HIGH-RESOLUTION CHARACTERIZATION REEVALUATES SEX LINKAGE OF

ORNAMENTATION IN GUPPIES

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Abstract

Colouration plays a key role in the ecology of many species, influencing how an organism

interacts with its environment, other species and conspecifics. Guppies are sexually

dimorphic, with males displaying sexually selected colouration resulting from female

preference. Previous work has suggested that much of guppy colour pattern variation is Y-

linked. However, it remains unclear how many individual colour patterns are Y-linked in

natural populations as much of the previous work has focused on phenotypes either not

found in the wild, or that are aggregate measures such as total colour area. Moreover,

ornaments have traditionally been identified and delineated by hand, and computational

methods now make it possible to extract pixels and identify ornaments automatically,

eliminating the potential for human bias. Here we developed a pipeline for automated

ornament identification and high-resolution image analysis of male guppy colour patterns.

Our results show that loci controlling the presence or absence of individual male ornaments

in our population are not predominantly Y-linked. However, we find that ornaments of

similar colour are not independent of each other, and modifier loci that affect whole animal

colouration do appear to be at least in part Y-linked. Considering these results, Y-linkage of

individual ornaments may not be important in driving colour changes in natural

populations of guppies, or in expansions of the non-recombining Y region, while Y-linked

modifier loci that affect aggregate traits may well play an important role.

Introduction

Colouration is an important morphological character in many species. It has the potential to greatly influence how an organism interacts with its environment via thermoregulation, UV protection [1–3],with other species via aposematism, mimicry and crypsis [4–7] and with conspecifics via intra- and intersexual selection [8,9]. Moreover, some colour phenotypes under sexual selection can incur significant metabolic production costs [10,11] or increased predation risks due to increased conspicuousness [12,13]. In these cases, the costs affect both sexes, but only one sex gains a mating advantage, resulting in sexual conflict [14,15]. In these cases, colour traits are likely to be dimorphic when the genetic architecture can be separated between females and males [15].

One important way to establish separate male and female genetic architecture, and thereby resolve sexual conflict, is Y-linkage. Moreover, sexual conflict is thought to accelerate the evolution of the Y chromosome and its divergence from the X [16] when a sexually antagonistic allele is in close linkage with the sex-determining (Y) locus. In males, this will lead selection against recombinants to maintain linkage, ultimately resulting in a non-recombining Y chromosome region [17–19]. Theoretical models [16,17] predict an accumulation of sexually antagonistic genes on Y chromosomes, particularly in nascent sex chromosome systems before large-scale gene loss has occurred.

Male guppies (*Poecilia reticulata*) are brightly coloured and highly variable in their patterning [20]. These patterns are composed of spots and bars that can be categorized into three types of ornament, orange and red carotenoid and pterin ornaments, melanic black ornaments, and green and blue ornaments due to structural colours [21,22]. In contrast females lack any

of these ornaments and are instead a uniform colour. Although colouration leads to

increased predation [23], male guppy colouration is the result of sexual selection, with

females showing a preference for more colourful, brightly patterned males [20,21,24–26].

Guppies face fewer predators in the upper reaches of the streams and in these more recently

colonised upstream populations, guppies have evolved more conspicuous colouration due

to increased female preference [27,28]. Male guppy colouration is therefore a sexually

antagonistic trait, being selectively disadvantageous via predation if it were found in

females, but being sexually advantageous for males.

Previous work has suggested that a sizable proportion of guppy male colouration is Y-

linked, and a summary by Lindholm and Breden (2002) identified 16 male ornament

characters as fully Y-linked, 24 that recombine between the X and Y and two that are X

linked. Indeed, Y-linkage of male colour traits has been suggested as a main factor in the

evolution of recombination suppression between the sex chromosomes in this system [29].

However, as Lindholm and Breden (2002) point out, much of the evidence for this Y-linkage

has come from studies on phenotypes not typically found in the wild [30,31], or from studies

that do not or cannot account for potential for variation in female sensitivity to hormone

treatments [31–33], and/or from studies using aggregate measures of total colour area rather

than specific ornaments [21,33,34]. Moreover, ornaments have traditionally been identified

and delineated by hand, leading to the potential for human bias if samples are not analysed

blind to parentage or place of origin [35] , even though computational methods now make it

possible to extract pixels automatically, without the potential for human bias.

Here we developed a pipeline for high resolution image analysis of male guppy colour

patterns. We use this pipeline along with two datasets from our outbred stock population

derived from the Quare river system to; i) identify and characterize male colour ornaments

agnostically with computational clustering methods, ii) determine how these ornaments

relate to each other, and iii) use pedigreed families to compare and contrast inheritance

patterns and possible Y-linkage of both individual ornament phenotypes and aggregate

pattern phenotypes of total colour areas .

Methods

Our stock population of guppies originates from the Quare River in Trinidad, originally

collected in 1998 and subsequently maintained in large numbers (>500) in benign freely-

mating conditions [36]. We established pedigrees from this population by pairing four

males and virgin females randomly in the first generation. We then paired offspring in

subsequent generations from different families to maximise the number of grandparents in

each brood, to minimize inbreeding which can make it difficult to differentiate different

modes of inheritance, and to help increase the diversity of different phenotypes segregating

in different families. This led to a minimum of six great-grandparents per family in

generation three (see Supplementary Fig. 1). In all, our pedigree stretched across three

generations and 19 crosses, and produced 214 male offspring across 15 generations two and

three (average per family = 14). We maintained both the stock population and pedigree

families on a 12:12 light cycle at 26C and fed a standard hobby guppy diet and artemia daily.

Imaging

We photographed males from the controlled pedigrees, described above, as well as 171

males taken from the main stock population and not used in pedigrees as a population

baseline for ornamentation. For all males, fish were photographed as soon as possible after

sexual maturation in a specially designed tank (photarium) with internal dimensions of

Length 100mm x Width 100mm x Depth 20mm. Photos were taken with a tripod-mounted

Canon EOS 100D and an 18-55m lens, using ISO 400, shutter speed 1/640 and F4.5. Lighting

was standardized using a Polaroid PLLED312 312 LED light set to 5600K on full power. The

standardized photographic conditions limited the need for pre-processing normalisation,

however, we used the R function histMatch() from the RStoolbox package [37] to correct the

small amount of variation we did observe in brightness . In addition, we also used the R

function focal() from the Raster package [38] to slightly blur images for downstream colour

block extraction, thereby eliminating any potential problems with glare or reflectance.

Following pre-processing, we cropped each photo to a 1801x931 (XY) pixel image using

custom functions. We then employed the k-means clustering algorithm used by the R base

function kmeans(), which partitions the image based on the RGB values of pixels into k

clusters, so that the sum of squares from pixels to the assigned cluster RGB centres is

minimized. Each image was partitioned using both $k=20$ and $k=40$, so that the image was

split into 20 or 40 clusters of different pixels. With images now split into k clusters of

different colours, we were able to separate and extract pixels from orange and black

ornaments.

For each of the two types of ornaments we extracted ornaments from the *k*-image that gave

the most distinct and defined ornaments. Although we used *k*-means images to reduce the

complexity of the colour on the fish to ease pixel selection, we did however extract the

original RGB values from the non *k*-means image.

Following the extraction of the ornament pixels for each fish, we placed 99 equally spaced

semi-landmarks around the body outlines (ignoring both caudal, dorsal and other fins) in

the original photos using the TPS suite [39,40]. We used the gpagen() function from the

Geomorph package [41] to calculate the mean shape of the 171 male fish from the main

population, and used this as the reference shape against which the images of extracted

orange ornaments from all pedigree males were aligned. This alignment was done using

Thin Plate Spline warping as implemented by the computeTransform() and

applyTransform() functions from the package r/Morpho [42]. See supplementary fig. 1 for

pipeline overview.

Defining ornaments and ornament inheritance

After aligning the orange and black extracted images of all 171 males from the stock

population, we had RGB scores for each pixel in each fish. We then used these data to define

and delimit the male ornaments in our stock population. Pixels were marked as ornamental

(being part of an ornament) based on the proportion of presence across fish. For a pixel to be

marked as ornamental it had to be found in black> 11% of all assayed fish for orange pixels

and > 10% of all assayed fish for black pixels. This slightly higher threshold for orange

pigmentation was needed in order to separate orange ornaments CII and CIII which were

otherwise joined by a few black pixels (Fig 1a; 1b). We then used the function hclust() to

cluster pixels into a predefined number of distinct groups, defined as ornaments. For orange

ornaments we used a predefined number of 4 ornaments, as this was very clearly the

number of distinct black regions found in fish. For black ornaments we tested clustering

using 6,7 and 8 ornaments, with one of the black regions being the eye. From these results, it

was clear that there were five main patches of black pigmentation, plus the eye and one very

small region that we did not consider in downstream analyses. From this we were able to

measure the minimum and maximum XY coordinates or four orange and five black

ornaments, and determine the size, hue and saturation of each of these ornaments in each

individual.

To better understand the correlational relationships among ornaments which we term

modulation, we calculated Pearson's correlations between ornaments for size (where

ornaments with 10 pixels or less were marked as NA) and saturation in R using the rcorr()

function from the package *Hmisc* [43]. We also calculated Spearman's correlations for

presence/absence (with ornaments with 10 pixels or less marked as absent).

With the ornaments we defined from our stock populations, we used functions from the R

packages pedigreemm, sommer, and MCMCglmm [44–47] to estimate heritability for size

(the number of pixels) and presence/absence for individual ornaments from our pedigrees.

For size, heritability was calculated using the raw data for each ornament (in the number of

pixels) for all fish that had that ornament, and with fish missing that ornament marked as

NA. A matrix with the relatedness between all individuals in the pedigree was calculated

using the functions pedigree() and getA(). We then used the mmer() function to fit a

univariate mixed effect model to estimate heritability, with a random effect - 'animal', which

is linked to the relatedness matrix included in the model formula (ornament.size ~

(1|animal)). For binary presence/absence data, we used a threshold of 10 pixels for presence

with all sizes smaller than this marked as absent. We used the function *MCMCglmm*() to

estimate heritability as implemented for binary traits [48]. We used *MCMCglmm*() for binary

traits as it has been found to be more reliable for binary data than other methods available

[49]. We used the priors (R = list(V = 1, fix = 1), G = list(G1 = list(V = 1, nu = 1000, alpha.mu =

0, alpha.V = 1) with the residual variance fixed to 1 as recommended for binary data [48],

and used a burnin of 100000 and the number of iterations set to 2500000.

Strength of Y-effects on ornamentation

We examined the effects of any possible Y-linked loci on total orange area and total black

area, by looking at the relationship between the phenotypes of our generation three

offspring and the phenotypes of their paternal and maternal grandfathers. Because the Y

chromosome is passed down the patriline, grandsons will have the Y of their paternal

grandfathers but not their maternal grandfathers. Therefore, we can hypothesise that if there

are Y linked loci effecting total black or black area, then the slope of the paternal grandfather

total black or black area, should be greater than the slope of maternal grandfather phenotype

on male total black or black area.

Unfortunately, as we were unable to photograph and phenotype the grandfathers of our

generation two offspring with our phenotype analysis pipeline. For this analysis we

therefore have a smaller sample of 73 generation three offspring from seven families. We

carried out analyses of both maternal and paternal effects for both total orange area and total

black area, using mmer(). As per our heritability analysis we used a random effect - 'animal',

which is linked to a relatedness matrix, and which controls for relatedness between

individuals. We also included a fixed effect, which was either the maternal or paternal

grandfathers phenotype. From the coefficients of this model we then have the slope of these

grandfather phenotypes (paternal and maternal) on both total orange and black area in our

generation three offspring. By comparing these slopes we can then see whether there is

therefore evidence of any Y effect loci. The formula of this analysis was: (total orange/black

area ~ Pat/Mat-GF phenotype + (1|animal)).

Results

Following Thin Plate Spline alignment of orange and melanin extracted images, we

identified four orange (CI = CIV) and five black ornaments (MI – MV, Fig. 1) found in our

stock population. Although all orange ornaments overlapped with at least one black

ornament, the overlap regions were small with 59% of potential ornament pixels in Fig 1.

Orange (blackblack), 35% black (black), and only 6% both (grey).

We determined correlations among ornaments in terms of size and saturation to understand

the genetic relationship among different modules in our stock population. We observed

positive correlations for both size and presence/absence among many of the orange

ornaments (Fig. 2A, Table 1 below the diagonal, supplementary table 1). This result suggests

there may be modifier loci that globally affect the size of orange ornaments found in males,

and thus also the total amount of orange pigmentation. Many previous studies that have

thus used the total orange (or 'black') area as a trait would therefore have been at least in

part measuring the heritability or inheritance of these loci rather than any loci related to the

presence or absence of any individual ornament. In contrast, correlations in size between

adjacent orange and black ornaments were found to generally be negative (Fig 2B, Table 1,

Supplementary table 2). This perhaps indicates epistatic interactions between loci controlling

black ornaments, with loci or alleles that increase size in one ornament, seemingly reducing

the size of others that are adjacent. Alternatively, it may reflect that where orange and black

ornaments overlap, only the black area is visible. Correlations in size between orange and

black ornaments (average = -0.019) are far lower than between ornaments of the same colour

(orange average = 0.21, black average = 0.091, Table 1).

We also determined the correlation in saturation among ornaments (Table 1 above the

diagonal, Supplementary table 3). For both black and orange pigmentation, we observed

generally positive correlations in saturation between adjacent ornaments of the same

pigmentation type. Thus again, ornaments in the same pathway do not appear to be entirely

independent of each other, suggesting that modifier loci perhaps control saturation levels

affecting multiple ornaments simultaneously. As with size, the correlation in saturation

between orange and black ornaments was on average much lower (average = 0.175) than

between ornaments of the same colour (orange average = 0.47, black average = 0.305, Table

1), suggesting that modifier loci do not transcend biochemical pathways to affect both

ornament types.

We used our pedigreed males to investigate the pattern of inheritance from father to son

(Table 2). Where an ornaments presence or absence is exclusively under the control of the Y-

chromosome all male offspring of a male will share their father's phenotype. However, in

cases where the presence or absence of an ornament is genetically partially or fully under

the control of a locus or loci of autosomal, X or pseudoautsomal origin, sons will frequently

have different phenotypes than their fathers. Our results show that no ornament displays

the inheritance pattern expected for a purely male specific Y-linked trait. For two ornaments

(OII and BV), we observe a majority of male offspring have the opposite phenotype to their

father. Overall these results suggest that individual orange and black ornaments are not

generally linked to the Y chromosome in our population.

For presence/absence, mean heritability was roughly similar for orange ornaments (0.539)

and black ornaments (0.410), and most ornaments show high heritability except for

ornaments OIII and BI (Table 3). In contrast, heritability for total area differed markedly

between orange (0.678) and black (0.038) ornaments.

Our analysis of paternal and maternal grandfather effects identified a strong relationship

between offspring total orange area and paternal grandfather total orange area (Coeff. =

0.807). However, the relationship between offspring total black area and maternal

grandfather total black area was much weaker (Coeff. = 0.232). This indicates that there may

indeed be Y-linked modifier loci that affect total orange area in guppies. This is consistent

with our previous analyses which show positive correlations in size among orange

ornaments. We also found a strong positive relationship between offspring total black area

and paternal grandfather total black area (Coeff. = 0.452). In contrast there is a negative

relationship between offspring total black area and maternal grandfather total black area

(Coeff. = -0.214). Again, this result suggests that Y-linked modifier loci do indeed affect the

total black area in guppies, just as they appear to affect total orange area too.

Discussion

Our study uses high resolution image analysis to define individual ornaments without human bias in order to examine inheritance patterns across a dataset of 214 offspring from 19 families. By computationally clustering pixels automatically to define individual ornaments without bias [35], we provide a comprehensive and agnostic diagnostic method for colouration patterning in a semi-natural outbred population. Using this method, we identified four orange and five black ornaments (Fig. 1) in our population that we then used to study modulation, heritability and mode of inheritance. We find, somewhat surprisingly, that loci controlling the presence and absence of these ornaments are not Y-linked, despite previous studies finding evidence of Y-linkage. However, in contrast to these presence/absence loci, we do find evidence of Y-linked modifier loci that affect aggregate phenotypes like total orange and total black area.

Modulation of ornamentation

The colourful ornaments found in animals are often treated as independent phenotypes, with the relationships among different ornaments less well considered [50]. However, in many cases the functions of these ornaments are not independent, but as whole patterns in conjunction [51]. Furthermore, some ornaments, particularly those that share the same biochemical basis, may have shared aspects of genetic architecture through the pathways that control them, and so treating them as individual units may not always be appropriate.

The colour patterns of guppies are used as a sexual signal. It has been proposed that such signals might be made more conspicuous, and therefore attractive to females, by greater differences between adjacent patches of colour [50]. If this is the case for guppies, we might

expect selection for linkage between adjacent black and orange patches. We tested this by

examining correlations in presence and absence between different male ornaments (Table 1).

Although we found some strong positive correlations for size within ornaments of the same

colour, there was little correlation among adjacent ornaments of different colours

(supplementary table 2). Our results therefore do not provide evidence of linkage between

adjacent and contrasting male ornaments in our population of guppies.

Our analysis does though provide several lines of evidence that guppy ornaments of the

same colour are not entirely independent of each other. Interestingly, orange and black

ornaments displayed different genetic characteristics, with high heritability for size (Table 3)

and high correlations in size (Table 1, Fig 2) between many of the orange ornaments, but not

black ornaments. However, for both black and orange pigmentation, we observed generally

positive correlations in saturation between adjacent ornaments of the same pigmentation

type (Table 1). In addition, for both orange and black, we find evidence of Y-linked modifier

loci that globally affect total amount of orange and black pigmentation. Altogether, this

provides support for the idea that ornaments in the same biochemical pathway are not

entirely independent of each other, with global modifier loci affecting saturation levels and

total size for multiple ornaments simultaneously, while other independent loci encode for

the presence or absence of individual ornaments.

Sex linkage

Many guppy colour traits have been shown to be Y-linked, reviewed by Lindholm and

Breden [52] and Kottler and Schartl [53]. However, much of this work has either been done

on ornaments in domestic guppy breeds and therefore unlikely to be found in the wild

[30,31], or on composite traits, such as aggregate colour area [21,32,33]. We assessed the

potential for Y-linkage in individual ornaments from our semi-natural populations under

the expectation that any Y-linked ornament displayed by a father would be also present in

all his sons. However, we did not observe Y inheritance patterns for presence or absence of

any single one of our nine ornaments. This suggests that individual male colour patterns in

guppies from our population are not Y-linked. This is also reflected in the heritability for

presence/absence of these ornaments, with more than half of ornaments with heritability

<0.5. Even for the ornaments inherited with the highest heritability (CIV), 9.7% of offspring

males display a different phenotype to their father.

Recent studies have suggested that the guppy Y chromosome is divided into a relatively

small region where recombination between the X and Y never occurs [54–57], and a larger

adjacent region where recombination is rare, occurring in between 1% and 0.1% of males

[55,58,59]. However, because the vast majority of recombination in males is confined to the

telomeric ends of the sex chromosome, nearly the entire chromosome is passed on as a Y

chromosome in >99% of male offspring. Therefore, rare X-Y recombination events cannot

explain the difference between paternal and filial phenotypes we observe in our ornaments.

These results are at first perplexing in light of previous work, and there are several potential

explanations. First, it is possible that our population has lost Y-linkage of ornaments in the

>20 years since it was collected from the wild. However, we think this is not terribly likely

given the large size of the founding colony and the fact that it has been maintained as an

outbred, freely mating population ever since. Both of these strategies have maintained

genetic diversity and avoided potential bottlenecks. Moreover, Y-linkage has been observed

in other lab and inbred populations [21,60], and it is not clear how Y-linkage would erode.

Second, considerable variation in perceived Y-linkage exists among wild Trinidadian

populations [61], with notable differences between high predation and low predation

populations in particular [32,33,55,62]. It is therefore possible that difference between our

results and others may simply be due to differences between populations. Although we also

think this is unlikely given that the Quare population upon which our stock population is

founded has been studied using aggregate methods, described below [33], it is however is

important for future studies to quantify Y-linkage of individual ornaments in multiple

different populations.

However, our results do perhaps make more sense when taken with our analysis of Y-

linkage of aggregate phenotypes total orange and total black area. These analyses did find

evidence of Y-linked modifier loci that globally affect the total amount of orange and black

pigmentation. Thus perhaps the most likely explanation for our perplexing results is that

although the presence or absence of individual ornaments are not often Y-linked in natural

populations, the Y chromosome does carry one or more modifier loci that affect many

ornaments in aggregate. Our results are therefore consistent with studies that have

characterized aggregate ornamental area, which often identify significant Y contributions.

For example, Postma *et al* [34] and Brooks and Endler [21] both identified significant levels

of Y-linked genetic variation when assessing total ornamental areas. Therefore when studies

use the total orange (or 'black') area as a trait they are in large part measuring the mode of

inheritance of these loci rather than any loci related to the presence or absence of any

individual ornament [21,33].

It may be that these Y-linked modifier loci works through a simple mechanism, such as

testosterone level or testosterone sensitivity, which has been shown to affect total ornament

area [31–33]. Indeed, the extensive variation exhibited in total ornament area among natural

[33] and introduced [32] populations hints at a simple genetic architecture, as the alternative

of rapid and repeated movement of many underlying genes to the relatively small Y

chromosome, is somewhat improbable. Given the importance of testosterone level and

sensitivity in fish growth rates, maturation and colouration [63–65], and the variation

observed in natural guppy populations in these traits [66], it is likely that testosterone and/or

testosterone sensitivity vary across populations, and this may interact with colouration. The

nature of these interactions, and the identification of the loci responsible for these Y-linked

effects remain interesting areas of future research.

Conclusion

Surprisingly, we did not observe inheritance patterns for presence and absence for any of

our nine ornaments that were consistent with Y-linkage. However, we did find evidence of

Y-linked modifier loci that affect the aggregate phenotypes of total orange and black area.

Given the results of our study, the Y-linkage of individual male colour traits may therefore

not be as important in the rapid evolution of colour changes in natural populations of

guppies [32] or in the expansions of the non-recombining Y region [67] as previously

thought. However, Y-linked modifier loci that affect aggregate traits may well play a role.

Alternatively other mechanisms to resolve sexual conflict, such as changes in gene

regulation [68] may alone be enough to explain colour dimorphism in this species.

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Fig 1. Male ornamentation. A) Heatmap showing the proportion of individuals from the full stock population with orange pigmentation at each pixel, B) Heatmap showing the proportion of individuals from the full stock population with black pigmentation at each pixel, with the eye masked, C) Mosaic plot showing the four orange and five black ornaments defined from the stock population.

Fig 2. Significant correlations for presence and absence among orange (A) and black (B) ornaments. Correlations are significant to P< 0.05.

Table 1. Strength of correlations for ornament size (below the diagonal) and saturation (above the diagonal) among orange and black ornaments. P-value <0.05 in bold

Ornament	OI	OII	OIII	OIV	BI	BII	BIII	BIV	BV
OI	-	**0.53**	**0.250**	-0.05	-0.05	0.07	-0.28	0.04	-0.24
OII	-0.21	-	**0.720**	**0.40**	0.01	-0.03	0.20	0.21	0.21
OIII	0.08	**0.19**	-	**0.41**	-0.01	0.03	0.21	0.17	0.02
OIV	-0.25	**0.28**	**0.23**	-	0.27	-0.10	0.13	-0.01	0.13
BI	-0.27	**-0.29**	-0.15	**0.34**	-	**0.35**	**0.37**	**0.41**	0.33
BII	0.13	0.12	0.01	-0.14	**-0.47**	-	0.21	**0.54**	**0.48**
BIII	-0.05	0.03	0.22	0.10	0.17	-0.24	-	**0.52**	**0.62**
BIV	0.05	**-0.44**	-0.14	-0.07	-0.14	0.02	-0.25	-	**0.57**
BV	-0.10	-0.24	-0.14	0.17	0.52	-0.03	0.12	0.24	-

 Table 2. Presence/absence and heritability across both fathers and sons for each ornament.

Ornament	OI	OII	OIII	OIV	BI	BII	BIII	BIV	BV	Total Or.	Total Bl.
Present	57%	89%	96%	57%	24%	98%	27%	64%	36%		
Same: different to father										-	-
Same as father	49%	44%	73%	90%	60%	87%	73%	52%	48%	-	-
h^2 (pres./abs)	0.669	0.456	0.255	0.776	0.121	0.414	0.519	0.581	0.414	-	-
h^2 (size)	0.508	0.461	0.459	0.484	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.186	0.000	0.678	0.038