

Muscular men less likely to support social and economic equality, study suggests

May 22 2017, by Sarah Cox, Brunel University London



Credit: Brunel University

Physically stronger men are less in favour of social and economic equality than weaker men, new research from Brunel University London indicates.

Dr Michael Price and colleagues assessed 171 men aged 18-40, collecting information on height, weight, waist size, flexed and relaxed

muscle circumference, hand grip, and arm and chest strength.

They also surveyed participants on how often they go to the gym, their [wealth](#), whether they support the redistribution of wealth, and whether they approve of the idea that some [social groups](#) should have [dominance](#) over others ('social dominance orientation').

As well as focusing on bodily signs of perceived dominance, the researchers also focused on facial appearance: they had groups of independent raters view participants' faces and rate whether they saw the men as dominant and attractive.

They also used software to analyse faces in terms of the masculinity of their shape.

Prior research has shown several aspects of face shape and appearance, such as height-to-width ratio, are linked to ability to compete for resources in the modern world.

The results showed a significant correlation between those with higher bodily formidability and the belief that some social groups should dominate others. These men were also much less likely to support redistribution of wealth.

But contrary to predictions, there was no correlation between being considered attractive, as measured by waist to chest ratio and various facial measures, and whether or not the men supported 'social dominance orientation' or redistribution.

The study showed that more muscular men were less egalitarian, and the number of hours actually spent in the gym was also linked to having less egalitarian socioeconomic beliefs.

Dr Price, Senior Lecturer in Psychology in the College of Health and Life Sciences at Brunel, explains:

"We believe that this link between perceived formidability and egalitarianism could be explained in a number of ways. It could be the result of men calibrating their egalitarianism to their own formidability. It could be the case that less egalitarian men strive harder to become muscular. Or there could be a third variable at play affecting both egalitarianism and muscularity.

"The causal direction here is somewhat ambiguous - does being muscular cause men to be less egalitarian, or are less-egalitarian men just more likely to lift weights?

"Our results suggest that wealthier men who are more formidable physically are more likely to oppose redistribution of wealth. Essentially, they seem more motivated to defend their resources. But less wealthy men who are still physically formidable don't seem more inclined to support redistribution either. They're not demanding a share of the wealth.

"A key question for future research might be whether certain personality traits, such as narcissism or a drive for dominance, might be related to both muscle-striving and inequality.

'Is sociopolitical egalitarianism related to bodily and facial formidability in men?' by Michael Price and Nicholas Pound (Brunel), Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington (LSE), and James Sidanius (Harvard University) will be published in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior* later this year and is [available online now](#)

More information: Michael E. Price et al. Is sociopolitical egalitarianism related to bodily and facial formidability in men?,

Evolution and Human Behavior (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2017.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2017.04.001)

Provided by Brunel University

Citation: Muscular men less likely to support social and economic equality, study suggests (2017, May 22) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-05-muscular-men-social-economic-equality.html>

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