover, the data in Table 2 indicate that gay men were less likely to have been previously married (74.1% compared to 66.7% for lesbian women). Lesbian women had more formalized relationship experiences, with 29.1% of them being either divorced or separated. Lesbian women were also more likely to have had resident children (cumulated 21.1%), whereas gay men more often declared the absence of any resident children (89.7%). Gay men were slightly more likely to be highly educated (32.2%). The majority of online daters were young (mean age of approximately 35 years) and of European ancestry. Finally, both gay men and lesbians reported being Christian or atheist to the largest extent.

### *Multivariate Results*

The estimated coefficients for Model 1, which tested the association between outcome variables and gender, previous union experience, and resident children while controlling for various other characteristics are reported in Table 3. Our first hypothesis proposed that lesbians have stronger monogamy beliefs than gay men. The results presented in Table 3 provide clear evidence to support this expectation. Lesbian online daters indeed displayed a stronger belief in sexual exclusivity. Although no explicit theoretical expectation was proposed with respect to long-term dating intentions, the results show that lesbians had significantly fewer long-term plans than gay men.

The following set of hypotheses proposed that gay men and lesbians with past union experience (e.g., divorce, separation) would have weaker (Hypothesis 2A) or stronger (Hypothesis 2B) long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs than the never-married. We also anticipated that there would be a negative association between relationship preferences and being widowed (Hypothesis 2C). Model 1 indicated virtually full support for Hypotheses 2A and 2C. We found that separated and widowed individuals were less likely to pursue a long-term relationship or to value monogamy. Model 2 added an interaction between previous union experience and gender, which proved significant

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Individual-Level Variables Used in Regression Analyses

Variables	Full sample		Gay men		Lesbians		Gender difference
<b>Dependent</b>							
Long-term dating intentions (range: 0–1)	74.3		75.3		73.1		***
Monogamy beliefs (range: 0–1)	72.6		70.9		74.6		***
Correlation between dependent variables	.48***		.51***		.44***		
<b>Independent</b>							
Previous union experience							***
Never married	70.7		74.1		66.7		
Divorced	13.7		12.1		15.5		
Separated	11.8		10.3		13.6		
Widowed	3.8		3.6		4.1		
Resident children							***
No children	84.7		89.7		78.9		
One	7.9		4.8		11.4		
Two	4.5		2.9		6.4		
Three or more	3.0		2.6		3.3		
Education level							***
Low	20.0		20.7		19.3		
Medium	49.4		47.2		52.0		
High	30.5		32.2		28.7		
Race							
European	84.4		84.4		84.2		
Hispanic	3.9		4.2		3.5		
Arabic	2.3		2.5		2.0		
Asian	2.4		2.6		2.3		
African	1.9		1.8		2.0		
Other	5.1		4.4		6.0		
Religion							***
Christian	31.8		32.3		31.2		
Muslim	3.4		3.6		3.1		
Buddhist	1.5		1.3		1.7		
Atheist	33.1		32.1		34.3		
Nonreligious believer	23.2		24.0		22.3		
Other	7.1		6.8		7.4		
Type of membership							*
Non-premium	96.8		97.0		96.5		
Premium	3.2		3.0		3.5		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age (range: 18–95)	34.6	12.6	35.1	12.8	34.0	12.3	
Total <i>N</i>	24,598		13,132		11,466		

Note: Table values are based on the database of gay and lesbian members of eDarling dating site, September 2011.

\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .001.

by means of a postestimation Wald test. The results indicated that union experience differences in relationship demands were greater for lesbians than for gay men. In particular, divorced lesbians showed higher long-term dating intentions and stronger monogamy beliefs than both never-married lesbians and those who were currently separated or widowed. Among gay men, on the other hand, the

divorced, separated, and widowed were similar in having less demanding relationship preferences than the never-married. Model 2 finally showed that the previous finding of lesbians being less likely to prefer long-term dating than gay men applied only to the never-married. Contrary to this, divorced lesbians displayed higher long-term dating intentions than divorced gay men.

Table 3. Multilevel Logistic Regression Results Predicting Long-Term Dating Intentions and Monogamy Beliefs, by Individual-Level Characteristics (N = 24,598 From 53 Regions)

Predictor	Long-term dating intentions				Monogamy beliefs			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Fixed effects								
Intercept	0.90***	0.07	0.95***	0.07	0.79***	0.08	0.82***	0.08
Gender: Gay man (ref.)								
Lesbian	-0.08**	0.03	-0.17***	0.04	0.25***	0.03	0.20***	0.04
Previous union experience: Never married								
Divorced	-0.05	0.05	-0.23***	0.07	0.05	0.05	-0.07	0.06
Separated	-0.25***	0.05	-0.31***	0.07	-0.12**	0.05	-0.16*	0.07
Widowed	-0.32***	0.08	-0.23*	0.11	-0.29***	0.08	-0.23*	0.10
Resident children: None (ref.)								
One	-0.07	0.06	-0.18	0.09	-0.03	0.06	-0.17	0.09
Two	-0.27***	0.07	-0.28*	0.11	-0.26***	0.07	-0.19	0.11
Three or more	-0.74***	0.08	-0.91***	0.12	-0.77***	0.08	-0.86***	0.12
Previous union experience × gender interaction								
Divorced × lesbian			0.35***	0.09			0.24**	0.09
Separated × lesbian			0.14	0.10			0.07	0.09
Widowed × lesbian			-0.14	0.15			-0.13	0.15
Resident children × gender interaction								
One × lesbian			0.14	0.12			0.21	0.12
Two × lesbian			-0.005	0.14			-0.12	0.14
Three or more × lesbian			0.30	(0.16)			0.16	(0.16)
Education: Low (ref.)								
Medium	0.28***	0.04	0.27***	0.04	0.41***	0.04	0.41***	0.04
High	0.28***	0.04	0.27***	0.04	0.45***	0.04	0.45***	0.04
Age	0.003*	0.00	0.003*	0.00	-0.004**	0.00	-0.004**	0.00
Race: European (ref.)								
Hispanic	-0.06	0.08	-0.07	0.08	-0.06	0.08	-0.06	0.08
Arabic	-0.41***	0.10	-0.41***	0.10	-0.31**	0.10	-0.31**	0.10
Asian	-0.57***	0.09	-0.57***	0.09	-0.72***	0.09	-0.72***	0.09
African	-0.20	0.10	-0.20	0.11	-0.34***	0.10	-0.35***	0.10
Other	-0.22**	0.07	-0.22***	0.06	-0.35***	0.07	-0.35***	0.06
Religion: Christian (ref.)								
Muslim	-0.30***	0.08	-0.30***	0.09	-0.32***	0.09	-0.32***	0.09
Buddhist	-0.36**	0.12	-0.35**	0.12	-0.27*	0.12	-0.27*	0.12
Atheist	-0.08*	0.04	-0.08	0.04	-0.04	0.04	-0.05	0.04
Non-religious believer	0.13**	0.04	0.13**	0.04	0.18***	0.04	0.18***	0.04
Other	-0.21***	0.06	-0.21***	0.06	-0.29***	0.06	-0.30***	0.06
Membership: Nonpremium (ref.)								
Premium	1.26***	0.13	1.27***	0.13	0.83***	0.11	0.84***	0.11
Random effects								
Regional-level variance	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.16***	0.04	0.16***	0.04
Bayesian DIC	27,365.52		27,351.85		27,415.7		27,411.59	

Note: ref. = reference category; DIC = Deviance Information Criterion.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In the third set of hypotheses we tested whether daters with resident children would have weaker (Hypothesis 3A) or stronger (Hypothesis 3B) long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs compared to those

without resident children. Model 1 provided nearly full support for Hypothesis 3A. Individuals who had at least two coresident children had a significantly lower interest in starting a long-term partnership and weaker beliefs in

monogamy than those without children. The negative association between resident children and relationship preferences became significant and larger when the number of resident children increased. Therefore, the more children present in the household, the less likely gay men and lesbians were to pursue long-term relationships and hold strong monogamy beliefs. The addition of an interaction of resident children  $\times$  gender in Model 2 proved to be nonsignificant, indicating a more robust association between relationship preferences and presence of children across gender categories. We also tested for cumulative effects of union experience and resident children on long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs. Additional analyses (available on request) including interaction terms of previous union experience and presence of resident children showed that the two factors operated independently.

We now turn to the findings related to contextual factors. In Table 4 we report the estimated associations between daters' relationship preferences and attitudes toward same-sex couples as well as legal recognition of same-sex unions. The fourth hypothesis suggested that more positive attitudes toward same-sex couples in a region would be related to stronger long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs among gay men and lesbians. The data entirely supported this expectation. Across all models, the results indicated that the more favorable the attitude toward same-sex couples, the more likely gay men and lesbian daters were to prefer long-term dating and to value monogamy. The inclusion of gender interactions in Model 5 was nonsignificant, suggesting that there were no major differences between gay men and lesbians when it came to the association between relationship preferences and normative climate toward same-sex partnering.

The fifth and final hypothesis proposed that the legal context of same-sex partnerships would also be linked to gay men and lesbians' dating intentions and monogamy beliefs. More precisely, we argued that gay men and lesbian women living in countries that legally recognize same-sex unions would have stronger long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs compared to those living in countries that do not recognize same-sex unions. The data again provided almost unequivocal support for the hypothesis. The results in the left panel of Table 4 demonstrate that the legal recognition

of same-sex unions (as registered partnerships and/or marital unions) was related to a significant increase in the intention to start a long-term relationship. The right panel also indicates a positive association between monogamy beliefs and legal recognition of same-sex marriage. Interactions with gender in Model 6 were nonsignificant, showing that the connection between relationship preferences and formal acceptance toward same-sex unions was also consistent across gender categories.

Finally, to make inferences about which contextual predictor had a more substantial link to gay men and lesbians' relationship preferences, despite the inability of estimating them within the same model (as described previously), we could nonetheless draw on goodness-of-fit comparisons. Whereas for long-term dating intentions the model including legal recognition of same-sex unions displayed a smaller DIC value, for monogamy beliefs a better fitting model was the one that included attitudes toward same-sex couples. Effect sizes (e.g., the effect of legal recognition was more prominent for long-term dating intentions than for monogamy beliefs; the effect of social acceptance for monogamy beliefs was twice as strong as for long-term dating intentions) also led us to conclude that legal recognition of same-sex unions was more strongly associated with daters' long-term plans, whereas social tolerance was a better predictor of gay men and lesbians' monogamy beliefs.

## DISCUSSION

This study expands research on gay men and lesbian women's relationship intentions and values by drawing on unique data from Internet daters' preference profiles. The handful of earlier studies that have examined the partnering behavior of sexual minorities have mainly relied on small-scale convenience samples or focused on a single geographical context. Looking at a real-life dating environment, this study analyses the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay men and lesbians across 53 regions in eight European countries. We also extended existing research by examining not only the influence of individual factors but also contextual determinants. In line with theoretical expectations and previous empirical studies, we found that, compared to gay men, lesbians hold a stronger belief in the importance of monogamy. We also demonstrated that, among

Table 4. Multilevel Logistic Regression Results Predicting Long-Term Dating Intentions and Monogamy Belief, by Contextual Level Characteristics (N = 24,598 From 53 Regions)

Predictor	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Long-term dating intentions								
Fixed effects								
Gender: Gay man (ref.)								
Lesbian	-0.08**	0.03	-0.08**	0.03	-0.08**	0.03	-0.16	0.25
Attitudes	0.20**	0.06			0.29***	0.07		
Legal recognition								
No recognition (ref.)								
Registered partnership			0.80***	0.13			0.76***	0.18
Marriage			0.88***	0.13			0.90***	0.19
Cross-level interactions								
Attitudes × gender					-0.11	0.08		
Legal recognition × gender								
Registered partnership							0.13	0.25
Marriage							-0.01	0.25
Random effects								
Regional-level variance	.01	0.01	.00	0.00	.01	0.01	.00	0.00
Bayesian DIC	27,361.92		27,357.51		27,333.40		27,332.38	
Monogamy beliefs								
Fixed effects								
Gender: Gay man (ref.)								
Lesbian	0.25***	0.03	0.25***	0.03	0.25***	0.03	0.02	0.20
Attitudes	0.43***	0.12			0.48***	0.12		
Legal recognition								
No recognition (ref.)								
Registered partnership			0.36*	0.15			0.17	0.16
Marriage			0.81***	0.17			0.66***	0.19
Cross-level interactions								
Attitudes × gender					-0.03	0.08		
Legal recognition × gender								
Registered partnership							0.25	0.20
Marriage							0.21	0.20
Random effects								
Regional-level variance	.10***	0.03	.08***	0.02	.10***	0.03	.08***	0.02
Bayesian DIC	27,411.31		27,412.84		27,411.68		27,413.36	

Note: Models include controls for all individual-level factors as in previous models as well as regional-level website composition measures. Although coefficients for the individual-level variables are not presented, they are consistent with the results in Table 3. The only significant factors indicating website composition are the aggregated proportion of highly educated online daters within a region (range: 0.11–0.53) and the regional mean age (range: 32.06–41.67). ref. = reference category; DIC = Deviance Information Criterion.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the never-married, lesbians had fewer long-term dating intentions compared to gay men. These results are in line with previous research showing that lesbians are less likely to enter registered partnerships (Andersson et al., 2006) and suggest that, when no marital history or ties

to previous partnerships are present, lesbians perceive fewer benefits and have less interest in long-term commitments than gay men.

Our results further confirm that separation and widowhood among gay men and lesbians are linked with the least demanding partnering

standards (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Carr, 2004). We also unraveled differences between gay and lesbian daters in relation to divorce. Similar to heterosexual divorcees' repartnering patterns, the experience of marital dissolution has different implications for women than for men (Holden & Smock, 1991; Sweeney, 1997). Whereas for divorced gay men marital history is connected with lower long-term dating intentions, divorced lesbians display more stringent partnering demands (Gelissen, 2004) by preferring long-term arrangements and placing more emphasis on sexual exclusivity. This finding could be related to the more economically vulnerable position that divorced women generally hold in the partnership market (e.g., Sweeney, 1997) and a thus greater urgency to reenter a formalized union compared to divorced men.

The presence of children also had a strong association with gay men and lesbians' relationship preferences. Having at least two resident children was connected to both lower interest in long-term dating and weaker monogamy beliefs. This reveals a self-evaluation of parenthood as a constraint on the partnership market, particularly as the number of children increases. The lack of gender differences illustrates that the "child burden" effect (Jansen, Mortelmans, & Snoeckx, 2009, p. 1285) is valid for both gay men and lesbians.

Furthermore, our findings support previous research, which has shown that mating strategies as well as monogamy attitudes are subject to contextual influences (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt, 2005). First, the normative climate toward same-sex couples was highly related to daters' relationship preferences. Residing in a supportive environment was associated with an increase in long-term dating intentions and in the value attached to sexual exclusivity for both gay men and lesbians. The level of formal tolerance toward same-sex couples has an even stronger link to gays and lesbians' long-term plans and monogamy beliefs, particularly in countries where same-sex marriage is legalized (e.g., the Netherlands, Sweden). The official recognition of same-sex partnerships indeed allows a longer horizon for pursuing long-term and monogamous relationships for both sexual minority groups (Lau, 2012). Additional analyses, available on request, also showed that the difference in dating intentions and monogamy beliefs between heterosexual online daters and those with a same-sex orientation is lower in

countries that legalize same-sex partnerships. Therefore, in contexts that legally recognize same-sex unions, gay men and lesbians have partnering values and priorities similar to those of heterosexuals.

The findings of this study have deep implications in support of bringing same-sex partnerships from "outlaw to in-law" (Rydström, 2004, p. 175) in both normative and institutional terms. The prospect of being able to have a socially and legally accepted union, in particular, a marital contract, provides gay men and lesbians the instruments to better define their partner roles (Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, & Carr Steelman, 2010). It also ensures the security to envision a sexually committed relationship in which relationship-specific investments can also be made. Moreover, this study questions the validity of previous hypotheses suggesting that gay men's preference for casual sex with multiple partners is related to their inherent inability to fulfill typical masculine gender roles and the subsequent desire to reassert their masculinity (Rhodes, McCoy, Hergenrath, Omli, & Durant, 2007). Our findings show that in contexts where same-sex marriage is legally recognized, gay men distance themselves from the stereotypical image of being prone to only short-term and sexually uncommitted relationships.

In addition to providing novel insights into gay men and lesbians' dating strategies and monogamy beliefs, this study has several limitations. First, we were constrained by being able to derive individuals' same-sex orientation only from whether they searched for a same-sex partner online instead of relying on self-identified measures of sexual identity. Second, the user profile data we used in the analyses did not include information regarding the exact previous union trajectories of gay and lesbian online daters. Furthermore, we could not make distinctions between types of resident children (e.g., biological, adopted, pertaining to a previous different-sex or same-sex union).

Given the lack of studies using European large-scale comparative data on these rather marginalized groups, the current research represents a significant leap. Despite these limitations, the current study presents innovative results and draws a comprehensive picture of both individual- and contextual-level determinants in the primary phase of the mate selection process of gay and lesbian daters. Future

studies could extend this research by using more refined measures of dating intentions and attitudes toward monogamy that could address more than one dimension of intentional commitment and relationship values (Rhoades et al., 2010). An additional avenue for research would be a longitudinal examination of whether dating preferences and beliefs evolve on the basis of experience on the website. Moreover, other contextual aspects, such as overall religiosity or economic development, could be examined at the regional level. Finally, future work might also adopt a two-sided perspective on gay men and lesbians' online dating by focusing on the actual contacting behavior and matching between members.

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#### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

Table A1. *Regional-Level Mean Values of Attitudes Towards Same-Sex Couples (Uncentered)*

Table A2. *Sample Distribution of Gay Men and Lesbians Across Countries and Regions (Percentages)*

Table A3. *Comparison of Same-Sex Couples Who Met Through Online Dating (N = 50) and Elsewhere (N = 418)*

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