**No meta-analytic support for greater male variability in animal personalities**

**What about:**

**Personality tests: men are more variable than women, but are males more variable than females?**

**Abstract (179 words)**

It is claimed that there is more variation among men than women in traits ranging from intelligence to height (Hyde 2014). There is often a strong focus in such studies on psychological traits (REF). For personality traits, greater variability among men is widely attributed to biological rather than social factors. This explanation is underpinned by a few studies in animals reporting that variation in morphology is greater among males than females (REFS). There is less evidence of this sex difference for behaviours that biologists describe as animal personalities (REF). We conducted a large meta-analysis of animal personality studies (2,248 effect sizes from XXX studies of 231 species, categorised into five taxa) to quantify sex differences in means and variances for: boldness, aggression, activity, sociality and exploration. We then tested if greater sexual size dimorphism, indicative of stronger sexual selection, predicts larger sex differences in personality as predicted by theory (REF). We found sex differences in average values in four of 25 taxon-specific tests. There were only two sex differences in variance, but in both cases females were more variable. There was no consistent relationship between sexual dimorphism and the extent of sex differences in variability. Given these findings we suggest that caution is required before we attribute greater variability in men’s than women’s personality to biology.

**Introduction**

There have been numerous studies quantifying the average differences between men and women in their morphology and physiology. In addition, and sometimes controversially, many studies have tested for sex differences in behaviour and the underlying cognitive abilities, intelligence and personalities of men and women. In contrast, far less attention is given to documenting sex differences in the level of variability among individuals in their morphological and physiological traits, although a few studies have done so (e.g. (Lehre *et al.* 2009)). Interesting, however, in recent years much attention has been given to sex differences in behavioural variability among individuals and the possible underlying causes. For example, there have been studies of sex differences in variability in academic performance in standardised tests (REF) or in the classroom (REF); which are then linked to reported sex differences in variability in intelligence (Arden & Plomin 2006; Johnson *et al.* 2008), creativity (Ju *et al.* 2015; Karwowski *et al.* 2016), aggressiveness (Deary *et al.* 2003), other personality traits (Borkenau et al. 2013) and, ultimately, brain structure itself (Wierenga et al. 2020). The general conclusion of these studies is that boys/men tend to be more variable than girls/women.

Higher variability among boys/men than girls/women in behaviour, personalities and cognition is likely to be due to both social and biological differences between the sexes. Many commentators have, however, argued for the primacy of biological differences. For example, Steve Pinker noted that: “*Since a male can have more offspring than a female—but also has a greater chance of being childless (the victims of other males who impregnate the available females)—natural selection favours a slightly more conservative and reliable baby-building process for females and a slightly more ambitious and error-prone process for males*” (New Republic 2005). This line of reasoning is often supported by invoking studies showing tthere is a trend across the animal kingdom for to bes It is true that greater male than femalein animals has been reported for many traits, but the strength of the evidence is mixed. The clearest evidence comes from studies showing greater variability in male than female morphology, especially for traits under sexual selection, including sexual ornaments, courtship displays, weaponry and body size ; REF – T Price B J Linn Soc??; Archer & Mehdikhani 2003; Reinhold & Engqvist 2013; Wyman & Rowe 2014 The evidence is, however, largely absent for behaviours that are displayed by both sexes. For example, in a meta-analysis of data from over 27,000 mice there was no evidence that male behaviour was more variable than that of females (Zajitschek et al. 2020). More generally, there was no consistent pattern for males to be more variable than females in mice for the full panoply of traits measured in the laboratory mice. The type of trait being measured determined which sex was more variable. More broadly, there is only weak evidence from a small meta-analysis in animals (n = 96 effect sizes) that behaviour is more variable among males than females (Tarka et al. 2018).

Human personality is quantified by classifying individuals based on their scores for five uncorrelated components of behaviour: extraversion, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Costa & McCrae 1992). As with most biological traits, these ‘Big Five’ factors are assumed to have differential costs and benefits arising from more extreme values. Individuals show repeatability in their behaviour over time and across a wide range of social situations and test conditions. If we assume that there is an optimal, intermediate level of trait expression this begs the questions of what processes maintain variation among individuals. In the last 15 years, biologists have also started to pay attention to quantifying repeatable differences in behaviours in animals. Evidence for consistent difference among individuals are considered akin to that for variation in personality in humans. Indeed, evolutionary biologists have grouped animal behavioural traits into five factors that loosely resemble those in humans: activity, aggression, boldness, exploration and sociability (Reale *et al*. 2007). For wild animals, consistent and predictable (i.e. repeatable) behaviours that do not change with age, or do not vary depending on the immediate context, would appear to be maladaptive. For example, XXXX. More generally, variation in personality among individuals raises evolutionary questions about how it is maintained in the face of natural selection, which should lead to convergence on an optimal phenotype (Smith & Blumstein 2008; Dingemanse & Wolf 2010).(Dingemanse *et al.* 2010). The four main explanations invoked by biologists are: (a) non-linear selection favours extreme trait expression; (b) negative frequency-dependent selection; (c) life-history trade-offs; and (d) developmental or genetic constraints. Each explanation could potentially apply to both human and animal personalities. Crucially, these explanations might also account for sex differences in the magnitude of variation in personality: specifically why males are more variable than females.

First, sexual selection is usually stronger on males than females (Fromhage & Jennions 2016; Janicke REF). It tends to favour individuals with the most extreme expression of any trait that increases the likelihood of obtaining mates or fertilizing eggs, because success under sexual competition is determined by relative advantage. Competition generates strong directional selection on traits that improve the access of individuals to mates (e.g. weapons, ornaments and coercive behaviours) (Darwin 1871), or of sperm to eggs (REF). Sexual selection tends to favours condition-dependent expression of traits (REF). Even minor differences in resources acquisition among individuals due to chance events or small genetic differences in, say, their foraging efficiency translate into differential expression of sexual traits (Rowe & Houle 1992), thereby increasing phenotypic variance among individuals. A more controversial suggestion is that sexual selection favours developmental process that increase variation in the outcome due to non-linear payoffs of sexual trait expression. That is, the reward of developing a larger than average trait more than compensate for the loss from a smaller than average one (Pomiankowski & Møller 1995; see also XXXRobertsPetrieXXX). Stronger sexual selection on males than females is therefore predicted to result in traits that increase reproductive success which exhibit greater variance among males than either the equivalent traits among females, or than naturally selected traits in both sexes (Pomiankowski & Møller 1995). There is some supporting evidence for this prediction. A meta-analysis comparing sex differences in phenotypic variance of traits reported significant higher variation among males than females for reproductive and non-reproductive traits, but the difference in variance was greater for reproduction traits (Wyman & Rowe 2014).

Second, negative frequency-dependent selection can maintain variation in traits. This form of selection might, however, be particularly important for behavioural traits, because the success of a given tactic during social and sexual interactions often decreases when it is more common (REF). For example, XXXX. Sexual selection on males often favour alternative mating tactics that are most successful when they are rare in the population (e.g. sneakers) (REF). These alternative mating tactic are usually associated with a suite of morphological and behavioural traits that differ from those associated with the dominant mating acquisition tactic (e.g. sneakers tend to be smaller and less colourful than males using the dominant mating tactic). Sexual selection leading to the evolution of alternative mating tactics will therefore tend to generate higher phenotypic variation among males than females.

Third, life history trade-offs may result in some individuals valuing future reproduction more highly due to a greater life expectancy arising from stochastic, environmental factors (e.g. food availability during development) or gene-environment interactions that favour different genes depending on the prevailing local conditions. These trade-offs could favour shifts in behaviour by individuals with greater life expectancy to be, for example, less bold or exploratory (Wolf et al. 2007). Sex differences in population variation in personality as a result seem plausible because many sexual selected traits in males increase the risk of death due to injury during fighting (REF), or elevate mortality because sexual advertising imposes high energetic costs (REF) and attracts predators (REF). This source of variation is further exacerbated if males vary in the costs that sexually selected traits impose depending on the males underlying health or body condition.

Four, greater male variability might arise from the mechanism of sex determination (James 1973). In some taxa females have two copies of each gene, while males only have one. This can be across the entire genome (e.g. haplodiploidy), or, less dramatically, females have two copies of the larger of two sex chromosome (homogametic sex), while males only have one (heterogametic sex). In mammals, for example, XX/XY sex determination means that females have two X chromosome and males a single X chromosome. In females the phenotypic effects of genes on the X chromosome are averaged across their expression on both chromosomes. Averaging occurs either through epigenetic inactivation of different regions of maternally and paternally inherited X chromosomes (Amos-Landgraf *et al.* 2006), or through mosaicism whereby a single, X chromosome per cell is expressed (Lyon 1961). In contrast, males only have a maternally inherited X chromosome, so that all genes on it are expressed. All else being equal, this should lead to more extreme phenotypes being shown in males than females (review: Charlesworth 1996), hence greater variation among males than among females. It should be noted, however, that females are the heterogametic sex in many taxa, including birds (reviewed in Graves & Shetty 2001), butterflies and some fish and reptiles (REF). Although there is no systematic review of the effects of heterogamy on variation in traits, there is evidence for greater variability in body size in males than females in species with heterogametic males, and for the reverse pattern of variation in species with heterogametic females (Reinhold & Engqvist (2013)

Male behaviour is often under strong sexual selection, which is likely to create differences in personality between the sexes because the underlying neural and physiological mechanisms driving behaviour have effects that extend beyond sexual behaviour. For example, success in male-male contests is an important determinant of male reproduction success in many animal species. This selects for physiological mechanisms, such as elevated testosterone production in mammals, that increase general aggression. Sexual selection on male behaviour also arises due to female choice (REF), which could contribute to sex differences in personality. Females often prefer males who exhibit behaviours that indicate the ability to provide material resources, parental care or signal their genetic quality (Jennions & Petrie 1997; Schuett *et al.* 2010; Munson *et al.* 2020). For example, bolder males might be better able to provision offspring with food (Munson *et al*. 2020); and males that perform precise, complex courtships behaviours are more attractive in many bird species (e.g. bower birds, manakins and birds of paradise). As with aggression, selection on proximate mechanisms that affect courtship behaviour is likely to affect non-sexual behaviour as a by-product. Finally, sexual selection often favours male persistence or coerciveness in species where courtship is minimal (e.g. water striders, some poecilid fishes), which is, again, likely to effects behaviours related to animal personality traits like activity and aggression as a by-product.

Based on the four arguments we outlined earlier, sexual selection is likely to amplify variation in sexually selected behaviours and, as a by-product, in associated behaviours that contribute to an individual’s personality. For example, in the case of selection on fight behaviour, this implies that agreeableness is therefore be a personality trait where males are more variable than females. Indeed, in humans, variation in two components of personality (agreeableness and neuroticism) where high scores are linked to aggressive behaviour, show greater variability among men than among women (Budaev 1999, Archer & Mehdikhani 2003). It should be clear, however, that this line of argument should apply to all species where there is sexual selection on males, and that sex differences in variation in behaviours and personality will be greater the stronger the intensity of sexual selection on males. This is therefore a key empirical claim that needs to be tested by those who attribute the greater variation in personality among men than among women to sex-specific evolutionary pressures (e.g. Pinker quote).

We conduct a large-scale meta-analysis to test the robustness of broad claims that men show greater variation than women in behavioural traits linked to personality because of biological factors associated with stronger sexual selection on males and/or men being the heterogametic sex. We collected data on behaviour traits liked to animal personality across a wide range of taxa. For each personality factor, there are often a small set of behaviour measures that are collected using similar protocols (e.g. hiding time after sighting a predator as an index of boldness). Our study builds on a small meta-analysis (Tarka *et al*. 2018). We greatly increase the size and scope of their dataset, and we tested for a moderating effect of sexual selection on sex differences in variation in personality. It is difficult to directly compare the strength of sexual selection across species, but in many taxa it is associated with the magnitude of sexual size dimorphism (SSD). (Reiss 1986; REFS). We therefore included SSD as a moderator in our meta-analysis. We partially tested for an effect of heterogamy on sex differences in variation in personality by testing for a moderating effect of taxa. We had data from taxa where males are always heterogametic (mammals), always homogametic (birds), or a mixture of the two (insects, fish and reptiles/frogs).

Here, we ask three key questions using meta-analytic models: 1) Do males show greater variability than females in personality traits; 2) Are sex differences in variation consistent for different components of personality; and 3) Does sexual selection (estimated here using the proxy of SSD) explain variation in the magnitude of sex differences in variation in personality? Finally, we asked the same three questions for the mean value of personality traits in animals.

**Results**

*Summary of the Dataset*

Our final dataset comprised 2,248 effect sizes from five broad taxonomic groups: mammals, birds, reptilia (amphibians and reptiles combined), fish and invertebrates. The number of species (n = 10-106), studies (n = 11-61) and effect sizes (n = 95-684) per taxa are shown in Table 1. Boldness was the most well-studied and sociality the least-studied of the five personality type (n=825 and 169 effect sizes, respectively) (Table 2).

*Sex Differences*

Combining all five personality traits, males and females did not differ significantly in their mean personality in any of the five taxa, nor was there a significant sex difference in variability (Table 1 and Supplementary Table S1). Add something about Heterogeneity?? The lack of a sex difference in mean personality could arise if the direction of any difference in sex-specific values varied across the five personality traits. When the traits were analysed separately we found significant sex differences in mean values in four cases. Females were significantly more sociable in birds (=-0.68, *p*=0.005), less aggressive and less bold in invertebrates (=0.45, *p*=0.05; =0.32, *p*=0.04), and less exploratory in reptiles (= 0.25, *p*=0.02). There were no significant sex differences in mean values for mammals or fish (Table 2, Figures 1 & 2).

There were also significant sex differences in variability in personality in two cases. Female were more variable in their exploratory behaviour in birds (=-0.26, *p*=0.05), and their aggressive behaviour in fish (=-0.13, *p*=0.04). There were no significant sex differences in variability in invertebrates, mammals or reptiles (Table 2, Figures 1 & 2 and Supplementary Table S2). Given that 50 tests for sex differences were conducted, none of the six sex differences were significant after correcting for multiple testing (critical Bonferroni P-value of 0.05/50 = 0.001).

*Sexual Size Dimorphism and Personality Differences between the Sexes*

Sexual size dimorphism (SSD) had a significantly effect on sex differences in mean personality in two of the four taxa test (Supplementary Tables S5 & S6), but its influence depended on the personality traits (Table 3). There was no effect of SSD in fish or birds. In invertebrates, the effect of SSD differed significantly for boldness and activity. When the sexes were the same size there was no difference in either boldness (*β* =0.37, *p*=0.06) or activity (*β* =0.03, *p*=0.90). When males were larger than females, males were less active (*β* =-0.87, *p*=0.19) but bolder (SSD x boldness: *β* =1.29, *p*=0.02). In mammals, the effect of SSD differed significantly for activity, aggression, boldness and exploration. When the sexes were the same size, there was only a sex difference in activity, with males being more active (*β* =0.27, *p*=0.05). When males were larger than females, males were less active (*β* =-2.02, *p*<0.0001), but tended to be more aggressive (SSD x aggression: *β* =3.45, *p*<0.0001), but there was no effect of SSD on boldness (SSD x boldness: *β* =1.96, *p*=0.0001) or exploration (SSD x exploration: *β* =1.92, *p=*0.0002).

There was no significant relationships between SSD and sex-differences in personality trait variability in any of the four taxa (see Table 3 and Supplementary Table S4). There was also no sex difference in variability when the sexes were the same size.

*Moderating effects of mating system, age, population, study environment and study type on personality*

In all five taxa, the sex difference in the mean or in the variability in personality traits did not differ between species with monogamous and multiple mating systems, nor between adults and juveniles (Supplementary Tables S7, S8).

With one exception, there were no significant sex differences in the mean or in the variability in personality traits in any of the five taxa that was associated with the origin of the test animals. In fish, however, populations from the wild had significantly less variability in male than female personality traits (=-0.09, *p*=0.04), but this was the not the case for lab-reared/captive populations (=0.08, *p*=0.12). (Supplementary Table S9).

With one exception, there were no significant sex differences in the mean or in the variability in personality traits in any of the five taxa attributable to where the animals were tested (lab or field). In mammals, however, the mean value was significantly lower in males than females tested in the laboratory (-0.31 , *p*=0.02), but not when tested in the field (=0.24, *p*=0.15) (Supplementary Table S10).

Finally, with one exception, there were no significant sex differences in the mean or in the variability in personality traits in any taxa that was explained by whether behavioural data was from an observational or experimental study. In mammals, however, the mean value was significantly greater in males than females in observational studies (= 0.39, , *p*=0.004), but not in experimental studies (=0.00, *p*=0.98) (Supplementary Table S11).

*Publication bias*

We found evidence of publication bias for estimates of sex differences in mean or variances for personality traits in only one of 10 tests. The precision of the study predicted the effect size for the sex difference in the mean for invertebrates (p = 0.004; Supplementary Table S12). This test remained significant after correcting for multiple testing (critical Bonferroni P-value of 0.05/10 = 0.005).

**Discussion**

Surprisingly, our meta-analysis failed to find significant sex differences in either trait means or trait variability for personality-like behaviours. When personalities were divided into their respective trait type (the Big Five) we found several significant sex differences in means for some personality types within some taxonomic groups (birds: Sociality; reptilia: Exploration; invertebrates: Aggression, Boldness). However, only exploratory behaviour for birds and aggressive behaviour for fish had significant sex differences in variability, both skewing towards females. Finally, personality and SSD interacted significantly to show strong sex-bias for mean personality, yet only within mammals (male-bias for all personality types except activity, which had a female-bias) and invertebrates (male-biased aggression), and did not moderate sex differences in variability for any personality type or taxonomic group.

The sex chromosome hypothesis suggests that variability for shared traits should reflect sex chromosomal arrangement. While we did observe a tendency for mean variability estimates to skew towards the heterogametic sex (especially mammals and birds), most estimates were nonsignificant. This was surprising considering the number of studies that suggest heterogamety is the mechanism driving greater male variability. For example, greater male than female variability has been reported for traits like personality types in humans (Archer & Mehdikhani 2003; Karwowski *et al.* 2016), cognition and intelligence (Halpern & LaMay 2000; Jones *et al.* 2003; Arden & Plomin 2006; Johnson *et al.* 2008, 2009), and for morphological traits like body size (Reinhold & Engqvist 2013), and brain structure (Arnold 2004; van der Linden *et al.* 2017; DeCasien *et al.* 2020). Importantly, these traits are also considered important for reproduction; in men, extraversion and creative personality types attract more mating opportunities (Buss 1995; Nettle 2006), while body size is important for male-male competition (Darwin 1871). Therefore, we should expect traits related to reproduction to have greater male variability, not just because of sex chromosomal arrangement.

Despite suggestions that most shared traits should have greater male variability, our meta-analysis found no evidence for male-biased variability for any personality trait. We expected aggression to show strong male bias within all taxonomic groups for mean differences and variability, yet only invertebrates had significant sex differences in mean aggression, and only fish had significant sex differences in variability for aggression (female-biased). These results were surprising given that male aggression should correlate with male-male competition and sexual selection (e.g. Schuett *et al*. 2010). However, female aggression is common for establishing social hierarchies and for defending offspring (e.g. Campbell 1999). Although sex roles can vary across the animal kingdom, females generally have the greatest investment in offspring (via anisogamy, Janicke *et al.* 2016), so females who provide parental care should be more aggressive than males in this context. Parental care could also potentially explain why only invertebrate males were significantly more aggressive than females; in many species, females don’t often provide care beyond egg-laying. However, we lacked suitable data to test this idea.

An additional explanation for the absence of sex differences comes from the human personality literature. Creativity and aggressive personality types have greater male variability and are important for female mate choice. Yet other personality traits frequently show no sex differences in either trait means or their variability. Archer and Mehdikhani (2003) compared means and variances for males and females for a range of personality-like traits and found that traits related to sexual selection (directly like physical aggression, or indirectly through a change in reproductive strategy) consistently had significant greater male variability, while traits unrelated to sexual selection had no sex differences in variability (Archer & Mehdikhani 2003). Our chosen sexual selection moderators (SSD and mating system) did not significantly change either mean trait expression or variability; while SSD did interact with personality trait type for mean trait expression in mammals, SSD had no significant effect on variability for any taxonomic group. If sexual selection operates to maintain inter-individual variation in animal personalities (Schuett *et al.* 2010), we would then expect greater variability for those traits in the sex under sexual selection. Since we did not observe significant sex differences in variability, animal personalities could instead reflect behaviours that don’t differentially affect reproductive outcomes.

Personality traits are frequently measured under the context of survival; personality encompasses antipredator responses (‘risky’ behaviour, or Boldness), foraging (Activity/Exploration), and other behaviours related to survival that are important for both sexes. Indeed, we found no sex differences in activity and only one instance of male-biased boldness behaviour for invertebrates. Where we did find sex differences in personality, the traits and their direction tended to reflect life-history differences between the sexes. For example, male reptiles were more explorative than females which might indicate male-biased dispersal (e.g. salamanders *Plethodon cinereus*; Liebgold *et al.* 2011), while female birds were more sociable than males that reflects different social group behaviour (e.g. zebra finches *Taeniopygia guttata*; Schuett & Dall 2009). Additionally, because there are costs (e.g. energetic investment) and benefits (e.g. faster growth, more feeding opportunities) associated with the expression of personality types (Wolf *et al.* 2007), both sexes likely experience trade-offs that lead to similar trait means and variabilities. Previous meta-analyses have found evidence of trade-offs between personality and survival (Smith & Blumstein 2008; Moiron *et al.* 2020), and we found some evidence that the degree of SSD might impact trade-offs between personality and survival for the sexes differently. For example, strong interactions between SSD and personality trait types for mammals, and between boldness and SSD for invertebrates, show that species with larger males trade-off ‘shy’ behaviour for larger body size. Larger animals are less likely to suffer mortality from predation, but also require more food to fuel their bigger bodies, thus need to feed more often and cannot play it safe. In mammals, as males became larger than females, males became bolder, more explorative and more aggressive than females. Male mammals are quite often the larger sex, due to sexual selection, so as males become larger they likely face more intense male-male competition (Darwin 1871)). However, SSD encompasses several different forms of selection, not just sexual selection (Blanckenhorn 2005). Because SSD did not interact significantly with trait variability, the sex differences in mean personality expression could instead be explained by adaptive, life-history differences.

Finally, phylogenetic variance (*I*2phylo) explained a large proportion of variance for personality variability (*lnCVR*) in both birds and mammals. This would suggest that variability in personality traits are heritable in endotherms and not ectotherms (Supplementary Table S1). Personality behaviours are heritable (Dochtermann *et al.* 2014), so assortative mating or mate choice for similar personality types could potentially allow variation in personality traits to persist, while keeping means and their variances relatively similar for both males and females (Schuett *et al.* 2010; Munson *et al.* 2020).

CUT FROM INTRO AND MOVED TO THE DISCUSSION: Aggressiveness has both costs (e.g. greater risk of physical injury) and benefits (e.g. more mating opportunities due to social dominance) (Buss 1996, Budaev 1999). Where the choosy sex (usually females) shows a strong preference for partners with a particular trait, that trait will have increased variance because it is under sexual selection (Pomiankowski & Møller 1995). Finally, different sex roles can also drive sex differences in behaviour. Both mating system and parental care can change the strength of sexual selection on one sex (usually males), producing larger variances in male reproductive success (Janicke *et al.* 2016). For example, species with monogamous males that share parental care might have no sex differences in their personalities, but where males mate multiply and do not care for offspring there might be more male-biased personality traits. Regardless of the underlying mechanism, most hypotheses surrounding sex differences in all traits tend to focus on greater male variability, as males tend to benefit more, or incur greater costs, for having greater representation at the tail-ends of trait distributions.

Sex chromosomal arrangement and greater male variability can also extend to behaviours, as they too have a genetic underpinning (Dochtermann *et al.* 2014). For example, men have greater representation at the tail ends of intelligence distributions, even when there are no mean differences in intelligence between men and women (Feingold 1992; Halpern & LaMay 2000; Arden & Plomin 2006; Johnson *et al.* 2008). While it is reasonable to expect male sexual traits to have greater variability than non-sexually selected traits, traits shared by both sexes are also frequently expected to show male-biased variability.

**Materials and Methods**

*Literature search and data collection*

We conducted a systematic search of the literature for empirical studies of wild animals that quantify personality traits, which were categorised into five types: ‘boldness’, ‘aggression’, ‘activity’, ‘sociality’ and ‘exploration’ (REF). We ran primary and secondary keyword searches using the search strings shown in Table 4. In the primary searches we looked for operational behavioural measures commonly used by those studying animal personality to quantify each of the five personality types, such as ‘hiding time’ as a index of boldness or ‘distance moved’ as an index of exploration (see Sih *et al.* 2004; Réale *et al.* 2007). Our secondary searches were designed to locate studies of ‘personality-like’ behaviours that were alternate measures of activity, aggression, boldness, exploration or sociality. We then conducted additional forward citation searches to include all articles that had cited one of five influential reviews of animal personality: (Dall *et al.* 2004; Sih *et al.* 2004; Réale *et al.* 2007; Schuett *et al.* 2010; Dingemanse & Wolf 2010). In all cases we searched for studies that collected data on both males and females so that the sexes could be compared in data collected by the same researchers from the same population using equivalent methods. In total, we collected 9,698 records from the *ISI Web of Science* and *SCOPUS* databases on 11 December 2018. The PRISMA diagram summarising our search protocol and the number of articles located using each search method is shown in Fig. 3.

After removing duplicates, 3,739 articles were available for title and abstract screening by LH. Of these, 942 were excluded at the title/abstract screening stage because they were: a) duplicates (*n* = 130), b) non-animal studies (*n* = 256), c) reviews or non-empirical studies (*n* = 516), d) not in English (*n* = 8), or e) inaccessible (*n* = 32). We then carried out a full-text screening of the remaining 2,797 articles. We included articles in the final dataset only if they provided raw means and variances (i.e. standard error or standard deviation) for operational behavioural measures of personality for both males and females. Raw summary statistics are required to calculate variance-based effect sizes, which also provide greater opportunities to control for sources of non-independence (Nakagawa *et al.* 2015; Noble *et al.* 2017). Consequently, studies that only report principle components or factor loadings were excluded (see Tarka *et al.* 2018). Briefly, we excluded articles during full-text screening using the following criteria: 1) it was not a personality study (i.e. reported a behaviour that could not be assigned to any of the ‘Big Five’ categories, e.g. ‘social node position’), 2) the study was on domesticated or agricultural animals where individuals were neutered, 3) the study did not report separate data for males and females (i.e. the study was on hermaphrodites, clones or gynandromorphs; or data from both sexes were combined; or only one sex was measured; or data was only reported for one sex), or 4) data were unsuitable/missing (see Figure 3). By definition, personality traits are repeatable (Sih *et al*. 2004), but very few of the available studies reported repeatability, or cited previous work that has documented repeatability of the behavioural measure used to quantify personality. We therefore included all behaviours that are commonly described as being indices of animal personality (see Sih *et al.* 2004; Réale *et al.* 2007).

In total, we identified 211 eligible articles that provided us with suitable data to calculate effect sizes (Fig. 3). We extracted means, measures of variance (standard deviation or standard error) and sample sizes from the text, tables, figures or supplementary data files for both sexes for all relevant behavioural measures of personality traits that were reported by the authors. We used the R package *metaDigitise* (v1.0.0, Pick *et al.* 2019) to extract summary statistics from figures. The location of the data in the original article is provided in XXXXX.

*Effect sizes and sampling variances*

To quantify sex differences in means and variances for personality traits we used unbiased standardised effect sizes. First, to quantify the difference between the sexes in the mean value of personality traits we calculated Hedges’ *g* (sample size adjusted standardised mean difference; Hedges & Olkin 1985) as follows:

, *Eq. 1*

*Eq. 2*

Where is the mean of the behavioural measure, is the pooled standard deviation and N and SD are the sample size and standard deviation for males (M) and females (F), respectively. The associated sampling error variance of Hedges *g* is:

ADD EQUATION *Eq. 3*

We used Hedges *g* instead of log response ratios as some behavioural measures were based on ranks or scores, meaning that response ratios could not be calculated. The relevant direction of the effect size varies depending on the focal behavioural measure of personality. For example, boldness is often measured as either ‘latency to flee’ or ‘time to resume a behaviour’ following a simulated predator approach. Here a bolder individual is therefore indicted by a larger or a smaller value respectively. We examined all measurement protocols and, where necessary, reversed the sign of the male-female difference to ensure that the direction of the effect size had a consistent interpretation for each personality trait. Specifically, a positive value of *g* indicates that males are more social, aggressive, exploratory, active or bold.

Second, to quantify a sex difference in the variance in personality traits we used the log coefficient of variation (lnCVR) (Nakagawa *et al.* 2015). We used this effect size rather than the lnCV to control for any mean-variance relationships and quantify sex difference in variances independent of the mean (Nakagawa *et al.* 2015; see Senior et al. 2020). In our data set there was a positive relationship between the mean and variance in personality measurements (see XXX). We calculated the effect size (lnCVR) and its associated samping variance () as follows:

,

*Eq. 4*

*Eq. 5*

where CV*M* and CV*F* are *SDM /M* and *SDF /F* , respectively; and . and are the correlation between the logged means and standard deviations of males and females respectively. A positive value of lnCVR indicates that males are variable than females.

*Data transformations*

Our dataset contained some means, and their variances, that needed to be transfromed to fulfil distribution assumptions about normality before we could calculate *g* or lnCVR. First, any latency data (e.g. time to resume behaviour) that was right-skewed was log-transformed using the following calculations to obtain means and standard deviations, respectively:

,

*Eq. 6*

*Eq. 7*

Second, some behavioural measures were presented as proportions, which constrains their distribution, so we converted them to the logit scale log (p/[1-p]) to meet normality assumptions before calculating the relevant effect size. Information on which effect sizes are based on transformed values are provided in XXXX.

*Moderator variables*

We extracted information on factors that differed among studies where we had an *a priori* expectation that they might moderate the magnitude and/or direction of the effect size (Tarka *et al.* 2018). Specifically, we recorded the taxa (‘invertebrates’, ‘fish’, ‘amphibians’, ‘reptiles’, ‘birds’, ‘mammals’), the age of individuals (‘juvenile’ or ‘adult’), whether the study population was from the lab (captive breed) or the wild, whether the behaviours were was measured in the lab or field, and whether the data was collected in an experiment or during natural behaviour of the subject. Most importantly, we generated two moderator variables to quantify the strength of sexual selection. First, we quantified the degree of sexual size dimorphism (SSD), which is often strongly correlated with indicators of the strength of sexual selection (e.g. birds: Székely *et al.* 2004; Dale *et al.* 2007; fish: Walker & McCormick 2009; mammals: Promislow 1992). We calculated SSD as the ratio of male to female mean body length, mass or the size of another focal trait (e.g. wing length). We then used the following index of SSD (Lovich & Gibbons 1992):

*Eq. 8*

Using the SSD index rather than the sex difference in raw means allows for: 1) a single continuous moderator that is zero when the sexes are the same size, and positive when males are larger than females; and 2) comparison of SSD across a wide range of absolute size measures. Larger values of the SSD index are interpreted as species in which there is increasingly stronger sexual selection on males.

Where body size measures for males and females were not reported in the research article, we searched *Web of Science*, *Scopus* and *Google Scholar* using the search terms: “species name” AND male AND female AND body size OR length. We then used data from located studies to calculate the SSD index. Second, we noted whether the mating system of the species was characterised by ‘multiple mating’ or ‘monogamy’. We again used the search approach described above if the relevant data was not provided in the focal article, using the search string: “species name” AND mating system.

Based on the number of available studies for different levels of the prospective moderators (age, population source, test location, experimental/observational), or the level of subjectivity required to categorise species (mating system), we decided upon completion of data collection that the only moderators we would formally analyse using a null hypothesis framework for their influence on the effect sizes were the SSD index and taxa. The relationships between the other moderators and the effect sizes are presented in Supplementary tables S7-S12, but these should be treated as strictly exploratory analyses.

*Meta-analyses*

We modelled the effect sizes Hedge’s *g* and lnCVR using multi-level meta-analytic (MLMA) models (only considering random effects) and then ran multi-level meta-regression (MLMR) models (including fixed effect moderators) in R using the package *metafor* (version 2.4.0 Viechtbauer 2010; R Core Team 2019). We ran separate MLMR models for each of our five taxonomic groups, namely: birds, mammals, fish, invertebrates and reptilia (amphibians and reptiles were combined due to low sample sizes). Although we were interested in whether sex differences varied across these taxonomic groups, the available sample sizes generally precluded running models with taxa as a moderator. In addition, we could only construct phylogenies for some taxa.

We first estimated the overall evidence for a sex difference in the mean and variance across all personality traits using MLMA models (Table 1). This analysis is based on the simple premise that we predict males will show larger trait values for personality traits (with the possible exception of sociality) (REF), and greater variance for all five traits (REF). More importantly, this analysis provides a baseline that allows us to look for sources of heterogeneity in the data. To account for the non-independence of data we included species identity and study identity as random effects, as there were multiple effect sizes from the same species or study. We also included observation level identity to account for variation among effect sizes within a study to ensure that the total and residual variance are correctly estimated. Without this term, within-study effects are confounded with sampling variance (the default setting in *metafor*). To correct for the non-independence of species due to their shared evolutionary history we corrected for phylogeny. Phylogenetic correlation matrices were derived for each taxa either from existing phylogenetic tree databases (e.g. *BirdTree.org* for birds; Jetz *et al.* 2012, 2014) or using *TimeTree.org* (Hinchliff *et al.* 2015). For the bird phylogeny, we used the Ericson tree backbone (Ericson *et al.* 2006) to generate 1,000 trees and then took a sample of 100 trees. We used *ape* and *phytools* in R to generate an average tree from these 100 trees, which we then used in our models. TimeTree phylogenies were derived by exporting a list of the relevant species from *TimeTree.org*. If a species in our dataset had no phylogenetic representation we substituted the next closest available species (e.g. same genera or family). In all cases, we resolved synonymous taxa across our dataset so that species were correctly categorised, and pruned our trees where needed. In the two initial MLMA models for *g* and LnCVR we derived heterogeneity estimates (*I*2; Higgins & Thompson 2002; Nakagawa & Santos 2012). We partitioned heterogeneity arising among species(*I*2species), studies (*I*2study), and due to phylogenetic heritability (*I*2phylo; Hadfield & Nakagawa 2010; Nakagawa & Santos 2012). The total heterogeneity (*I*2Total), is the proportion of the total variance in effect size estimates excluding that arising due to sampling variance.

Next, we fit MLMR separate models for each taxa, that included key moderator variables. Our first set of models included personality type as a factor to provide an estimate of the mean effect size for each trait (i.e. ‘activity’, ‘aggression’, ‘boldness’, ‘sociability’, ‘exploration’) (Table 2). We expected that the magnitude of sex-specific differences in mean values and variance would depend on the type of personality trait, because trait types are likely to be correlated with sex roles (e.g. parental care might affect sociability; Schuett *et al.* 2010), life-histories (e.g. sex-biased dispersal is likely to affect exploration and activity; Cote *et al.* 2010), and sexual selection (e.g. the level of male-male competition or female mate choice might affect male levels of aggression and female levels of exploration; Munson *et al.* 2020). We then tested whether the degree of sexual selection, as measured by sexual size-dimorphism (SSD index), moderated effect sizes. We predicted that species with a greater male-bias in SSD would show stronger sex differences in the mean and variance. However, we also expected the strength of its moderating effect to differ among the personality trait. As such, we fit a model that included personality type, SSD and their interaction. Interaction terms for personality traits when there were fewer than 10 species with SSD data were dropped from the models,. There were too few data on reptiles to run a model that included any interactions (Table 3).

Studies included in our meta-analysis varied greatly in their design and there was a number of additional sources of non-independence within studies (Noble *et al.* 2017). First, multiple personality traits were quantified on the same sets of individuals (e.g. ‘boldness’ and ‘aggression’). Additionally, some studies measured the same individuals multiple times for the same trait (i.e. repeatability), or for the same trait type using a different test (e.g. several measures of boldness). We conducted a series of sensitivity analyses to ascertain the impact that these sources of non-independence had on our final results. We created correlation matrices among effect sizes that shared the same sets of individuals in the sample used to derive effect sizes. Given that we did not know the exact correlation among traits we created three different dependency matrices (**D**; i.e., correlation matrices) that assumed r = 0.3, r = 0.5 and r = 0.8. We refit our models replacing the identify matrix (**I**) that was assumed when estimating the residual error variance with our **D** matrices.

For all models we present meta-analytic mean estimates and 95% confidence intervals (Tables 2-4).

*Publication bias*

It is possible that published studies might disproportionately report certain findings (e.g. greater male variability). To look for publication bias, we first checked for funnel plot asymmetry for both *g* and lnCVR. Studies with small sample sizes (e.g. low precision) drive funnel plot asymmetry if there is a true non-zero effect and a bias towards publishing significant results (REF). Simple inspection of funnel plots is misleading, however, as we need to account for source of variation in effect sizes (i.e. moderator variables and random factors) other than sample size. We therefore included precision as a moderator term in our MLMR models to test where it explained some of the variation in the reported effect sizes (Van Aert *et al.* 2019). If precision has a significant influence, this is suggestive of publication bias. Precision was calculated as:

*Eq. 9*

Where is the sampling variance of Hedge’s *g* .

**Data availability**

xxx

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Table 1. Multi-level meta-analytic models for each taxonomic group for a sex difference in the mean (SMD) and variability (lnCVR) in personality traits. Positive estimates indicate that the mean or variability in personality is greater for males than females.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameters** | **Estimated mean** | **95% CI** | **Prediction interval** | ***t score*** | ***p*-value** | ***n* effect sizes** |
| *SMD (Hedge’s g)* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mammals | 0.08 | -0.28, 0.45 | -1.10, 1.27 | 0.46 | 0.65 | 684 |
| Birds | -0.13 | -0.36, 0.10 | -1.85, 1.59 | -1.12 | 0.26 | 493 |
| Reptilia | 0.07 | -0.08, 0.22 | -0.52, 0.67 | 0.94 | 0.35 | 95 |
| Fish | -0.04 | -0.35, 0.28 | -1.00, 0.93 | -0.24 | 0.28 | 493 |
| Invertebrates | 0.24 | -0.03, 0.51 | -1.76, 2.24 | 1.73 | 0.08 | 483 |
| *lnCVR* |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mammals | 0.07 | -0.20, 0.35 | -0.64, 0.79 | 0.54 | 0.59 | 684 |
| Birds | -0.15 | -0.66, 0.36 | -1.95, 1.65 | -0.59 | 0.56 | 493 |
| Reptilia | 0.05 | -0.04, 0.14 | -0.06, 0.15 | 1.13 | 0.26 | 95 |
| Fish | -0.04 | -0.09, 0.01 | -0.64, 0.56 | -1.44 | 0.15 | 493 |
| Invertebrates | -0.02 | -0.09, 0.06 | -0.72, 0.69 | -0.44 | 0.66 | 483 |

Table 2. MLMR models for each taxa with personality type as a fixed moderator. Values highlighted in bold indicate a significant difference between males and females. Positive estimates indicate that the mean and variability are greater for males than females. These models are graphically represented in Figures 1 & 2.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameters** | **SMD**  **mean** | **SMD 95%CI** | **SMD**  ***p-value*** | **lnCVR**  **mean** | **lnCVR**  **95%CI** | **lnCVR**  ***p-value*** |
| ***Mammals*** | | | | | | |
| Activity | -0.16 | -0.56, 0.23 | 0.41 | 0.11 | -0.19, 0.41 | 0.48 |
| Aggression | 0.11 | -0.27, 0.48 | 0.58 | 0.11 | -0.20, 0.42 | 0.48 |
| Boldness | 0.15 | -0.20, 0.50 | 0.39 | 0.06 | -0.21, 0.34 | 0.65 |
| Exploration | 0.06 | -0.31, 0.42 | 0.77 | 0.05 | -0.24, 0.34 | 0.73 |
| Sociality | 0.09 | -0.29, 0.47 | 0.64 | 0.06 | -0.24, 0.37 | 0.68 |
| ***Birds*** | | | | | | |
| Activity | -0.13 | -0.42, 0.16 | 0.37 | 0.04 | -0.25, 0.33 | 0.79 |
| Aggression | -0.11 | -0.40, 0.18 | 0.47 | -0.06 | -0.39, 0.27 | 0.72 |
| Boldness | -0.19 | -0.44, 0.07 | 0.15 | -0.01 | -0.23, 0.21 | 0.93 |
| **Exploration** | 0.08 | -0.19, 0.35 | 0.56 | **-0.26** | **-0.52, 0.00** | **0.05** |
| **Sociality** | **-0.68** | **-1.16, 0.21** | **0.005** | 0.13 | -1.59, 1.86 | 0.61 |
| ***Reptilia*** | | | | | | |
| Activity | -0.05 | -0.45, 0.36 | 0.82 | -0.11 | -0.51, 0.29 | 0.60 |
| Aggression | -0.07 | -0.32, 0.19 | 0.60 | 0.33 | -0.05, 0.72 | 0.09 |
| Boldness | 0.08 | -0.15, 0.31 | 0.68 | 0.10 | -0.13, 0.33 | 0.41 |
| **Exploration** | **0.25** | **0.05, 0.45** | **0.02** | -0.10 | -0.35, 0.14 | 0.40 |
| Sociality | -0.05 | -0.60, 0.50 | 0.86 | -0.12 | -0.76, 0.52 | 0.70 |
| ***Fish*** | | | | | | |
| Activity | -0.16 | -0.65, 0.33 | 0.53 | -0.03 | -0.16, 0.09 | 0.63 |
| **Aggression** | -0.05 | -0.52, 0.42 | 0.53 | **-0.13** | **-0.25, -0.01** | **0.04** |
| Boldness | -0.16 | -0.63, 0.32 | 0.52 | -0.02 | -0.63, 0.59 | 0.59 |
| Exploration | -0.05 | -0.54, 0.44 | 0.84 | -0.03 | -0.16, 0.09 | 0.62 |
| Sociality | -0.40 | -0.91, 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.07 | -0.11, 0.24 | 0.47 |
| ***Invertebrates*** | | | | | | |
| Activity | 0.08 | -0.23, 0.39 | 0.62 | -0.06 | -0.17, 0.05 | 0.26 |
| **Aggression** | **0.45** | **0.00, 0.90** | **0.05** | 0.02 | -0.17, 0.21 | 0.83 |
| **Boldness** | **0.32** | **0.01, 0.62** | **0.04** | -0.02 | -0.12, 0.08 | 0.65 |
| Exploration | 0.06 | -0.31, 0.43 | 0.74 | 0.05 | -0.10, 0.20 | 0.51 |
| Sociality | 0.30 | -0.26, 0.86 | 0.29 | 0.23 | -0.08, 0.54 | 0.15 |

Table 3. MLMR models with personality trait type and SSD moderator terms, as well as their interactions, for each taxonomic group. Estimates highlighted in bold indicate significant differences between males and females. Positive estimates indicate that the mean and variability are greater for males than females.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameters** | **SMD**  **mean** | **SMD 95%CI** | **SMD**  ***p-value*** | **lnCVR**  **mean** | **lnCVR**  **95%CI** | **lnCVR**  ***p-value*** | **n studies** | **n**  **species** | **n effect sizes** |
| ***Mammals*** | | | | | | |  |  |  |
| **Activity** | **0.27** | **-0.01, 0.54** | **0.05** | 0.07 | -0.22, 0.37 | 0.63 | 14 | 12 | 84 |
| Aggression | 0.15 | -0.06, 0.37 | 0.17 | 0.10 | -0.18, 0.39 | 0.48 | 15 | 13 | 85 |
| Boldness | 0.13 | -0.07, 0.33 | 0.20 | 0.10 | -0.18, 0.39 | 0.48 | 26 | 26 | 163 |
| Exploration | 0.03 | -0.15, 0.22 | 0.72 | 0.04 | -0.24, 0.32 | 0.78 | 19 | 16 | 223 |
| **SSD** | **-2.02** | **-2.94, -1.10** | **<0.0001** | 0.30 | -0.34, 0.94 | 0.36 |  |  |  |
| **Aggression x SSD** | **3.45** | **2.05, 4.85** | **<0.0001** | -0.15 | -1.14, 0.83 | 0.76 |  |  |  |
| **Boldness x SSD** | **1.96** | **0.96, 2.96** | **0.0001** | -0.30 | -1.02, 0.41 | 0.41 |  |  |  |
| **Exploration x SSD** | **1.92** | **0.91, 2.92** | **0.0002** | -0.07 | -0.80, 0.65 | 0.84 |  |  |  |
| ***Birds*** | | | | | | |  |  |  |
| Intercept (Boldness) | -0.25 | -0.85, 0.34 | 0.40 | 0.03 | -0.04, 0.11 | 0.38 | 21 | 78 | 235 |
| SSD | -0.24 | -1.45, 0.97 | 0.70 | 0.10 | -0.16, 0.37 | 0.44 |  |  |  |
| ***Fish*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Aggression | -0.09 | -0.66, 0.47 | 0.75 | -0.11 | -0.31, 0.09 | 0.27 | 16 | 13 | 93 |
| Boldness | -0.13 | -0.70, 0.44 | 0.66 | -0.03 | -0.22, 0.16 | 0.74 | 23 | 12 | 172 |
| SSD | 0.16 | -0.85, 1.17 | 0.76 | -0.28 | -1.03, 0.48 | 0.47 |  |  |  |
| Boldness x SSD | -0.38 | -1.45, 0.69 | 0.48 | 0.39 | -0.44, 1.21 | 0.36 |  |  |  |
| ***Invertebrates*** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Activity | 0.03 | -0.37, 0.42 | 0.90 | -0.08 | -0.22, 0.06 | 0.28 | 22 | 19 | 204 |
| **Boldness** | **0.37** | **-0.02, 0.76** | **0.06** | -0.02 | -0.15, 0.11 | 0.79 | 27 | 26 | 178 |
| SSD | -0.87 | -2.15, 0.42 | 0.19 | 0.05 | -0.56, 0.66 | 0.87 |  |  |  |
| **Boldness x SSD** | **1.29** | **0.22, 2.36** | **0.02** | 0.07 | -0.62, 0.76 | 0.84 |  |  |  |

Table 4.Primary and secondary keyword searches used for our literature search on 11 December 2018. Keyword searches differed slightly to account for how operator terms are employed by each database. The searches were further refined by using relevant biology field categories in ISI or SCOPUS.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***ISI Web of Science*** | ***SCOPUS*** |
| *Primary keyword search terms* | (personalit\* OR “behavioural syndrome\*” OR “behavioral syndrome\*” OR temperament) AND (sex\*) NOT (man OR men OR woman OR women OR human) | personalit\* OR “behavioural syndrome” OR “behavioral syndrome” OR temperament AND sex AND NOT man AND NOT woman AND NOT human |
| *Secondary keyword search terms* | animal\* AND behav\* AND (bold\* OR shy\* OR neoph\* OR aggress\* OR explor\* OR hid\*) AND “sex differences” NOT man NOT woman NOT human | animal\* AND (bold\* OR shy\* OR neoph\* OR aggress\* OR explor\* OR hid\*) AND “sex differences” AND NOT man AND NOT woman AND NOT human |
| *Refined by categories* | zoology, ecology, biology, multidisciplinary sciences, evolutionary biology | agriculture & biology |



**Figure 1**. Phylogenetic relationships and orchard plots for a) mammals and b) birds. Node colours reflect SSD ratios for each species (no data is grey) and heatmap data shows *n* effect sizes for each personality trait type for each species. Orchard plots show all effect sizes and mean effect size for SMD and lnCVR MLMR models with personality trait as a moderator term. Thin bars are 95% CIs and thick bars are prediction intervals. Circle size reflects effect size precision where bigger circles have greater precision.



**Figure 2.** Phylogenetic relationships and orchard plots for c) reptilia, d) fish and e) invertebrates. Node colours reflect SSD ratios for each species (no data is grey) and heatmap data shows *n* effect sizes for each personality trait type for each species. Orchard plots show all effect sizes and mean effect size for SMD and lnCVR MLMR models with personality trait as a moderator term. Thin bars are 95% CIs and thick bars are prediction intervals. Circle size reflects effect size precision where bigger circles have greater precision.



**Figure 3.** *PRISMA* diagram showing the process of finding, screening and including/excluding studies for this meta-analysis. Searches were further refined to agriculture & biology (Scopus), zoology, ecology, biology, multidisciplinary sciences, evolutionary biology (WoS) categories.