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Sexual orientation, competitiveness and income

Buser, T.; Geijtenbeek, L.; Plug, E.

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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jeboSexual orientation, competitiveness and income[☆]Thomas Buser^{a,b,*}, Lydia Geijtenbeek^a, Erik Plug^{a,b,*}^aAmsterdam School of Economics, University of Amsterdam, Roeterstraat 11, Amsterdam 1018WB, The Netherlands^bTinbergen Institute, Gustav Mahlerplein 117, Amsterdam 1082MS, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

Do gays earn less than other men because they are less competitive? Do lesbians earn more than other women because they are more competitive? To answer these questions, we conduct an experiment on a Dutch online survey panel to measure the competitive preferences of gay, lesbian and straight panel members. We find that gay men compete less than straight men, while lesbians compete as much as straight women. Linking our experimental measure of competitiveness to earnings and education data, we find that competitiveness predicts earnings and education levels and that differences in competitive preferences can partially explain the gay earnings penalty but not the lesbian premium.

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1. Introduction

In this paper we investigate sexual orientation differences in taste for competition. In particular, we introduce a short version of the competition experiment of [Niederle and Vesterlund \(2007\)](#) to measure the competitiveness of gay, lesbian and straight panel members in a representative Dutch online survey.¹ We then match this experimental competitiveness measure with realized labour market outcomes and investigate whether sexual orientation differences in competitiveness can explain sexual orientation differences in earnings.

Sexual orientation differences in earnings are well documented but not well understood. While most empirical studies find that gay men earn less than straight men and lesbian women earn more than straight women (see [Klawitter \(2015\)](#) for a recent meta-analysis on the topic), it has proven difficult to distinguish between the typical explanations for differences in earnings, including differences in productivity, differences in tastes, and a discriminating labour market. In the case of taste for competition, however, we have a better chance of doing so. If taste for competition drives the typical income differences for gays and lesbians, we should find that in a competition experiment gays are less competitive than straight men and lesbians are more competitive than straight women.

Our study is also of broader interest. Gender differences in willingness to compete are well established inside the laboratory and widely believed to have important effects outside the laboratory. While many experimental studies show that

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* Correspondence to: PO Box 15867, Amsterdam 1001 NJ, The Netherlands.

E-mail addresses: t.buser@uva.nl (T. Buser), e.j.s.plug@uva.nl (E. Plug).

¹ Throughout the paper, we use gays in reference to homosexual men and lesbians in reference to homosexual women.

women shy away from competition and men compete too much (Croson and Gneezy 2009; Gneezy et al. 2003; Niederle and Vesterlund 2007; 2011), only a few empirical studies have linked gender differences in willingness to compete to gender differences in education or labour markets (Berge et al. 2015; Buser et al. 2014; 2017a; 2017b; Flory et al. 2015b; Reuben et al. 2015; 2017; Zhang 2012). If important economic decisions – including educational and occupational choices – are indeed influenced by someone's willingness to compete, we should find that differences in willingness to compete predict differences in earnings for different groups of workers.

The main results of our competition experiment indicate that gays compete less than straight men, whereas lesbians compete at similar levels as straight women. When we link our experimental measure of competitiveness to real-world outcomes, we find that competitiveness has a positive, sizable and statistically significant correlation with earnings and education levels. Differences in competitiveness account for a significant portion of the gay-straight earnings gap for men, but cannot explain the lesbian earnings premium. Additionally, we find that gender differences in competitiveness, which are comparable to those found in most other experimental studies, are significantly related to the gender gap in earnings.

It thus seems that taste for competition offers at most a partial explanation for the observed sexual orientation differences in earnings. Reviewing the existing literature on the possible origins of the gay penalty and lesbian premium, however, we note that partial explanations are more the rule than the exception. Evidence in favour of labour market discrimination, for instance, is mixed. Some studies link homophobic attitudes to labour market behavior (Black et al. 2002; Hammarstedt et al. 2015; Plug et al. 2014). Other studies send out fake resumes with manipulated indications of sexual orientation (Drydakis, 2009; 2011; Tilcsik, 2011; Weichselbaumer, 2003; 2015). Nearly all these studies find that gays and lesbians face a discriminating labour market, which is consistent with the observed wages of gays, but not of lesbians. Evidence in favour of skill differentials is far from conclusive either. Given the observed earnings differentials, human capital models (Becker 1964; Mincer 1974) predict that gays spend fewer years in school than other men, whereas lesbians are expected to spend more years in school than other women. While most empirical studies, listed in the meta-analysis of Klawitter (2015), indeed report that lesbians are better educated than other women, the common finding that gays are better educated than other men runs counter to what human capital models predict.² Apart from the results in our study, other evidence in favour of (or against) differentials in economic preferences is essentially nonexistent. The complete explanation for why gays earn less than other men and lesbians earn more than other women therefore remains an open question.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces the online experiment. Section 3 briefly describes the experimental and survey data. Section 4 reports the main results on sexual orientation differences in competitiveness and their implications for sexual orientation differences in labour market earnings. Section 5 highlights the implications and conclusions of this study.

2. Sampling and experimental design

We conduct our competitiveness experiment on the LISS panel, a representative Dutch online panel of 5000 households whose members respond to monthly questionnaires. Academic researchers can apply to add questionnaire items or conduct simple experiments. The main advantage of using the LISS panel is the large amount of data already available on the panel members. This allows us to select gay and lesbian participants without informing them that we are interested in their sexual preferences, thus avoiding priming. Furthermore, it allows us to link our experimental results to survey data on income and educational careers.

The questionnaires contain a number of items that help us to identify lesbian and gay panel members. A 2009 questionnaire asked “Are you attracted to men or to women?”, with answers on a five-point scale: 1 only to men; 2 especially to men, but to some extent also to women; 3 as much to men as to women; 4 especially to women, but to some extent also to men; 5 only to women. Our gay sample includes men who answered 1, 2 or 3 and our lesbian sample includes women who answered 5, 4 or 3.³ This question was answered by 4794 panel members. We further use the question “What is your partner's gender?” which was asked yearly from 2008 to 2012. Panel members who at least once stated having a partner of the same sex are added to the gay and lesbian samples whereas those who always stated to be single or with a partner of the other gender are added to the heterosexual sample. This gives us 9268 individuals, 163 of whom are gay and 164 of whom are lesbian (see Table 1).⁴

² In alternative models of household specialization (Becker 1981), expectations about having children (or the absence thereof) can lead to differences in work experience between gay, lesbian and other workers. If gay and lesbian couples are less likely to have children and thus less likely gain from specialization, models of household specialization predict that gays work less and as a consequence accumulate fewer productive skills than other men, and reversely that lesbians work more and accumulate more productive skills than other women. While these explanations certainly capture part of the actual earnings patterns (Black et al. 2003; 2007), formal evidence is scarce. Some studies investigate the division of labour in gay, lesbian and straight couples. In general, these studies find that gay men work less than other men, whereas lesbian women work more than other women. Additional evidence is then taken from earnings regression models, in which several specialization-related covariates are added, including the presence of children, work experience and its square, part-time work (and variations thereof). After including these covariates, the same studies continue to find penalties for gays and premia for lesbians that are sizable and statistically significant (Antecol et al. 2008; Baumle and Poston 2011; Tebaldi and Elmslie 2006).

³ The gay and lesbian samples therefore also include bisexual individuals.

⁴ Of these, 5357 individuals are active panel members at the time of the experiment. An active panel member is defined here as a member who has participated in at least one survey round within the last 3 months.

Table 1
Sample

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
		LISS population	Sample	Participants	Participants <65
Male	Straight	4146	157	124	80
	Gay	163	77	66	46
Female	Straight	4795	172	134	112
	Lesbian	164	84	61	47
Total		9268	490	385	296

Note: column 1 counts all panel members with information on sexual preferences. Column 2 counts all members within our sampling frame. Column 3 counts all members within our sampling frame who actually participated in the experiment and column 4 counts those who participated and are below 65 years of age (the working-age sample used in our main analysis).

Fig. 1. Matrix task.

To obtain a measure of competitiveness, we conducted an incentivised online experiment. We invited all active homosexual panel members to participate, supplemented by a random selection of heterosexual members, stratified by age and gender. Of these 490 candidates, 385 participated in the experiment, 66 of whom are gay and 61 of whom are lesbian.⁵ Because we are interested in labour-market outcomes, in the main empirical analysis we work with the subsample of working-age individuals (see Table 1). The experimental design is similar to the design introduced by Niederle and Vesterlund (2007) which has become the standard in the literature on gender and competitiveness. Participants are paid for their performance in a simple task where they can choose between competitive tournament incentives and a non-competitive piece-rate payment. The task consists of a series of matrices with eight numbers. Out of these eight numbers, participants have to find the two numbers which add up to exactly ten (see Fig. 1). As soon as they click the correct pair of numbers, the next matrix appears. After reading the instructions, participants receive a series of three matrices for practice, with an option of receiving three more.⁶

The experiment consists of two incentivised rounds of three minutes each. In round 1, participants are paid a piece-rate of 40 euro cents per solved matrix. Their score in this round serves as a baseline performance measure. In round 2, participants can choose how they would like to be paid. In particular, they can choose between a 40 cent piece-rate and entering a winner-takes-all tournament. If they choose the tournament, their performance is compared with the performance of one other randomly chosen participant.⁷ If they perform better, they earn 100 cents per solved matrix, otherwise they receive nothing.⁸ The choice of payment scheme serves as our measure of competitiveness, with competitiveness equal to 0 for people who choose the piece rate scheme and 1 for those who choose the relative scheme.

The experiment is followed by a brief questionnaire which assesses participants' confidence in their own ability for the task and their willingness to take risk, two factors which have been shown to influence the choice of payment scheme (Niederle and Vesterlund 2011). We measure confidence through the question "What do you think is the probability that you solved more matrices than another randomly chosen opponent?". The answer is on a scale from 0 ("the lowest") to 10 ("the highest"). We measure willingness to take risks through the question "Tell us to what extent, in general, you are willing to take risks" (with answers on a scale from 0 ("not at all willing") to 10 ("fully willing")). This question is similar

⁵ Because only 79 percent of the individuals in our sampling frame actually participate in the experiment, selective non-response is a potential concern. That is, the decision of participating in the experiment could be related to the outcome variables. This is not the case. Neither income nor education level differ between those who participate and those who do not (to test this we ran t-tests for log income and chi-squared tests for education level for the sample as a whole as well as for each of the four subgroups). Also, the decision to participate is not significantly related to gender and sexual orientation.

⁶ See the Online Appendix for details on the online version of the competition experiment, including instructions and screen descriptions.

⁷ This random opponent is picked amongst all other participants regardless of their choice.

⁸ In case of a tie, each participant receives 40 cents. The earnings are transferred to participants' bank accounts together with their monthly LISS participation fee.

Table 2
Descriptives.

	(1) Straight males	(2) Gays	(3) Lesbians	(4) Straight females	(5) P (1) vs. (2)	(6) P (3) vs. (4)	(7) P (1) vs. (4)
Experimental variables:							
Round 1 performance (age < 65)	9.045 (4.261)	9.217 (4.195)	7.702 (3.906)	8.589 (4.423)	0.823	0.235	0.462
Competitiveness (age < 65)	0.371 (0.486)	0.239 (0.431)	0.191 (0.398)	0.232 (0.424)	0.124	0.575	0.032
Risk (age < 65)	5.202 (1.902)	5.522 (1.918)	4.766 (2.442)	4.768 (1.755)	0.358	0.996	0.095
Confidence (age < 65)	5.337 (1.827)	4.978 (1.556)	4.106 (2.046)	4.393 (1.694)	0.258	0.362	0.000
Background variables (LISS population):							
Age (all ages)	52.9 (16.9)	53.1 (16.7)	50.7 (16.4)	50.2 (16.2)	0.858	0.710	0.000
Log income (age < 65)	7.394 (0.779)	7.359 (0.748)	7.041 (0.774)	6.797 (0.921)	0.659	0.005	0.000
Education level (percentages, age < 65):							
basisonderwijs (primary)	5.90	3.48	4.51	5.99			
vmbo (lower track-secondary)	18.74	20.87	17.29	21.70			
havo/vwo (higher-track secondary)	10.52	6.96	7.52	11.33			
mbo (vocational training)	28.61	21.74	28.57	27.69			
hbo (applied-science university)	23.69	29.57	29.32	24.08			
wo (university)	12.54	17.39	12.78	9.20			
Education level (average, age < 65)	3.831	4.052	3.992	3.698	0.108	0.019	0.000

P-values are from *t*-tests. Income is defined as the average income over all months for which income data is available on the LISS panel for a given individual. For average education level we assign a number from 1 (primary) to 6 (university) to each individual.

to the risk question used by [Dohmen et al. \(2011\)](#) which has been shown to predict both incentivized choices in a lottery task and risk taking across a number of contexts, including holding stocks, being self-employed, participating in sports, and smoking. Before the start of the first round, participants had a chance to practice the task. The data was collected in March 2014. Participants earned 8.82 Euros on average.

3. Data

[Table 2](#) describes some of the basic characteristics of our target sample – individuals of working age. The data shows the standard pattern from the experimental gender difference literature. While 37 percent of straight men choose the tournament scheme, only 23 percent of straight women do, even though their first-round performance is statistically indistinguishable. Women also rate themselves as significantly less risk-seeking and are significantly less confident about their performance in the task. Gays and lesbians enter the tournament at similar rates as straight women, 24 and 19 percent respectively. Gays do not differ from straight men in their risk aversion and confidence, nor do lesbians differ from straight women along these characteristics.

To directly test whether our experimental measure of competitiveness can explain labour market differences between heterosexual and homosexual individuals, we use data on income and education levels contained in the LISS data. Income and education are part of the background data questions which are asked every time an individual answers a questionnaire. Our income variable is the average net income over all these observations for each individual. Education is defined in six categories according to the definition of CBS (Statistics Netherlands). We use the most recent observation. With respect to income, we find that the income (measured in logs) of straight women is significantly lower than that of straight men. Lesbians earn significantly more on average than straight women, whereas there is no significant difference between gay and straight men. With respect to education, we find that the straight men in our sample are on average higher educated than straight women, and that gays and lesbians are on average higher educated than straight men and women.

4. Results

[Table 3](#) contains the results on sexual orientation differences in competitiveness. Here we regress a binary variable indicating whether an individual chose the competitive payment scheme on sexual orientation dummies, controlling for first-round scores. We show results for the whole sample as well as the subsample of individuals below 65 years of age, which will serve as the empirical basis for our subsequent analysis on the link between competitiveness and salaries. We find that working-age gays are indeed significantly less competitive than straight men. In the working-age sample, gays are around 14 percentage points less likely to choose the competitive payment scheme conditional on performance. However, there is virtually no difference between the competitiveness of lesbians and straight women. We also replicate the standard finding that straight women are less competitive than straight men, a difference of 12 percentage points for working-age individuals.

Table 3
Estimating the relationship between competitiveness and sexual orientation.

	(1) All	(2) <65	(3) All	(4) <65
Gay	-0.072 (0.062)	-0.138* (0.075)	-0.073 (0.058)	-0.144** (0.069)
Lesbian	-0.075 (0.064)	-0.130* (0.076)	-0.039 (0.063)	-0.079 (0.072)
Straight female	-0.086* (0.050)	-0.122** (0.061)	-0.040 (0.048)	-0.068 (0.057)
Score round 1	0.035*** (0.005)	0.037*** (0.005)	0.022*** (0.005)	0.022*** (0.006)
Risk			0.059*** (0.010)	0.066*** (0.012)
Confidence			0.032** (0.012)	0.034** (0.014)
Lesbian-Straight f.	0.011 (0.061)	-0.008 (0.069)	0.001 (0.058)	-0.011 (0.065)
	385	294	385	294

Coefficients are from OLS regressions with a binary indicator for choosing the competitive remuneration as the dependent variable. In all regressions, the reference group are straight males. Robust standard errors in parentheses; *, ** and *** denote significance at 10, 5 and 1 percent, respectively.

Controlling for confidence and risk attitudes in column 4 explains about half of the straight gender difference in competitiveness but not the gay effect. These results indicate that individual differences in competitiveness indeed have the potential to explain differences in labour market outcomes between gay and straight men, but not between lesbian and straight women. We should note that when we use the whole sample (and include those older than 65), as we do in columns 1 and 3, the differences in competitiveness get somewhat weaker. This result is comparable to the result reported by [Flory et al. \(2015a\)](#). They find that gender differences in competitiveness are weaker in older samples.⁹

To directly test whether individual differences in competitiveness can explain differences in labour market outcomes, we regress log income on sexual orientation dummies and our experimental indicator of competitiveness. The results are presented in [Table 4](#). All regressions control for a quadratic polynomial of age. The results reported in column 1, using the whole LISS sample, confirm the expected income differences: gays earn less than straight men and lesbians earn more than straight women, although this effect is significant only for the lesbians. Gays and lesbians in our sample are substantially more likely to be highly educated (see [Table 2](#)). In column 6, we restrict the sample to individuals who attended college. Conditional on having attended college, we find that gays earn substantially and significantly less than straight men. We also find that the lesbian earnings advantage shrinks, which suggests that large part of the lesbian earnings advantage is due to an educational advantage. We also find a gap of 57 percent (46 percent for college-educated individuals) between straight men and straight women.¹⁰

Columns 2 and 7 repeat this exercise using only individuals from the experimental sample for whom we have a measure of their competitiveness.¹¹ In columns 3 and 8, we then additionally control for performance in the experiment and in columns 4 and 9 we add competitiveness (i.e. a dummy for choosing the tournament) to the regression. Competitiveness strongly and significantly predicts income: conditional on performance, those who choose to compete in the experiment earn 17 percent more than those who choose the piece-rate (20 percent for college-educated individuals). Controlling for confidence and risk attitudes in column 5 actually increases the bonus for competitiveness to 19 percent (25 percent). Controlling for competitiveness reduces the gay income disadvantage which shrinks by 39 percent (33 percent). As expected, controlling for competitiveness does not affect the estimated income difference between lesbians and straight women.

To further explore the relationship between education, sexual orientation and competitiveness, we run ordered probit regressions of education level on sexual preference dummies and our measure of competitiveness. [Table 5](#) contains these ordered probit estimates. As before, the results reported in columns 1 and 2, obtained with the full and experimental sample, confirm the typical educational differences that have been observed elsewhere: gays are on average higher educated than straight men and lesbians are higher educated than straight women. In column 4, we add a competitiveness dummy to the regression. Competitiveness significantly and positively predicts the education level (see also [Buser et al., 2017b](#)). Controlling for competitiveness significantly increases the gay education advantage and explains part of the education disadvantage of

⁹ We have also estimated the same regression models on a sample of individuals below 55 and found sexual orientation differences in competitiveness that are more pronounced. In the specification without the risk and confidence covariates, the parameter estimates (with standard errors in parentheses) are -0.194 (0.086), -0.197 (0.086) and -0.157 (0.078) for gays, lesbians and straight females, respectively.

¹⁰ The reason why this gap is larger than typically reported in the literature is likely due to the high incidence of part-time work among Dutch women ([Bosch and Van der Klaauw 2012](#)).

¹¹ Restricting the experimental sample to university graduates leaves us with a fairly small sample of 34 straight males, 26 gays, 21 lesbians and 39 straight women.

Table 4
Estimating the relationship between income, sexual orientation, and competitiveness (working age individuals).

	LISS sample	Experimental sample				P-val.	P-val.	LISS sample	Experimental sample				P-val.	P-val.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(3)<(4)	(3)<(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(8)<(9)	(8)<(10)
Gay	-0.061 (0.054)	-0.065 (0.091)	-0.070 (0.087)	-0.043 (0.087)	-0.021 (0.090)	0.070	0.040	-0.177** (0.089)	-0.211 (0.136)	-0.199 (0.136)	-0.133 (0.138)	-0.170 (0.136)	0.044	0.316
Lesbian	-0.368*** (0.060)	-0.483*** (0.111)	-0.454*** (0.113)	-0.428*** (0.112)	-0.410*** (0.117)	0.096	0.080	-0.405*** (0.088)	-0.625*** (0.181)	-0.601*** (0.189)	-0.525*** (0.185)	-0.571*** (0.184)	0.068	0.340
Straight female	-0.566*** (0.019)	-0.683*** (0.100)	-0.675*** (0.096)	-0.655*** (0.096)	-0.641*** (0.090)	0.094	0.094	-0.455*** (0.026)	-0.394*** (0.118)	-0.384*** (0.118)	-0.324*** (0.114)	-0.360*** (0.113)	0.058	0.320
Competitiveness				0.170* (0.088)	0.191* (0.099)						0.201* (0.111)	0.249* (0.130)		
Confidence					0.022 (0.032)							-0.090*** (0.028)		
Risk					-0.024 (0.026)							0.028 (0.031)		
Age controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Performance controls			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		
College educated only								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Lesb. - straight f.	0.198*** (0.061)	0.200 (0.134)	0.221 (0.137)	0.229* (0.137)	0.228* (0.137)	P(3)>(4) 0.318	P(3)>(5) 0.273	0.050 (0.090)	-0.231 (0.188)	-0.216 (0.194)	-0.201 (0.195)	-0.210 (0.192)	P(8)>(9) 0.277	P(8)>(10) 0.454
N	6122	267	267	267	267			2288	120	120	120	120		

Coefficients are from OLS regressions with the logarithm of income as the dependent variable. In all regressions, the reference group are straight males. The sample consists of all individuals younger than 65 years. Income is defined as the average net income over all months for which income data is available on the LISS panel for a given individual. The age controls consist of age and age squared in years. Performance is the amount of points scored in round 1 of the experiment. Regressions using the experimental sample also control for performance in round 1 of the experiment. Robust standard errors in parentheses; *, ** and *** denote significance at 10, 5 and 1 percent, respectively. *P*-values for differences in coefficients are from one-sided tests using Stata's *suest* command.

Table 5

Estimating the relationship between educational attainment, sexual orientation, and competitiveness (working age individuals)

	LISS sample	Experimental sample			P-val.	P-val.	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(3)<(4)	(3)<(5)
Gay	0.168 (0.106)	0.396** (0.198)	0.395** (0.199)	0.454** (0.197)	0.480** (0.199)	0.061	0.053
Lesbian	0.124 (0.092)	0.080 (0.184)	0.155 (0.189)	0.205 (0.188)	0.267 (0.199)	0.091	0.067
Straight female	-0.101*** (0.026)	-0.123 (0.147)	-0.099 (0.146)	-0.053 (0.147)	-0.001 (0.153)	0.069	0.033
Competitiveness				0.396** (0.157)	0.350** (0.169)		
Confidence					0.070 (0.044)		
Risk					-0.009 (0.033)		
Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Performance			✓	✓	✓		
Lesbian-Straight f.	0.225** (0.092)	0.203 (0.176)	0.254 (0.181)	0.257 (0.182)	0.267 (0.184)	P(2)>(3) 0.545	P(2)>(4) 0.538
N	6985	294	294	294	294		

Coefficients are from ordered probit regressions with education level as the dependent variable. In all regressions, the reference group are straight males. The sample consists of all individuals younger than 65 years. Education level is split into six levels according to the definition of CBS (Statistics Netherlands). The age controls consist of age and age squared in years. Performance is the amount of points scored in round 1 of the experiment. Regressions using the experimental sample also control for performance in round 1 of the experiment. Robust standard errors in parentheses; *, ** and *** denote significance at 10, 5 and 1 percent, respectively. *P*-values for differences in coefficients are from one-sided tests using Stata's *suest* command.

straight women vis-a-vis straight men but does not significantly affect the lesbian education advantage relative to straight women. These education results are similar to the income results we have discussed earlier. In particular, controlling for competitiveness significantly alters both the education advantage and the earnings disadvantage of gay men. In contrast, controlling for competitiveness has little impact on the education and earnings advantage of lesbian women.

Our results on competitiveness, income and education are correlational. One possible interpretation is that competitiveness is fixed at an early age and affects income via an effect on education. This fits with the results of Buser et al. (2014) and Buser et al. (2017a), who find that competitive students pick more challenging and prestigious study tracks in the Netherlands and Switzerland respectively. In both cases competitiveness is measured before the educational decisions are taken. Alternatively, participating in higher education might enhance both people's earnings potential and their willingness to compete.

5. Conclusions

In this study we have proposed a new explanation of the systematic relationship between sexual orientation and earnings, namely taste for competition. If gays are less attracted to competition than straight men and lesbians are more attracted to competition than straight women, we argue that such sexual orientation differences in competitiveness could lead to a labour market in which there is a gay wage penalty for men and a lesbian wage premium for women. The evidence from our online experiment on competitiveness, which we link to information about subjects' sexual orientation and earnings, suggests that gays are indeed less competitive than straight men but lesbians are as competitive as straight women. This means that preferences for competition cannot be the main mechanism that explains the link between sexual orientation and earnings but nevertheless may play a role for the earnings difference between straight and gay men.

We also contribute to the literature on gender differences in competitiveness. First, we show that the gender difference in competitive preferences found in student samples carries over to a representative sample of the Dutch population; that is, men are much more competitive than women. Second, we show that the measure of competitiveness which is most commonly used in the lab is a significant predictor of earnings and education levels.

A weakness of our paper is the relatively small sample size which results in some imprecisely estimated differences. It is also important to keep in mind that competitiveness might be endogenous with respect to earnings rather than being a fixed trait. We mean here that working in competitive (and presumably well-paid) positions might increase people's willingness to compete. The same might be true of higher education. In analogy with the experimental literature on gender and competitiveness, our conclusion is that individual preferences for competition have the potential to explain career differences between straight men and straight women, between straight men and gay men, but not between straight women and lesbian women.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at [10.1016/j.jebo.2018.03.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.03.017)

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