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Failing to attract a female partner – Are low mate value and low mate access associated with regulating female sexual autonomy in men?

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ABSTRACT

We tested the hypothesis that individual differences in capacity to attract female partners is associated with regulating female sexual autonomy in men. Building on evolutionary theories of female choice, we hypothesized that men with low (vs. high) mate value and low (vs. high) mate access are more motivated to limit female choice, and, therefore, to adopt sexism and oppose women's sexual freedom. We used self-reports of mate value, mate access, sexism and, opposing women's sexual freedom from 159 men and examined associations between these self-reports by using structural equation modeling. We also inspected individual differences in regulating female sexual autonomy based on income, education, and socioeconomic status. As expected, men with low (vs. high) mate value displayed more sexism. Interestingly, there was no association between mate access and regulating female sexual autonomy neither in terms of sexism nor in terms of opposing women's sexual freedom. We also found a correlation between education and sexism, indicating respondents reporting a lower education reported more sexism. To conclude, the results are mixed and calls for further research.

1. Introduction

Research indicates individuals are facing challenges in the mating domain (Apostolou et al., 2023) and that sexism has become more common in men (Campbell et al., 2024). As members of extreme anti-feminist ideologies (such as incels; i.e., involuntary celibates) are—according to their description—motivated by difficulties finding female partners (Sparks, Zidenberg, & Olver, 2022), regulating female sexual autonomy could partly stem from individual differences in perceived capacity to attract female partners. We investigated if low mate value and low mate access are associated with regulating female sexual autonomy in terms of sexism and opposing women's sexual freedom in men.

1.1. Female choice and mating strategies

Female choice (e.g., Buss, 2006) refers to women being more selective when choosing partners than men (Trivers, 1972). This stems from parental investment theory, as women face higher reproductive costs (e.g., limited number of sex cells, costly pregnancy) than men (unlimited number of sex cells; Trivers, 1972). This generates an asymmetry in mating strategies between women and men, as suboptimal mate choices

disproportionately affect women, leading to greater competition for mates among heterosexual men (Rosvall, 2011).

1.2. Mate value and mate access

Individual differences in mate value and mate access affect the likelihood of attracting partners. High mate value in men includes genetic quality indicators (e.g., health, strength, and their correlates; Sugiyama, 2005) and ability to invest in a woman and her offspring (e.g., high social status, resources; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). Mate access is influenced by mate value, as high mate value facilitates attracting mates and turning potential mates into actual mates (Walldén, Westerlund, Gunst, Santtila, & Antfolk, 2020). Hence, all other things equal, an individual with higher (vs. lower) mate value is expected to have higher (vs. lower) mate access. However, even relatively high-mate-value individuals can struggle finding partners in low-mate-access contexts (Walldén et al., 2020). As women are more selective than men when choosing partners, especially low-mate-value and low-mate-access men have difficulties finding partners.

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1.3. Opposing Women's sexual freedom

Opposing women's sexual freedom (i.e., supporting restrictive relationship norms and attitudes toward sexual behavior, sexual double standards) is widespread (Luberti, Blake, & Brooks, 2023). Both men and women suppress female sexuality, holding sexually conservative norms when it serves their mating-related interests (Luberti, Blake, & Brooks, 2022). On a societal level, men suppress female sexuality to ensure paternity certainty (Platek & Shackelford, 2006) and establish male-male alliances controlling resources (Grant & Montrose, 2018). Grant and Montrose (2018) argue patriarchal cultural systems have benefited men's mating interests, enforcing rules controlling female sexuality. The authors suggest patriarchy is a community-wide male mate-guarding strategy, created and maintained to ensure paternity certainty, enabling control of female sexuality even in the absence of their male partners.

1.3.1. Mate value, mate access, and opposing Women's sexual freedom

On an interpersonal level, men use mate-guarding tactics restricting women's sexual freedom (Geary, 2006). Evidence suggests men gain an advantage in intra-sexual competition by regulating their female partner's sexuality, increasing their own, but limiting other men's access to partners (Barbaro & Shackelford, 2016). Moreover, low-mate-value men use more controlling mate-guarding tactics than high-mate-value men (Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009). Another means to control women's sexuality is through social norms punishing women's behavior (Smuts, 1992). High-mate-value men are more open to casual sex and promiscuity than low-mate-value men, with increased self-perceived mate value leading to a preference for unrestricted mating strategies (Surbey & Brice, 2007). While evidence suggests that low-mate-value and low-mate-access men oppose women's sexual freedom to increase their access to partners, no prior study has specifically explored this. We investigated associations between mate value and mate access with opposing women's sexual freedom in men.

1.4. Sexism

Bareket and Fiske (2023) conclude there is empirical support for sexism (i.e., negative gender stereotypical views of women; Glick & Fiske, 1996) as a coordinated system maintaining control over women, preserving gender inequality, and legitimizing patriarchal arrangements.

1.4.1. Mate value, mate access, and sexism

We propose that low-mate-value and low-mate-access men adopt sexism as a strategy to enhance their mating opportunities. Sexism could function similarly to cost-inflicting mate retention strategies as low-mate-value men use more controlling and aggressive behaviors (e.g., abuse, threats) toward their female partners (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2009), and more cost-inflicting mate retention (e.g., decreasing self-esteem; Miner, Shackelford, & Starratt, 2009). Aligning with our hypotheses, Miner, Starratt, and Shackelford (2009) suggested low-mate-value men use mate retention tactics undesired by women to control their female partner's sexuality as they cannot afford to use desired mate retention tactics. Bosson, Rousis, and Felig (2022) suggested misogyny (i.e., hostile sexism) serves as a mating strategy, decreasing women's self-perceived mate value. While evidence suggests low-mate-value and low-mate-access men employ sexism to increase their access to partners, no prior study has specifically explored this. We investigated associations between mate value and mate access with sexism in men.

1.5. The current study

We aimed to investigate if low mate value and low mate access are associated with sexism and opposing women's sexual freedom in men. We made the following predictions:

1. Men with a) lower (vs. higher) mate value, and b) lower (vs. higher) mate access will display more sexism.
2. Men with a) lower (vs. higher) mate value, and b) lower (vs. higher) mate access will oppose women's sexual freedom more.

Moreover, we explored differences in sexism and opposing women's sexual freedom due to income, education, and socioeconomic status, without specific predictions.

2. Method

2.1. Ethical approval

Before data collection, this study received approval from The Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University. Respondents provided informed consent before participation. We assured respondents' anonymity, that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time.

2.2. Respondents and procedure

We conducted an online survey in 2021, targeting men through online communities (Reddit, Facebook). We recruited adults (18 years or older) romantically and sexually interested in women and identifying as men. Of 444 respondents, 248 did not complete the survey, 30 were terminated, and 7 were excluded based on criteria, leaving a final sample of 159. Power analyses (0.3 effect size, 0.80 power) indicated a sample size of 150 for statistical effects and 308 for model structure.

2.3. Measures

Respondents provided demographics and self-reported mate access, mate value, sexism, and opposing women's sexual freedom. To reduce COVID-19 impact, respondents answered as they would pre-pandemic. See Supplementary Material for included items.

2.3.1. Mate access

We measured mate access using 11 items from the Mate Access Scale (Walldén et al., 2020), assessing perceived mating opportunities (P-factor) and encounters with potential partners (E-factor). Responses were on 4-, 5-, or 7-point Likert scales. Higher scores indicated higher mate access. The scale initially demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Walldén et al., 2020) and good internal validity in this study ($\alpha = 0.85$).

2.3.2. Mate value

We measured mate value using the 4-item Mate Value Scale (Edlund & Sagarin, 2014), assessing respondents' desirability as a partner. Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated higher mate value. The scale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Edlund & Sagarin, 2014) and excellent internal validity in this study ($\alpha = 0.91$).

2.3.3. The modern sexism scale

We measured sexism using The Modern Sexism Scale (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995), assessing traditional gender role beliefs and contemporary sexism (e.g., "Women are generally not as smart as men", "Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement"). Responses were on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated less sexism. The scale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Campbell, Schellenberg, & Senn, 1997) and excellent internal validity ($\alpha = 0.91$) in this study.

2.3.4. Opposing women's sexual freedom

We developed an 11-item questionnaire measuring opposing women's sexual freedom, including support of restrictive relationship norms, sexual double standards, and attitudes toward sexual behavior

(e.g., “Women should be in a romantic long-term relationship with one partner”, “I find women that have had more sexual partners than me unattractive”). Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated less opposition. The measure showed good internal validity ($\alpha = 0.85$).

2.4. Statistical analyses

We conducted statistical analyses in R (R Development Core Team, 2008; scripts available; https://osf.io/ykqn3/?view_only=d162e6a3d2034ace94e8c7a5cae46cbd). We examined means and standard deviations for measures, and zero-order correlations for items, visualized with *corrplot* (Wei, 2016). We used *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012) for factor structure examination of measurement models and structural equation model (SEM) creation, visualizing the structural regression model with *SemPlot* (Epskamp, 2014). Due to ordinal data, we used diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimation. We assessed and adjusted model fit using comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.90, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) > 0.90, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08, and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) < 0.08 as cutoffs (Bentler, 1990; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). We examined zero-order correlations between income, education, socioeconomic status, sexism, and opposing women’s sexual freedom.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive results

See Table 1 for respondent demographics and Table 2 for respondents’ mean sexism, opposing women’s sexual freedom, mate access, and mate value.

3.2. Zero-order correlations

We investigated zero-order correlations between all items (see Fig. 1) and found a strong negative correlation between items “I believe it is an achievement for a man to have had multiple sexual partners” and “I believe it is an achievement for a woman to have had multiple sexual partners”. We excluded both items from further analyses.

3.3. Measurement models

We present results and adjustments for initial measurement models below. We added five residual correlations to improve model fit. These were all within scale, minimizing the risk of unjustifiable relationships across scales. The added residual correlations were between items with theoretical (content) and methodological (measurement format, contextual placement) overlap possibly leading to correlated errors and shared variance beyond the latent construct.

3.3.1. Mate access

In the initial measurement model for mate access, one item (“How many potential sex partners do you interact with during a normal weekend?”) was excluded. The item had negative variance, high error variance, and large residuals, suggesting measurement error. As data were gathered during COVID-19 restrictions, the item was likely difficult to answer (e.g., challenging to picture a “normal” weekend). The adjusted model showed high RMSEA and SRMR, indicating poor fit (CFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.972, RMSEA = 0.137, SRMR = 0.106). To improve fit, we added one residual correlation between two items from the same scale: “Do you receive as many romantic invitations as you would desire?” and “In your everyday life, do you meet as many potential partners as you want to?”, resulting in acceptable fit (CFI = 1.000, TLI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.020 [0.000, 0.063], SRMR = 0.070). This appears to be a stable feature of the measurement model and not sample-specific noise, as the same adjustment enhanced model fit in a validation

Table 1

Respondents’ Age, Nationality, Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Relationship Status, Education, Job-Status, Yearly Income, and Socioeconomic Status.

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
18–24	63	39.62
25–34	75	47.17
35–44	17	10.69
45–54	2	1.26
55–64	1	0.63
> 64	1	0.63
Nationality		
European	63	40.25
North American	76	47.17
South American	5	3.15
Asian	8	5.03
Oceanian	6	3.77
African	1	0.63
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	6	3.77
Asian	10	6.29
African American/Black	2	1.26
Caucasian/White	131	82.39
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0.00
American Indian or Alaska Native		
Multiracial	6	3.77
Other	1	0.63
Prefer not to say	3	1.89
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	133	83.65
Bisexual	17	10.69
Pansexual	7	4.40
Other	2	1.26
Relationship status		
Married	18	11.32
In a relationship/Cohabiting	47	29.56
Dating	8	5.03
Single	86	54.09
Other	0	0.00
Education		
Less than a high school diploma	1	0.63
Highschool degree or equivalent/GSCE	54	33.96
Bachelor’s degree	61	38.37
Master’s degree	33	20.76
Doctorate	6	3.77
Other	4	2.52
Job status		
Employed	85	53.46
Unemployed	15	9.43
Student	46	28.93
Retired	2	1.26
Self-employed	10	6.29
Other	1	0.63
Yearly income before tax (USD)		
> 10,000	51	32.08
10,000–50,000	61	38.36
50,000–100,000	36	22.64
100,000–150,000	5	3.14
> 150,000	6	3.77
Socioeconomic status		
1	6	3.77
2	2	1.26
3	8	6.03
4	20	12.58
5	32	20.13
6	22	13.84
7	43	27.04
8	17	10.69
9	7	4.40
10	2	1.26

Note. For socioeconomic status (SES), we asked respondents to estimate their SES in relation to the rest of the population with an illustration of a ladder where higher scores indicated a higher SES and lower scores indicated a lower SES. $N = 159$.

Table 2
 Respondents' Sexism, Opposing Women's Sexual Freedom, Mate Value, and Mate Access.

Variable	M (SD)	Scale range
Sexism	5.13 (1.28)	1–7
Opposing women's sexual freedom	3.81 (0.93)	1–5
Mate value	4.05 (1.30)	1–7
Mate access Encounters	1.67 (0.49)	1–4/7
Mate access Perceived possibilities	2.00 (0.87)	1–4/5

Note. For sexism and opposing women's sexual freedom, higher values indicated lower sexism and opposition. For mate value, and mate access encounters and perceived possibilities, higher values indicated higher mate value and mate access for both encounters and perceived possibilities. N = 159.

study of the scale using another sample (Walldén et al., 2020).

3.3.2. *Mate value*

The initial measurement model for mate value required no adjustments as it showed an acceptable fit immediately (CFI = 1.000, TLI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.019 [0.000, 0.160], SRMR = 0.016).

3.3.3. *Opposing women's sexual freedom*

The initial measurement model for opposing women's sexual freedom showed poor fit due to high RMSEA and SRMR (CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.973, RMSEA = 0.138, SRMR = 0.096). To improve fit, we added a residual correlation between two items from the same scale: "Women and men should be equally free to choose how many partners they date at the same time" and "Women should be free to choose if they prefer having several short-term sexual relationships with different partners",

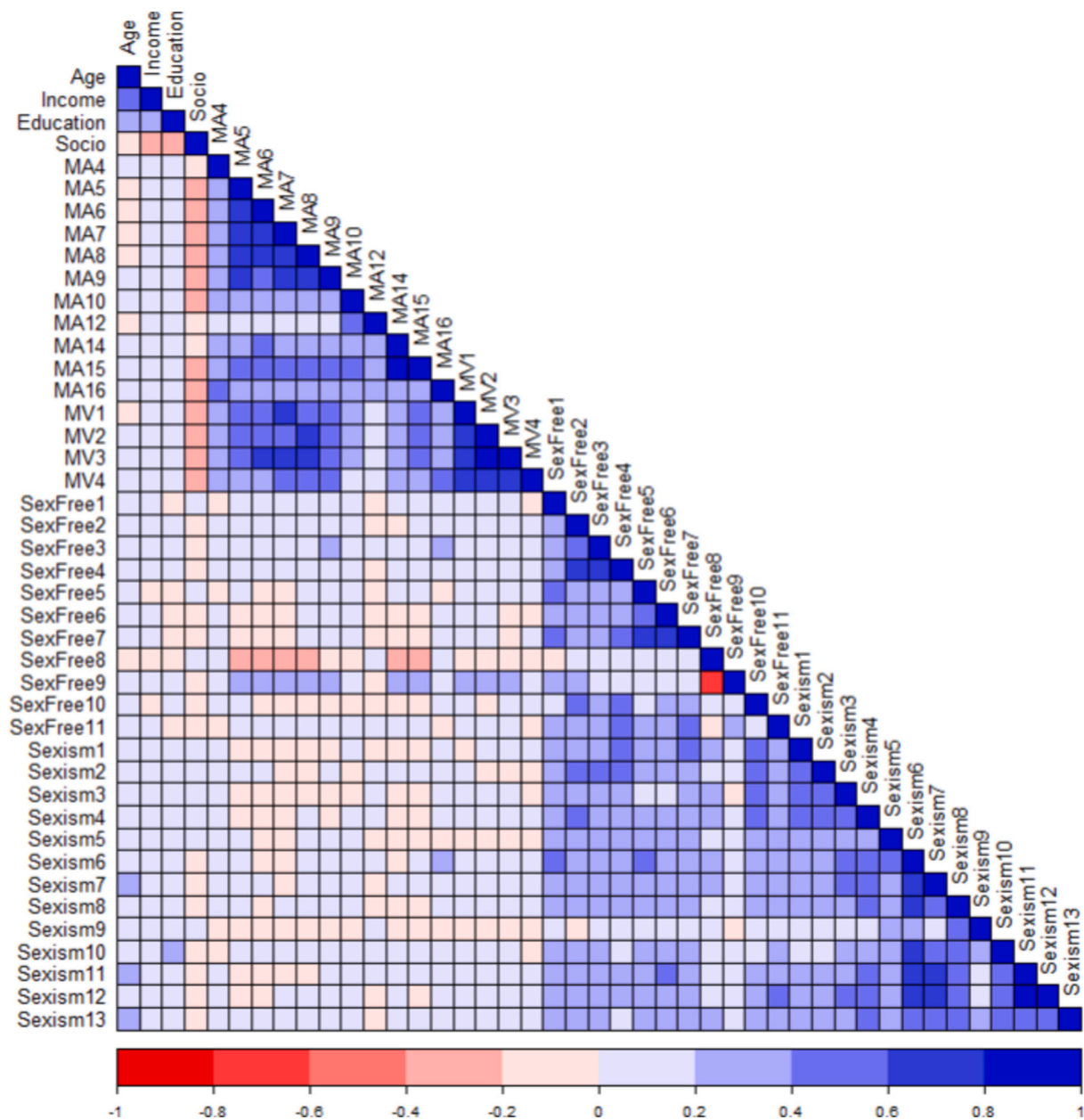


Fig. 1. Plot of the Zero-Order Correlations Between All Study Items

Note. Strong positive correlations are shown in blue, strong negative correlations in red, and correlations approximating null in white. Socio = socioeconomic status, MA = mate access, MV = mate value, SexFree = opposing women's sexual freedom, Sexism = Modern Sexism Scale. The items MA1–3, 11, and 13 were not included in the current study as they are not part of the original Mate Access Scale.

resulting in acceptable fit (CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.042 [0.000, 0.094], SRMR = 0.054).

3.3.4. Sexism

The initial measurement model for sexism showed poor fit due to high RMSEA and SRMR (CFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.985, RMSEA = 0.134 [0.116, 0.151], SRMR = 0.105). One item (“On average, people in our society treat husbands and wives equally”) showed poor factor loading (0.37) and was excluded. The item was excluded for lack of theoretical relevance and potentially misinterpreted due to cultural and societal differences in the international sample, adding little value while increasing model error. However, the adjusted fit remained poor (CFI = 0.991, TLI = 0.989, RMSEA = 0.126 [0.106, 0.145], SRMR = 0.098). We added three residual correlations between six items from the same scale (“It is easy to understand the anger of women’s groups in America” and “It is easy to understand why women’s groups are still concerned about societal limitations of women”, “Women are generally not as smart as men” and “Women are just as capable of thinking logically as men”, and between “I would be equally comfortable having a woman as a boss as a man” and “It is more important to encourage boys than to encourage girls to participate in athletics”), resulting in acceptable fit (CFI = 0.997, TLI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.078 [0.055, 0.100], SRMR = 0.078).

3.4. Structural regression model adjustments

We conducted structural equation modeling to examine the structural regressions between the independent variables mate value and mate access (encounters and perceived possibilities), and the dependent variables measuring regulating female sexual autonomy (sexism, opposing women’s sexual freedom).

We regressed variables measuring regulating female sexual autonomy on mate access and mate value. The initial model showed poor fit due to high SRMR (CFI = 0.996, TLI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.045 [0.035, 0.054], SRMR = 0.087). To improve fit, we added residual correlations between items “It does not matter if my partner has had more sexual partners than me before we met” and “I find women that have had more sexual partners than me unattractive” and between “If you were looking for a new partner to have sex with, in what time do you think it would be realistic for you to find one?” and “How often do you receive sexual invitations from persons you might be interested in?”, reducing SRMR (CFI = 0.997, TLI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.040 [0.029, 0.050], SRMR = 0.085). The SRMR remained elevated, likely due to the small sample size and the model’s numerous latent variables. We decided to retain the model, as theory and other fit indices appeared good (CFI > 0.95, TLI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06). See Fig. 2 for SEM model illustration.

3.5. Results from the structural regression model

3.5.1. Mate value and regulating female sexual autonomy

See Table 3 for SEM regression estimates. The regression path between the latent factors mate value and sexism was significant ($\beta = 0.333, p = .041$), indicating men with lower (vs. higher) mate value reported more sexism. There was no significant association between the latent factors mate value and opposing women’s sexual freedom ($\beta = 0.170, p = .345$), indicating men with lower (vs. higher) mate value did not oppose women’s sexual freedom more.

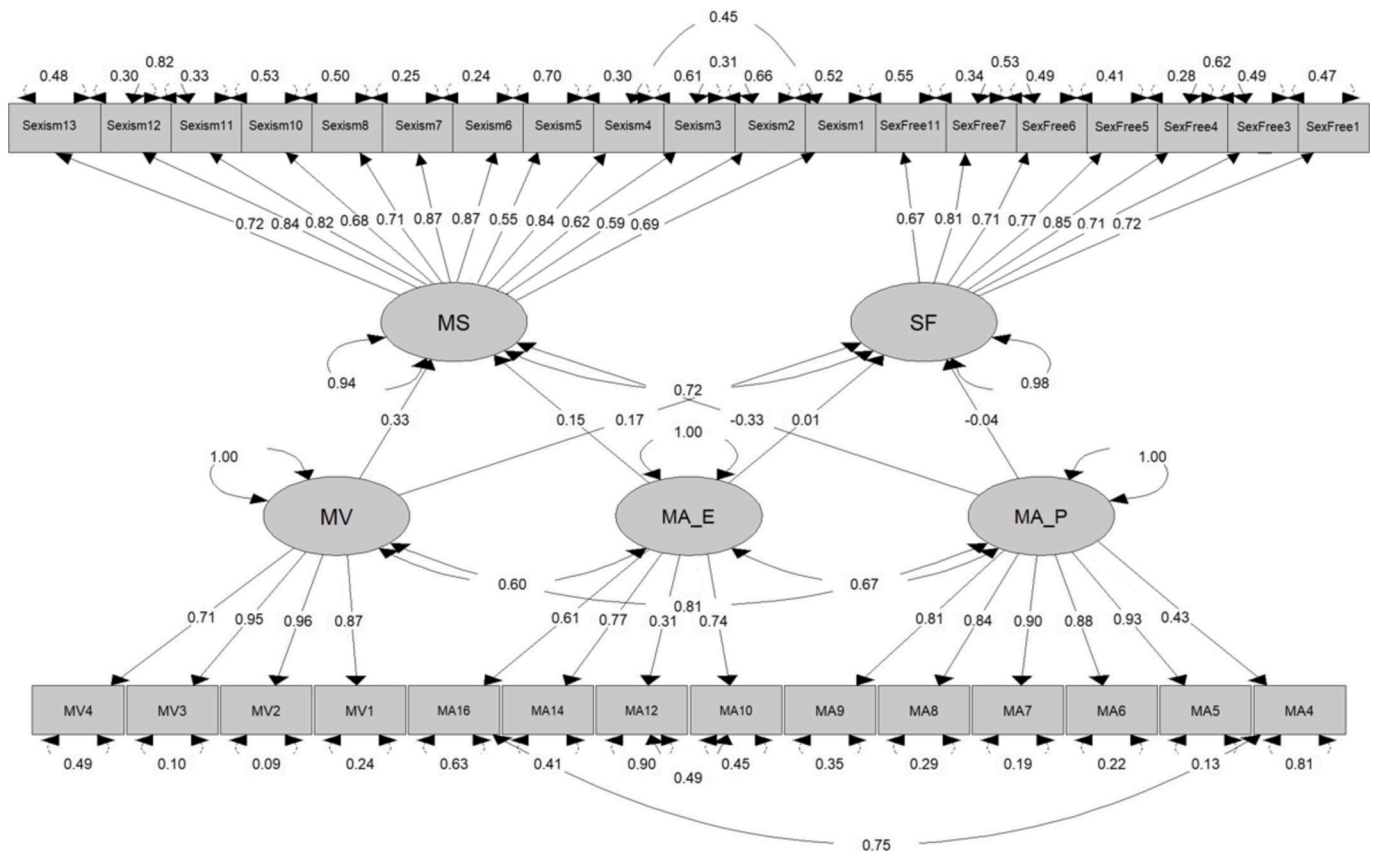


Fig. 2. Standardized path diagram for the latent structural regression mode. Note. The model shows sexism (MS) and supporting restrictions on women’s sexual freedom (SF) regressed on mate value (MV) and mate access encounters (MA_E) and mate access perceived possibilities (MA_P). Circles represent latent variables. Squares represent observed variables. Arrows between the latent variables represent the regression coefficients. Higher MS and SF indicated less sexism and supporting restrictions on women’s sexual freedom less. Higher MV, MA_E, and MA_P indicated higher mate value, mate access encounters, and mate access perceived possibilities.

Table 3
Results From the Structural Regression Model.

Independent variables	Dependent variables	β	95 % CI	SE	Z	p
Mate value	Sexism	0.33	[0.01; 0.65]	0.16	2.05	0.041*
Mate value	SexFree	0.17	[-0.19; 0.53]	0.18	0.92	0.345
Mate access perceived possibilities	Sexism	-0.31	[-0.68; 0.08]	0.19	-1.60	0.110
Mate access perceived possibilities	SexFree	-0.03	[-0.42; 0.37]	0.20	-0.15	0.878
Mate access encounters	Sexism	0.12	[-0.17; 0.42]	0.15	0.82	0.410
Mate access encounters	SexFree	-0.01	[-0.28; 0.25]	0.13	-0.05	0.957

Note. * = $p < .05$. Higher scores indicated less sexism and opposing women’s sexual freedom (SexFree) less. For all other variables, higher scores indicated higher mate value, mate access encounters, and mate access perceived possibilities. $N = 159$.

3.5.2. *Mate access and regulating female sexual autonomy*

The regression paths between the latent factors mate access and sexism were not significant for perceived possibilities ($\beta = -0.308, p = .110$) nor preferred encounters ($\beta = 0.124, p = .410$), suggesting men with lower (vs. higher) mate access did not report more sexism. Similarly, the regression paths between mate access and opposing women’s sexual freedom were not significant for perceived possibilities ($\beta = -0.030, p = .878$) nor preferred encounters ($\beta = 0.007, p = .957$), suggesting men with lower (vs. higher) mate access did not oppose women’s sexual freedom.

3.6. *Zero-order correlations between composite variables and demographics*

We examined zero-order correlations between mean scores for sexism, opposing women’s sexual freedom, mate value, and mate access based on items in the measurement models, income, education, and socioeconomic status (see Table 4). We found that respondents with lower education reported more sexism. As hypothesized, respondents reporting lower mate value reported more sexism. As theorized, respondents reporting higher mate value reported perceiving more mating possibilities, and respondents reporting more sexism reported opposing women’s sexual freedom.

4. Discussion

We investigated if individual differences in mate value and mate access are associated with regulating female sexual autonomy in men romantically and sexually interested in women. We predicted that men reporting lower (vs. higher) mate value and mate access would report

Table 4
Zero-Order Correlations Between Income, Education, Socioeconomic Status, Sexism, Opposing Women’s Sexual Freedom, Mate Value, and Mate Access.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Sexism	1.00							
2. Opposing women’s sexual freedom	0.62***	1.00						
3. Mate value	0.15*	0.13	1.00					
4. Mate access Encounters	0.08	0.03	0.39	1.00				
5. Mate access Perceived possibilities	0.03	0.05	0.67***	0.48	1.00			
6. Income	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.12	0.11	1.00		
7. Education	0.17*	0.02	0.09	0.12	0.14	0.42	1.00	
8. Socioeconomic status	-0.12	-0.08	-0.40	-0.25	-0.37	-0.40	-0.34	1.00

Note. * = $p < .05$. *** = $p < .001$. Lower scores indicated higher sexism and opposing women’s sexual freedom. For all other variables, higher scores indicated higher mate value, mate access encounter, mate access perceived possibilities, income, education, and socioeconomic status. Four respondents stating their education as “other” were excluded from the analysis ($n = 155$).

regulating female sexual autonomy.

4.1. *Mate value and regulating female sexual autonomy*

As predicted, lower (vs. higher) mate-value men reported more sexism, supporting that low-mate-value men may adopt sexism strategically to enhance perceived mating opportunities. The results build on initial evidence regarding mate value and sexism (Bosson et al., 2022; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2009; Miner, Starratt, & Shackelford, 2009). In extreme cases, difficulties finding a partner may lead to radicalization (Costello, Rolon, Thomas, & Schmitt, 2024). Meta-analyses show men’s sexism is associated with male-to-female violence (e.g., Gutierrez & Leaper, 2024). Consequently, we need a better understanding of who endorses sexism and potentially violence against women. This study shed light on how low mate value may predict male-to-female violence.

Contrary to predictions, we found no association between lower (vs. higher) mate value and opposing women’s sexual freedom. These results were puzzling, as they contradict opposing women’s sexual freedom to reinforce low-mate-value men’s access to female partners, and as research shows low-mate-value men are opposed to casual sex when unpopular (vs. popular) in dating contexts (Luberti et al., 2022). Sexism may serve as a strategy, collectively lowering women’s self-esteem, and, as Bosson et al. (2022) suggested, hostile sexism may serve as a strategy to decrease women’s self-perceived mate value. Luberti et al. (2023) argued sexual suppression involves interactions between individual traits (e.g., mate value, sociosexuality) and ecology (e.g., gender inequality), and that in countries with high gender inequality, both men and women suppress sexuality. As 87 % of respondents were from high-gender-equality countries (Europe, North America), this may explain the lack of association between mate value and opposing female sexual freedom.

4.2. *Mate access and regulating female sexual autonomy*

Contrary to predictions, lower (vs. higher) mate access was not associated with sexism nor opposing women’s sexual freedom. Instead, this may stem from low mate access not attributable to low mate value, such as a biased number of reproductive and available women to men (Jennions & Fromhage, 2017) in one’s environment. An individual perceived as an attractive partner might have limited available desirable potential partners in their environment. In such cases, changing social contexts (e.g., seeking new networks, relocating) could improve mate access and reduce support for regulating female sexual autonomy.

Another explanation is that real-life low mate access is not perceived as such, as online dating is prevalent (Vogels & McClain, 2023). Rosefeld and Thomas (2012) found that individuals experiencing a smaller (vs. larger; e.g., sexual minorities) potential partner pool are more likely to meet partners online. Since our study did not include online mate access, we may not have captured respondents’ true mate access. For example, a man with low online and offline mate access probably feels more disadvantaged than a man with only low offline access.

Moreover, mate value was strongly correlated with perceived possibilities, but moderately correlated with encounters in the Mate Access Scale. This suggests that meeting potential partners does not ensure high mate access. Mate value might be a better indicator, as high-mate-value men are more successful in finding partners, making low-mate value a stronger predictor of regulating female sexual autonomy due to difficulties finding a partner.

4.3. Demographic variables and regulating female sexual autonomy

Men with lower education reported more sexism, aligning with previous research (Glick, Lameiras, & Castro, 2002). Consistent with research linking mate value, but not social status, to male sexism (Bosson et al., 2022), neither socioeconomic status nor income correlated with regulating female sexual autonomy.

4.4. Limitations and further directions

First, recruiting via online communities (Facebook, Reddit) may introduce sampling bias (e.g., self-selection based on topic interest), limiting generalizability. Additionally, we used self-reports, risking biases like social desirability and response bias.

Second, power analyses required a minimum of 150 respondents, which we exceeded with 159 respondents. However, the model structure required 308 respondents. Due to financial and time constraints, we ended data collection before reaching this number, as recruiting male respondents is challenging (Mohajer & Jan, 2019). This likely affected optimizing the model fit, as the SRMR appeared slightly high (0.085), increasing the risk of Type-II errors and inflated standard errors. Still, we retained the model as other fit indices appeared good. Given the small sample size, caution is warranted when generalizing these preliminary findings, which lay the groundwork for future research with larger samples.

Third, we did not control for environmental variables or other attitudes. However, research links misogyny to social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism (Renström, 2023). Moreover, environmental factors (e.g., gender equality, income equality, adult sex ratio) shape sexual marketplace dynamics, influencing sexual attitudes and behavior (Luberti et al., 2023).

Fourth, we did not control for whether respondents were singles or actively looking for a partner, although research suggests that singledom (Renström, 2023), unwanted celibacy (i.e., men in the normal population unable to secure romantic/sexual partners; Grunau, Bieselt, Gul, & Kupfer, 2022), and female romantic rejection (Andrighetto, Riva, & Gabbiadini, 2019; Blake, Bastian, & Denson, 2018) are associated with misogyny and hostility toward women in men, warranting further investigation in future studies.

Finally, we used the Modern Sexism Scale to measure sexism, not distinguishing between hostile and benevolent sexism. Future studies investigating associations between mate value and sexism should separate between hostile and benevolent sexism, as Bosson et al. (2022) showed that hostile and benevolent sexism are linearly associated in high-mate-value men, but curvilinearly associated in low-mate-value men, with benevolence decreasing as hostility rises above the midpoint. This pattern remains when controlling for men's social status and wealth, indicating low perceived mate value influences men's self-views more than their provision abilities. According to Bosson et al. (2022), men may be inclined toward hostile sexism when doubting their appeal to female partners, suggesting a stronger association between low mate value and hostile sexism than modern sexism. Despite women perceiving benevolent sexism as undermining, women prefer men displaying benevolent sexism, as it signals willingness to invest (Gul & Kupfer, 2019), indicating that benevolent sexism (not embraced by low-mate-value men) is helpful in the mating market.

4.5. Conclusions

We found an association between low mate value and sexism but not between low mate value and opposing women's sexual freedom. As mate access was not associated with sexism nor opposing women's sexual freedom, mate value appears more central in regulating female sexual autonomy. Overall, our findings provide limited evidence linking difficulties in finding a partner to regulating female sexual autonomy in men.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Catharina Walldén: Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Annika Gunst:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Julia Andersson:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Jeremia Sjöblom:** Methodology, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Jan Antfolk:** Supervision, Project administration, Conceptualization.

Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individuals participating included in the study and privacy rights were observed.

Ethics approval

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and institutional guidelines of Åbo Akademi University. Approval was granted by The Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University (21st of October 2020) prior to the start of data collection.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the first author used ChatGPT in order to shorten the text. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.113034>.

Data availability

Anonymous data and R script can be found on OSF (https://osf.io/ykqn3/?view_only=d162e6a3d2034ace94e8c7a5cae46cbd).

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