



Original Article

Is sociopolitical egalitarianism related to bodily and facial formidability in men?

Michael E. Price^{a,*}, Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington^b, James Sidanius^c, Nicholas Pound^a^a Psychology Division, Gaskell Building, Department of Life Sciences, College of Health and Life Sciences, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, United Kingdom^b Department of Psychological & Behavioural Science, London School of Economics & Political Science, Queen's House, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 2AE, United Kingdom^c Department of Psychology, Harvard University, William James Hall, 33 Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, United States

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ABSTRACT

Social bargaining models predict that men should calibrate their egalitarian attitudes to their formidability and/or attractiveness. A simple social bargaining model predicts a direct negative association between formidability/attractiveness and egalitarianism, whereas a more complex model predicts an association moderated by wealth. Our study tested both models with 171 men, using two sociopolitical egalitarianism measures: social dominance orientation and support for redistribution. Predictors included bodily formidability and attractiveness and four facial measures (attractiveness, dominance, masculinity, and width-to-height ratio). We also controlled for time spent lifting weights, and experimentally manipulated self-perceived formidability in an attempt to influence egalitarianism. Both the simple and complex social bargaining models received partial support: sociopolitical egalitarianism was negatively related to bodily formidability, but unrelated to other measures of bodily/facial formidability/attractiveness; and a formidability-wealth interaction did predict variance in support for redistribution, but the nature of this interaction differed somewhat from that reported in previous research. Results of the experimental manipulation suggested that egalitarianism is unaffected by self-perceived formidability in the immediate short-term. In sum, results provided some support for both the simple and complex social bargaining models, but suggested that further research is needed to explain why male formidability/attractiveness and egalitarianism are so often negatively related.

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Over human evolutionary history, individuals who were relatively physically formidable and/or attractive would also have been relatively more able to bestow benefits and/or impose harm on others, and consequently would have had increased bargaining power in social interactions (Lukaszewski, 2013; Sell, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2009b). Formidability increases an individual's bargaining power by enhancing abilities both to threaten violence and to offer protection and work effort (Price, Dunn, Hopkins, & Kang, 2012; Sell et al., 2009b; Snyder et al., 2011). Moreover, attractive people have higher bargaining power because they are preferred as social associates (Langlois et al., 2000), a manifestation of the attractiveness "halo effect" which leads to the attribution of a range of positive traits to attractive individuals (Dion, 2002; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). In part, this may be because traits perceived as attractive are signals of underlying characteristics such as health, developmental stability, and fertility (Grammer, Fink, Møller, & Thornhill, 2003; Nedelec & Beaver, 2014; Roney, 2009).

Due to their increased bargaining power, formidable/attractive individuals would have been relatively more likely to prevail in social competitions, and thus to benefit from the inequities in status and resource

distribution that would have been the outcome of such competitions. Individuals who were more formidable and/or attractive would thus have had more opportunity to benefit from social norms promoting inequality rather than those promoting equality. By this reasoning, a tendency for people who are more formidable and/or attractive to exhibit a reduced tendency to support egalitarian norms may be an element of evolved human psychology (Price, Brown, Dukes, & Kang, 2015; Price, Kang, Dunn, & Hopkins, 2011). We'll refer to this proposition as the 'simple social bargaining' model of egalitarianism ('simple' because as discussed below, a more complex social bargaining model of egalitarianism has also been proposed).

1.1. Evidence consistent with the simple social bargaining model

Several studies support the hypothesis that formidability and/or attractiveness are negatively related to egalitarianism, particularly in males. Sell et al. (2009b) reported that stronger men perceive themselves to be more entitled to special treatment, while Price et al. (2011) found that male bodily attractiveness and formidability correlated negatively with egalitarianism on several measures, including the measure of social dominance orientation devised by Pratto, Sidanius and colleagues (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius &

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: michael.price@brunel.ac.uk (M.E. Price).

Pratto, 1999). Price et al. (2015) also found that men with more attractive bodies are less egalitarian on a variety of behavioural and psychological measures, but found no relationship between bodily formidability and these egalitarianism measures. Several experimental economic studies (Sanchez-Pages & Turiegano, 2010; Shinada & Yamagishi, 2014; Takahashi, Yamagishi, Tanida, Kiyonari, & Kanazawa, 2006; Zaatari & Trivers, 2007) have demonstrated that relatively inegalitarian resource distribution decisions are made by men who possess traits that are judged as more attractive by others, and/or who possess more symmetrical faces and bodies (symmetry being a putative indicator of attractiveness, health, and underlying genotypic quality [Møller, 2006]). Finally, Holtzman, Augustine, and Senne (2011) reported that bodily/facial symmetry relates negatively to prosocial personality traits, including some related to egalitarianism (e.g., fairness, empathy), in both men and women.

Three points should be noted about the studies cited in the preceding paragraph. First, although not all have found significant relationships between all attractiveness/formidability measures and all egalitarianism measures (e.g. as noted with regard to Price et al., 2015), when significant relationships have been observed, they have always been negative. Second, the results reported above refer to measures of formidability and attractiveness that were either objectively measured (e.g., bicep circumference, physical strength, fluctuating asymmetry) or based on others' perceptions (e.g., faces rated for attractiveness), as opposed to self-assessments. This emphasis on objective and other-perceived measures is important because self-assessments of physical characteristics are not necessarily reliable reflections of reality as perceived by others. This appears to be particularly true with regard to women's ratings of their own attractiveness, which tend to correlate only weakly with anthropometric measures and others' ratings of their attractiveness (Brewer, Archer, & Manning, 2007; Paunonen, 2003; Price et al., 2012). Third, not all of these studies were designed to test for relationships between egalitarianism and objectively measured or other-perceived attractiveness/formidability in women (as well as men). However, of those that were, only one has found such relationships (Holtzman et al., 2011). All other studies have reported these relationships in men only (Price et al., 2011; Price et al., 2015; Sell et al., 2009b; Shinada & Yamagishi, 2014; Takahashi et al., 2006; Zaatari & Trivers, 2007). Two studies have reported negative relationships between egalitarianism and self-perceived attractiveness in women (Price et al., 2011; Sell et al., 2009b), and an additional study (not cited above) reported positive correlations between self-perceived attractiveness and support for inequality in both women and men (Belmi & Neale, 2014). However, as just noted, self-perceived attractiveness does not appear to reliably reflect attractiveness as perceived by others, and thus seems like a relatively unreliable measure of social bargaining power (although it may be a useful measure of personality traits such as narcissism [Bleske-Rechek, Remiker, & Baker, 2008] or confidence).

The absence of a relationship between formidability and egalitarianism in females is not surprising, since ancestrally, upper body strength was probably much less important to women than to men as a determinant of competitive ability (Lassek & Gaulin, 2009). However, the lack of good evidence for an attractiveness-egalitarianism relationship in females is more unexpected, as attractiveness is assumed to be an important aspect of female social bargaining power (Sell et al., 2009b), perhaps especially among women of reproductive age. A potential explanation for this finding may be rooted in theories of parental investment and sexual selection (Trivers, 1972), which suggest that success in ancestral status/resource competition was a higher-stakes game in terms of reproductive payoffs for males than for females. Ancestral men may thus have had greater incentives to base their attitudes about resource distribution not just on their formidability, but also on other aspects of their intrasexual competitive ability, including their attractiveness (Price et al., 2015). Females, on the other hand, with less to gain from status/resource competition, are subject to less selective pressure to bring their resource-related attitudes in line with their social bargaining power. If the

greater attractiveness-egalitarianism correlation in men were a reflection of higher-stakes reproductive competition among males, this may also help explain why this correlation seems highest among younger men (Shinada & Yamagishi, 2014), of the age range associated with intensified male mating competition (Wilson & Daly, 1985).

1.2. Alternatives to the simple social bargaining model of egalitarianism

The studies reviewed above provide evidence that is consistent with the simple social bargaining model, which proposes a direct negative association between formidability/attractiveness and egalitarianism, especially in men. However a more complex version of the social bargaining model has been presented by Petersen and colleagues (Petersen, Sznycer, Sell, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2013), who propose that the effect of formidability on 'support for redistribution' (i.e., the belief that the government should redistribute wealth from richer to poorer) in males is moderated by income. They report that in three samples of male participants (university students from Argentina and the USA, and a nationally representative Danish sample), a significant interaction effect was observed between upper body strength and wealth whereby strength and support for redistribution were negatively related in wealthier men but positively related in less-wealthy men. These results were interpreted as evidence that support for redistribution reflects male self-interest, as shaped by their contemporary resource stock: wealthier men are in a better position to defend their wealth if they are stronger, whereas less-wealthy men are in a better position to demand redistribution if they are stronger. The finding that strength and egalitarianism are positively related in poorer men is especially interesting as it represents an exception to the rule, noted above, that whenever relationships between egalitarianism and formidability/attractiveness have been found, they have been negative.

It could also be the case that both the simple and complex social bargaining models of egalitarianism are mistaken in their suggestion that egalitarianism levels are caused by formidability/attractiveness. The studies cited above have demonstrated correlations between formidability/attractiveness and egalitarianism, but formidability/attractiveness could actually be caused by egalitarianism, if less-egalitarian men were more motivated to increase their own formidability/attractiveness, for example by engaging in more resistance training activities such as weightlifting (Price et al., 2015). (Motivation to life weights could increase both formidability and attractiveness in males, as male muscularity is perceived as attractive if not too extreme [Frederick & Haselton, 2007]). Alternatively, egalitarianism and formidability/attractiveness could both be influenced by some third variable (e.g., narcissism or dominance striving; for discussion see below) associated with both reduced egalitarianism and greater motivation to build one's muscles. Consistent with the notion that men who strive for muscularity tend to be less egalitarian, Swami et al. (2013) report that among UK men, social dominance orientation is correlated with higher scores on a "drive for muscularity" scale (McCreary, 2007).

1.3. The current study

Our study aimed to make progress on several issues described above concerning egalitarianism's relationships with formidability and attractiveness. Given the weak theoretical and empirical case for the existence of these relationships among females, we focused our research efforts on males. Our primary goals were to test for the two types of relationships between formidability/attractiveness and egalitarianism described above: a simple negative association, and a more complex relationship moderated by wealth. We also focused on a particular form of egalitarianism, 'sociopolitical egalitarianism'—that is, attitudes about how status and resources ought to be distributed among different groups within society—as this kind of egalitarianism seems relevant to real-world human affairs in an especially concrete way. For our first

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