

# Domain-specific variation in women's masculinity preferences

BC Jones

University of Aberdeen

LM DeBruine

University of Aberdeen

AC Little

University of Stirling

DR Feinberg

McMaster University

J Vukovic

University of Aberdeen

While some researchers suggest that attractiveness judgments are best explained by domain-specific preferences for cues of mate quality<sup>1-2</sup>, other researchers suggest that attractiveness judgments are best explained by domain-general preferences for characteristics that are considered attractive in stimuli of any kind, including mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli<sup>3-4</sup>. Since this issue has not previously been investigated for masculinity preferences, we tested if variation in women's preferences for masculine men can be dissociated from variation in domain-general preferences for perceived masculinity in mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli.

## Methods

First, we selected high and low perceived masculinity images from image sets of men's faces, men's bodies, dogs, watches, patterns and cars using women's masculinity ratings of these images. Inter-rater agreement was high for ratings in each image category (all  $\alpha > .85$ ).

Examples of high (left column) and low (right column) masculinity images are shown in the images to the right. Pilot studies confirmed that women could accurately identify the high and low masculinity images in each image category on  $> 98\%$  of trials.

Body and face images were of different men to control for preferences for specific individuals that may be unrelated to masculinity preferences.

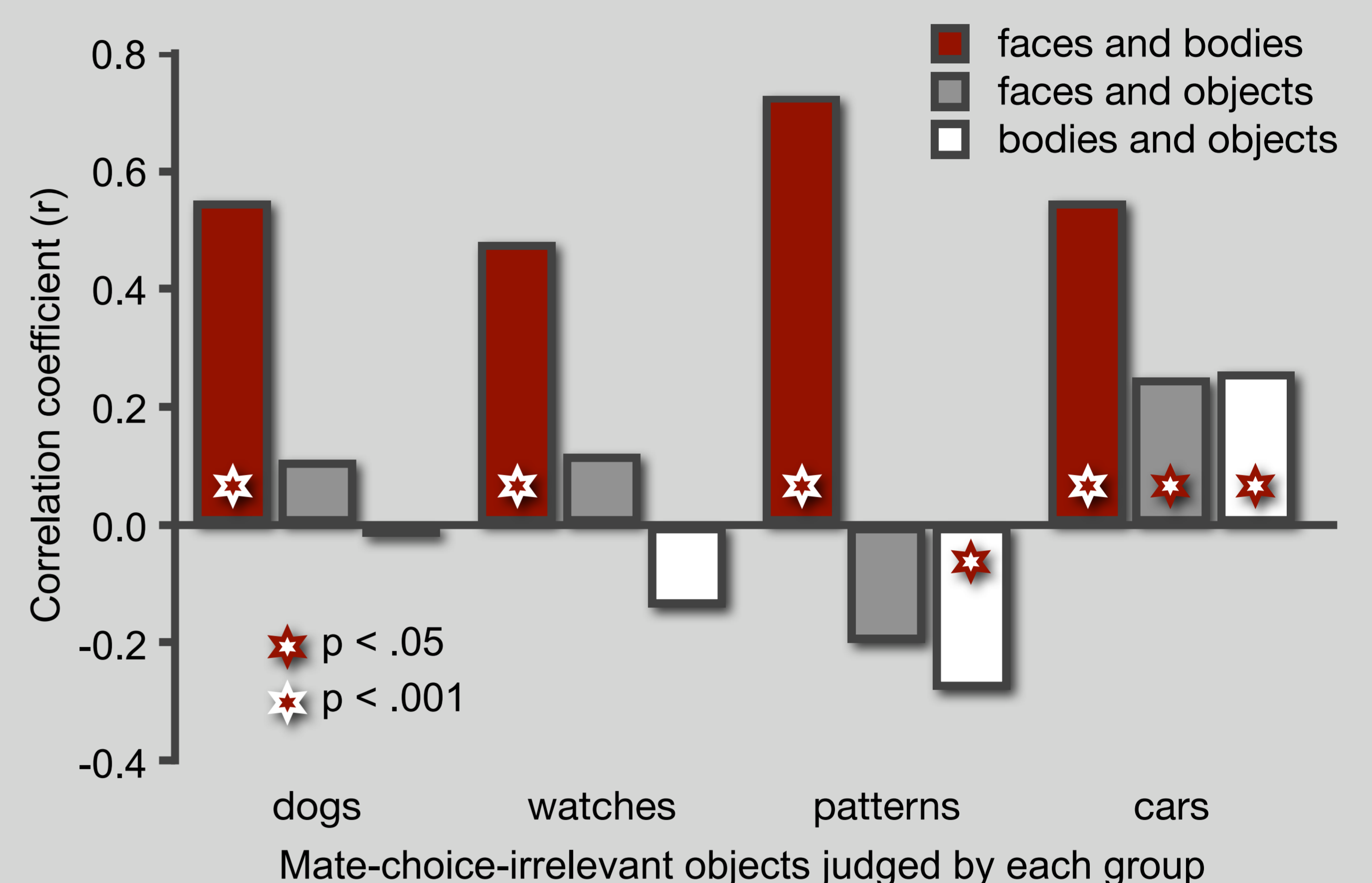
Next, we assessed the strength of women's preferences for masculinity when judging all possible combinations of high versus low masculinity stimuli in each image category.

All women ( $N = 340$ ; Mean age = 22.5 years,  $SD = 6.2$ ) were tested on faces, bodies and one other image category. 84 of the women judged dogs (Study 1), 77 judged watches (Study 2), 91 judged patterns (Study 3) and 88 judged cars (Study 4).



## Results

The figure below shows the simple (i.e. zero order) correlations among masculinity preferences for each image category.



Preferences for masculinity in faces and bodies were positively correlated in each study. Preferences for masculine bodies were negatively correlated with preferences for masculine patterns and preferences for masculine faces and bodies were positively correlated with preferences for masculine cars.

In each study, both the signed and unsigned correlations between preferences for masculinity in men and in mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli were significantly weaker than the corresponding correlations between preferences for masculine faces and bodies (all  $t > 2.17$ ,  $p < .033$ ).

Importantly, the correlations between preferences for masculine faces and bodies remained significant when controlling for masculinity preferences in mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli (all  $r > .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Indeed, controlling for preferences for masculinity in mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli did not significantly weaken the correlations between preferences for masculinity in faces and bodies in any of the studies (all  $p > .18$ ).

The correlated preferences for different markers of men's masculinity observed in these studies indicate systematic variation in women's preferences for masculine men and are consistent with correlated preferences for masculinity in men's voices and faces reported in previous research<sup>5</sup>. Our findings also show that systematic variation in women's preferences for masculine men can be dissociated from variation in masculinity preferences in mate-choice-irrelevant stimuli, suggesting domain-specificity in women's preferences for masculine men. Collectively, these findings support the proposal that variation in women's preferences for masculine men reflects individual differences in preferences for underlying qualities that are signaled by different markers of men's masculinity<sup>1-2,5</sup>.

**References:** [1] Fink & Penton-Voak (2002). *Curr Dir Psychol Sci*, **11**, 154-158. [2] Gangestad & Simpson (2000). *Behav Brain Sci*, **23**, 573-644. [3] Enquist & Arak (2002). *Nature*, **372**, 169-172. [4] Halberstadt & Rhodes (2000). *Psychol Sci*, **11**, 289-293. [5] Feinberg et al. (2008). *Evol Hum Beh*, **29**, 233-241.

To contact the authors email [ben.jones@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ben.jones@abdn.ac.uk) or [faceresearch@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:faceresearch@abdn.ac.uk) or visit <http://www.facelab.org>