



The role of intra-sexual competition in attitudes towards immigrants

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ABSTRACT

We proposed the hypothesis that immigration attitudes (IA) could be partly explained by intra-sexual competition (ISC), as immigration can increase mate competition, negatively affecting mate access for local individuals with low mate value. To test this, we presented participants with masculinized/feminized images of males and females. Each image was paired with a background description. Participants reported whether the depicted person should be permitted residence and whether participants would help the person integrate. We also measured participants' mate value. Both men and women were more negative towards male than female immigrants. As expected, participants with lower mate value reported more negative IA, providing tentative support for the hypothesized association between ISC and IA. Because the manipulation of masculinity/femininity was only effective for female images, it remains unclear whether attractive (vs. less attractive) male immigrants elicit more negative IA.

When two or more members of the same sex compete for the same reproductively relevant resources, intra-sexual competition (ISC) occurs (Darwin, 2009). Males compete against other males in the search for desirable females, whereas females compete against other females for desirable males (Darwin, 2009). Because males' minimum required parental investment is lower than that of females (Trivers, 1972), females are choosier than males when selecting mates. This means that males with lower mate value (i.e., desirability as a partner) are at risk of ending up with no partner at all. On the other hand, most females have access to their desired number—but not necessarily the desired quality—of partners (Rosvall, 2011), making female ISC less intense than male ISC.

In the current study, we present and test the hypothesis that ISC contributes to negative immigrant attitudes (IA). This hypothesis is based on the premise that immigration can influence the individually perceived access to desired mates, by both altering the sex-ratio (i.e., the relative number of females and males in a mating pool) and the attractiveness of a given individual relative to that of others. If, for example, more males than females enter into the local mating pool, this will decrease each individual male's chances of finding a desirable female partner, and increase male ISC (e.g., Kruger, Fitzgerald, & Peterson, 2010; Pedersen, 1991). Also, if the immigrants are considered to be relatively attractive, this might decrease the relative mate value of local individuals (e.g., Bateson & Healy, 2005). ISC could also increase if norms differently regulate mating behavior for immigrating males

and females. Additionally, highly attractive males tend to adopt short-term sexual strategies, characterized by short, frequent sexual relationships, whereas females of high mate value tend to adopt long term sexual strategies (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Schmitt, 2005). Thus, even in the case of a balanced sex ratio in the local mating pool, the influx of immigrants can affect male and female ISC differently (i.e., increase male ISC but not affect female ISC).

In line with the outlined theory, ISC includes competitor derogation (Fisher & Cox, 2010). Several studies show that males display more negative IA compared to females (Ekehammar, Akrami, & Araya, 2003; Qualls, Cox, & Schehr, 1992). Also in Finland, males tend to display more negative IA and the sex difference is particularly apparent among younger individuals (Jaakkola, 2009), and especially immigrant men are discriminated (Öblom & Antfolk, 2017). Interestingly, also less direct evidence supports the notion of ISC being part of especially males' negative IA. The immigration debate in media is highly sexualized (Yardley, 2016) and several anti-immigrant vigilant groups, such as Soldiers of Odin in Finland, state as their aim the protection women and children from immigrant males (Rosendahl & Forsell, 2016).

1. The role of mate value

Traits influencing individual mate value include physical attractiveness, resource acquisition, youth, status, health, and social popularity (Buss, 1989; Edlund & Sagarin, 2014). Females generally have a

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relative preference for characteristics signaling capacity and willingness to invest in potential offspring, whereas males tend to put relatively high value on physical attractiveness (Barber, 1995; Buss, 1989). Males are generally drawn to feminine facial features and youth, whereas females often prefer masculine faces with a marked jawline, and prominent brow ridges, and prominent cheekbones (Rhodes, 2006). Johnston, Hagel, Franklin, Fink, and Grammer (2001) tested female preferences using manipulated images of faces, ranging from highly masculinized to highly feminized. The study indicated that females prefer *slightly* masculinized faces—perhaps as the result of a tradeoff between benefits (i.e., healthy offspring) and costs (i.e., low investment in offspring) of mating with very masculine males (DeBruine, Jones, Crawford, Welling, & Little, 2010; Gangestad, Garver-Apgar, Simpson, & Cousins, 2007). Females report more jealousy in response to imagined feminine (vs. masculine) females flirting with their partners (O'Connor & Feinberg, 2012). This suggests that females are expected to perceive feminine (vs. masculine) women as a bigger threat on the mating market. In contrast, males would perceive masculine (vs. feminine) men as a bigger threat.

2. The current study

The hypothesis tested in the current study was that increased ISC can—at least partly—explain negative IA. To test this hypothesis, we presented participants with masculinized/feminized images of males and females. Each image was paired with a background description. Participants reported whether the depicted person should be permitted residence and whether participants would help the person integrate. We also measured participants' mate value. We expected that men with lower (vs. higher) mate value would display more negative IA, and attractive/masculine male immigrants would be seen as increasing male ICS more than unattractive/feminine male (or female) immigrants would. Consequently, local males would display more negative IA towards attractive/masculine immigrants. Conversely, females with lower (vs. higher) mate value would also display more negative IA, and attractive/feminine female immigrants would increase female ISC and hence elicit more negative IA among local females. Based on these assumptions, we made the following predictions:

- i) Men and women with relatively low mate value will be more negative towards immigrants of the same sex compared to men and women with a relatively high mate value. This expectation is derived from the notion that low mate value individuals will perceive immigrants as relatively more threatening to their own situation on the mating market.
- ii) Men will have more negative attitudes to immigrants than women. This expectation is derived from the fact that male intra-sexual competition is higher than female intra-sexual competition.
- iii) Men will be more positive towards female immigrants than towards male immigrants, whereas women will be more positive towards male immigrants than female immigrants. This hypothesis is derived from the fact that intra-sexual competition would increase if more members of the same sex were accepted into a country.
- iv) Immigrants that are perceived as more attractive and masculine/feminine will elicit the most negative reactions by members of their own sex. For immigrants of the opposite sex the effect will be the opposite.

3. Methods

3.1. Ethical permission

The current study received permission by the Ethical Review Board of Åbo Akademi University.

3.2. Participants

We recruited participants through mailing lists of universities and vocational schools, mailing lists of city/municipality employees, and social media. After excluding participants with incomplete answers on items measuring mate value, the final sample consisted of 533 participants (374 women, 158 men, and one who did not identify as either female or male), between 16 and 60 years of age ($M = 34.73$, $SD = 12.80$).

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. IA

We presented participants with pictures of males and females of different ethnic origin, together with a short description of why the depicted individual seeks residence permit in Finland. We included the five following questions: “In your opinion, should the person be granted a residence permit in Finland?”, “How willing would you be to help him/her find an apartment?”, “How willing would you be to help him/her establish a social network?”, “How willing would you be to ask him/her to spend time with you and your friends?”, and “How willing would you be to invite him/her to your house?”. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (“Absolutely not”) to 9 (“Yes, absolutely”). We combined responses to these items by calculating the individual mean for each participant and each picture. This measure had adequate internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.94$). See Table 1 for means, SD, and range for each item.

3.3.2. Mate value

We used the Mate Value Scale (Edlund & Sagarin, 2014) that consists of four questions regarding self-perceived desirability as a partner. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (extremely undesirable) to 7 (extremely desirable). The mate value scale shows adequate validity and reliability (Edlund & Sagarin, 2014; Gillen, Collisson, Murtagh, Browne, & Mccutcheon, 2016). We combined responses by calculating the individual mean. This measure had adequate internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.88$).

3.4. Materials

The stimulus material consisted of 16 pictures. These pictures included a masculinized and a feminized version of eight individuals (four males and four females). Pictures were manipulated using the software PsychoMorph (Tiddeman, Burt, & Perrett, 2001). Faces differed only in sexual dimorphism, and all other characteristics (e.g., skin texture) were held constant. The pictures were manipulated to be either 100% more similar to average male face or 100% more similar to average female face. Pictures were neutral (minimal make-up, no jewelry or hats etc.). The depicted individuals originated from four different regions: Mexico, Vietnam, Iraq, and West Africa (Nigeria and Cameroon) and were 22–27 years of age. This is an age where individuals are seen as attractive and sexually active in the studied population (Antfolk, 2017; Antfolk et al., 2015).

Each picture was paired with a background description. Descriptions were written so that they could be paired with any of the pictures, regardless of sex or origin. The combination of pictures and

Table 1
Means, standard deviation, and range for items measuring immigrant attitudes.

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	
Asylum	6.37	2.39	1	9
Apartment	5.52	2.35	1	9
Social	5.65	2.29	1	9
Hang out	5.45	2.33	1	9
Home	5.22	2.39	1	9

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