

Height predicts jealousy differently for men and women

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Abstract

Because male height is associated with attractiveness, dominance, and reproductive success, taller men may be less jealous. And because female height has a curvilinear relationship with health and reproductive success (with average-height females having the advantages), female height may have a curvilinear relationship with jealousy. In Study 1, male height was found to be negatively correlated with self-reported global jealousy, whereas female height was curvilinearly related to jealousy, with average-height women reporting the lowest levels of jealousy. In Study 2, male height was found to be negatively correlated with jealousy in response to socially influential, physically dominant, and physically attractive rivals. Female height was negatively correlated with jealousy in response to physically attractive, physically dominant, and high-social-status rivals; in addition, quadratic effects revealed that approximately average-height women tend to be less jealous of physically attractive rivals but more jealous of rivals with “masculine” characteristics of physical dominance and social status.

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1. Introduction

Male stature is directly related to dominance and has a significant impact on reproductive success. Throughout the animal kingdom, larger males are more likely to win fights and to attain dominance (e.g., Goodall, 1986; McElligott et al., 2001; Schuett, 1997). Even the giraffe’s long neck—often cited as a classic example of an adaptation for survival—may have evolved in part to facilitate dominance competitions (Simmons & Scheepers, 1996). Thus, males in many species may, through dominance, obtain and monopolize access to females.

In humans, who walk upright, height is one of the first features that others notice and is associated with status. For instance, one study found that full professors were 0.47 in. taller than associate professors, who were 0.26 in. taller than assistant professors, who were 1.24 in. taller than the average

nonacademic (Hensley, 1993). The reproductive advantages of height for males are apparent in the female preference for taller males (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005; Pawlowski, 2003; Shepperd & Strathman, 1989). Indeed, taller men receive more replies to dating announcements (Pawlowski & Koziel, 2002), have more physically attractive girlfriends (Feingold 1982), and have more reproductive success (Mueller & Mazur, 2001; Nettle 2002a, 2002b; Pawlowski, Dunbar, & Lipowicz, 2000). Given that height is highly heritable (one recent estimate—in a study using the Danish Twin Registry—found heritability coefficients of .69 for men and .81 for women; Schousboe et al., 2004), females choosing tall males are more likely to have tall male offspring, who in turn would be preferred by females.

Underlining the greater attractiveness of taller males to females, there is evidence suggesting that height may serve as an indicator of good genes. First, there is evidence that height is correlated with cognitive abilities (Case & Paxson, 2006), which translates into higher wages (e.g., Judge & Cable, 2004; Loh, 1993). Second, paralleling other good-genes indicators (e.g., Gangestad, Simpson, Cousins, Garver-Apgar, & Christensen, 2004; Thornhill & Gangestad,

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1999), women desire a larger partner-to-self height discrepancy when they are in the fertile phase of the ovulatory cycle and when they are considering partners for a short-term relationship (Pawlowski & Jasienska, 2005). In addition, male height has been found to be correlated with physical health and with morphological symmetry (Manning, 1995; Silventoinen, Lahelma, & Rahkonen, 1999). There is some evidence that shorter people may live longer than taller people if environmental factors are compatible with a small body size (e.g., Samaras, Harold, & Storms, 2003; Weeden & Sabini, 2005). However, this does not contradict the evidence that height indicates good genes for men, as height could contribute to fitness at reproductive ages while imposing costs at later ages.

In the present research, we examined the relationship between height and jealousy. Jealousy is an emotional and motivational response that has been hypothesized to serve the function of protecting the pair bond from rivals (Buunk, Massar, & Dijkstra, 2007; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982). Like many evolved mechanisms, jealousy is expected to be functionally flexible: It is a costly response that should be activated most strongly when it is most functional, such as when it may reduce the likelihood of losing the mate or—in the case of males—the likelihood of investing in another's male's offspring due to infidelity of the mate. Height may plausibly influence male jealousy via two routes. First, given the association between height and attractiveness, partners of taller males may have fewer reasons to cheat, reducing the need for mate-guarding and jealousy. Second, given the association between height and dominance, taller males may more successfully deter rivals, reducing the need for mate-guarding and jealousy.

For women, the relationship between height and jealousy may be different because it seems that women of medium height seem to be the healthiest and most attractive to men. Very short and very tall women are more prone to illnesses than women of average height (Silventoinen et al., 1999), and very tall women are also more likely to develop depression symptoms (Bruinsma et al., 2006). Men consistently tend to prefer women who are shorter than they are, although not too short (Pawlowski, 2003; Pawlowski & Koziel, 2002), and shorter women tend to be more symmetrical (Manning, 1995). Indeed, women of approximately average height have higher reproductive success (Nettle, 2002b). The apparent curvilinear relationship between female height and attractiveness to males would suggest that there would also be a curvilinear relationship between women's height and jealousy. Therefore, we hypothesized that women of around average height may be least jealous and that women who are increasingly taller or shorter than average may be more jealous.

Nevertheless, there is reason to assume that there will also be a negative linear relationship between jealousy and height among women because height may affect women's fighting ability and dominance. The importance of physical fights in competition among women has often been underestimated,

but it does exist. In a study of polygynous societies, Burbank (1987) observed that co-wives may intrasexually compete for food and money, paternal care for their offspring, and offspring's inheritance. In 61% of the 137 cultures she analyzed, women engaged in physical aggression, typically fighting with other women over men.

Study 1 was a preliminary investigation in which we used a global measure of jealousy for a first test of our hypotheses. In testing these hypotheses, we also examined the effect of body mass index (BMI). BMI is negatively related to both men's and women's attractiveness as potential partners (Kurzman & Weeden, 2005), is heritable (Allison et al., 1996), and is related to health and reproductive success, especially among women (e.g., Pawlowski & Dunbar, 2005). Thus one might expect that women with higher BMI would be more jealous.

2. Study 1

2.1. Methods

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

We used a sample of 100 men and 100 women described by Buunk (1997) in an article reporting distinct hypotheses and results not mentioned here. Participants were heterosexual individuals in close relationships recruited through an announcement on Dutch national television. Because more women than men responded, Buunk (1997) created matched samples for men and women using a random sampling procedures (for additional details about this sample, see Buunk, 1997). The mean age was 33 years (range, 15–76). The average heights were, for men, mean=180.74 cm (range, 164–200; S.D.=7.98), and for women, mean=168.19 cm (range, 152–184, S.D.=7.02). We also computed BMIs.

2.1.2. Measures

Global jealousy was assessed with a single question: "In general, how jealous are you in your current relationship?" The possible responses were (1) "not jealous," (2) "hardly jealous," (3) "a little bit jealous," (4) "quite jealous," (5) "very jealous," and (6) "morbidly jealous." Men (mean=3.05, S.D.=1.51) and women (mean=3.37, S.D.=1.51) did not differ in their responses ($p=.14$). In addition, we assessed individuals' perceptions of their partner's extrapair sexual interest with the following question: "To what extent do you think your partner is sexually interested in individuals of the opposite sex?" (1=not at all, 5=very much). Men (mean=1.92, S.D.=.94) and women (mean=2.13, S.D.=1.07) did not differ in their responses ($p=.16$).

2.2. Results and discussion

Regression analyses were used to test for linear and quadratic effects. Among men (Fig. 1), there was a negative linear relationship between height and jealousy [$F(1,98)=4.73$, $r=-.22$, $p=.032$] but no quadratic relationship [$F(2,97)=2.40$, $p=.096$]. Among women (Fig. 2), there was

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