

# Perceptions of paternal resemblance predict family violence

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## Abstract

Fifty-five men participating in a domestic violence treatment program agreed to complete a questionnaire and rate the degree to which their children looked like them. Ratings of paternal resemblance were positively correlated with the self-reported quality of the men's relationships with their children and inversely proportional to the severity of injuries suffered by their spouses. Analogous results were also found for the men's experience with their parents. We suggest that these results reflect men's use of paternal resemblance to assess paternity. © 2000 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

Because of the impact of cuckoldry, males have developed a variety of paternal assurance tactics to increase the probability that the children they invest resources in are their own (Daly & Wilson, 1982; Pagel, 1997; Regalski & Gaulin, 1993). As would be expected, males invest less in stepchildren (Anderson, Kaplan, Lam, & Lancaster, 1999; Marlowe, 1999), and in many cases, are more likely to abuse stepchildren (Daly & Wilson, 1996). Other studies have shown that abuse, both physical and sexual, is more likely when children reside with a stepparent (e.g., Wilson, Daly, & Weghorst, 1980). But these are cases in which the child obviously was from a previous union. What is the effect on the child if paternity is uncertain? To quote Daly and Wilson (1998, p. 44), "In

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principle, there are two broad classes of paternity cues available to doubtful fathers: those reflecting the likelihood of female infidelity around the time of conception, and those manifested by the offspring themselves, who may or may not resemble the putative father or his relatives.”

Gender differences in sexual jealousy are well documented (Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Geary, Rumsey, Bow-Thomas, & Hoard, 1995; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993). Males are more likely to become upset or angry at the thought of the female partner having intercourse with another man, while females become more upset at the prospect of emotional infidelity (Buss, Larsen, & Westen, 1992). In spite of the fact that men are more likely to commit adultery, nearly twice as many men as women (51% and 27%, respectively) considered adultery by their spouses to be a major factor in their divorces (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Buckle, Gallup, and Rodd (1996), utilizing a sample of over 1.7 million people, also showed that men were almost twice as likely as women to petition for divorce on the grounds of suspected infidelity. In fact, penal laws in different cultures around the world show a striking double standard in the punishment of adultery (Daly et al., 1982). Men are sometimes (e.g., Brazil) given the right to kill adulterous wives without fear of intervention or punishment. This is rarely if ever true of wives who are betrayed.

Daly and Wilson (1982) recorded spontaneous remarks in maternity wards about the appearance of the newborn child. Mothers, friends, and relatives were more likely to comment on how children resemble their fathers than their mother or any other family member. When fathers displayed any doubt, the mothers quickly reassured them of the child's resemblance. In one instance, the potential father informed hospital staff that if the child resembled a former boyfriend (who was of a different race), he would not support the child. The mother of this child was reported to be quite worried about its appearance. Nevertheless, whether human fathers adjust their investments in relation to resemblance is unknown (Daly & Wilson, 1998).

This study attempts to investigate the relationship between the perception of paternal resemblance, spouse abuse, and child abuse among convicted spouse abusers.

## 2. Methods

The subjects consisted of 55 men convicted of spouse abuse who were referred to the Men's Opportunity Program at the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center in Glens Falls, New York. This program was developed in cooperation with the local criminal and family court systems and domestic violence prevention agencies in the surrounding communities. The program consists of a screening appointment, a number of group meetings that require weekly homework assignments and open discussion. After completion of the course, the client is encouraged to attend further group sessions.

Upon their initial screening session, the men were instructed to fill out a survey regarding demographic variables (race, religion, income, etc.) and respond to the Abusive Behavior Inventory, a 30-item questionnaire developed to measure violent behavior and distinguish abusive from non-abusive relationships (Shepard & Campbell, 1992).

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