



Men with more masculine digit ratios are partnered with more attractive women



Berenika Kuna*, Andrzej Galbarczyk

Department of Environmental Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Jagiellonian University Medical College, 20 Grzegorzeczka St., 31-351 Krakow, Poland

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ABSTRACT

The low 2nd to 4th digit ratio (2D:4D) is thought to reflect higher prenatal exposure to testosterone and may be associated with higher testosterone levels in adulthood and higher reproductive success in males. However, there is little evidence that higher testosterone levels are directly responsible for higher male fertility. Here, we investigate if this phenomenon may be related to mate choice, and, in particular, if males with lower 2D:4D are partnered with more attractive and potentially more fertile women. We compared waist-to-hip ratio and breast size of 50 women from two groups, depending on the 2D:4D (more masculine, more feminine) of their actual partner. Moreover, we examined the relationship between men's digit ratio and their mate's body type. Men with more masculine 2D:4D were coupled with women with significantly lower waist-to-hip ratios. They were also four times more often partnered with women who had both relatively narrow waists and large breasts. These findings suggest that levels of sex steroids during fetal development in males may have long-lasting influences on their mating value. This is the first study to show relationships between men's intrauterine environment, reflected by 2D:4D, and their actual partners' anthropometric traits, linked to perceived attractiveness and potential fertility.

1. Introduction

The ratio of 2nd to 4th digit length (2D:4D) is a putative indicator of intrauterine hormonal environment, which may affect phenotype and health risks in individuals (Manning, Scutt, Wilson, & Lewis-Jones, 1998). Low 2D:4D (longer 4th finger) ratios is thought to reflect higher exposure to testosterone in utero (Lutchmaya, Baron-Cohen, Raggatt, Knickmeyer, & Manning, 2004; Manning & Fink, 2017). A low 2D:4D in men has also been linked with their higher reproductive success (Klimek, Galbarczyk, Nenko, Alvarado, & Jasienska, 2014; Manning & Fink, 2008), though the mechanisms driving this correlation still remain unclear. Although more masculine 2D:4D among men has been linked with higher testosterone levels in adulthood (García-Cruz, Hugué, Piqueras, Ribal, & Alcaraz, 2012; Klimek et al., 2014), there is no evidence for direct correlation between testosterone levels and male fertility (Gomendio, Malo, Garde, & Roldan, 2007).

The higher reproductive success of men with lower 2D:4D may be explained by their higher physical attractiveness (Bogaert, Fawcett, & Jamieson, 2009), which may increase their value as mates. Men with lower 2D:4D exhibit greater development of sexually dimorphic traits, such as facial masculinity (Fink et al., 2005; Weinberg, Parsons, Raffensperger, & Marazita, 2015) and height (Fink, Neave, & Manning,

2003), making them appear more masculine. They also demonstrate greater facial symmetry (Fink, Manning, Neave, & Grammer, 2004). All of these traits are considered indicators of biological quality and are perceived as attractive by women (Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005). Higher attractiveness of men with lower 2D:4D may explain why they have more sexual partners (Hönekopp, Voracek, & Manning, 2006).

For men, higher reproductive success may be also associated with the higher biological quality of their partners. If men with more masculine digit ratios have traits that signal their good quality as mates, then they may be more likely to attract women who also possess features that indicate they are high-quality mating partners.

In Western cultures, female attractiveness assessment includes mainly waist and breast size as cues of youthfulness, health status, and reproductive capability (Dixson, Duncan, & Dixson, 2015; Singh, 2002). These features also correlate to estrogen and progesterone levels, crucial for facilitating conception and maintaining a pregnancy (Gorkemli, Ak, Akyurek, Aktan, & Duman, 2004; Lipson & Ellison, 1996). Women who are characterized by both relatively narrow waists and large breasts have the highest reproductive potential (Jasienska, Ziomkiewicz, Ellison, Lipson, & Thune, 2004).

Therefore, if men with more masculine 2D:4D are more likely to be in a relationship with women who have narrow waists and large

* Corresponding author at: Institute of Public Health, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Grzegorzeczka 20, 31–351 Krakow, Poland.
E-mail address: berenika.kuna@gmail.com (B. Kuna).

breasts, this could explain the previously demonstrated correlation between men's digit ratio and their reproductive success. We hypothesized that men's fetal hormonal environments (reflected by 2D:4D), and their associated attractiveness, may enhance their chance of mating with more attractive and presumably more fertile women.

2. Material and methods

We analyzed data from a sample of 50 heterosexual couples ($N = 100$ individuals). The mean age of the men was 24.0 years ($SD = 3.19$) and the mean age of the women was 22.2 years ($SD = 2.30$). The average length of relationship was 27 months ($SD = 24.6$). All women were nulliparous and did not use hormonal contraception. Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Finger length in men was measured twice with a caliper, directly on the ventral surface of the both hands from basal crease to the fingertip, according to a standard protocol (Klimek et al., 2014; Manning et al., 1998), by the same researcher. The mean of the two measurements was used in analyses to minimize measurement errors. 2D:4D values obtained for left hand varied from 0.97 to 1.05 ($Me = 0.97$, $SD = 0.03$) and for right hand: 0.98 to 1.08 ($Me = 0.98$, $SD = 0.03$). Men were divided into two groups: those with more masculine, lower 2D:4D (< 1), and those with more feminine, higher 2D:4D (≥ 1), following previously published studies (Klimek et al., 2014; Manning et al., 1998). Respectively to differentiation in methodology accepted in study on 2D:4D, all analyses were re-ran with 2D:4D as continuous variable (Galís, Ten Broek, Van Dongen, & Wijnaendts, 2010).

Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) in women was calculated as a proportion of waist circumference measured at the narrowest point (about 2 cm above navel) to hip circumference, measured at the widest point of the hips. Relative breast size was assessed by the bust-to-underbust ratio (BUR), calculated as proportion of bust circumference (the largest circumference around the chest) to the circumference obtained under bust. Since women who are characterized by both relatively narrow waists and large breasts have a higher potential fertility (Jasienska et al., 2004), using median values of WHR ($Me = 0.72$) and BUR ($Me = 1.15$) we divided women into two groups, according to their body type: "women with both relatively narrow waists and large breasts" and "other body types."

The difference in partners WHR and BUR values between groups of men with low and high digit ratio was assessed with an unpaired t -test and with analyses of covariance (ANCOVA), with length of relationship as a potential confounder. Additionally, analyses were repeated with right- and left-hand 2D:4D as a continuous variable in simple linear regression analysis and in multiple linear regression, with length of relationship as a potential confounder. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between men's 2D:4D and women body type.

3. Results

There was a statistically significant difference in partner's WHR between men with more masculine vs. more feminine 2D:4D ($t_{(48)} = 5.14$, $p < 0.001$ for right-hand and $t_{(48)} = 2.69$, $p < 0.01$ for left-hand 2D:4D) (Table 1). Women partnered with men with lower digit ratios had significantly narrower waists in relation to their hips (lower WHR). There was no statistically significant difference in BUR between the two groups of men with lower and higher digit ratios ($t_{(48)} = -1.27$, $p = 0.44$ for right-hand and $t_{(48)} = -0.77$, $p = 0.21$ for left-hand 2D:4D). After controlling for length of relationship the results remained unchanged; women partnered with men with more masculine 2D:4D had significantly lower WHR ($F_{(1, 47)} = 26.22$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.36$ for right-hand and $F_{(1, 47)} = 7.15$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$ for left-hand 2D:4D) but they did not differ in BUR ($F_{(1, 47)} = 1.81$, $p = 0.185$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$ for right-hand and $F_{(1, 47)} = 0.65$,

$p = 0.424$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$ for left-hand 2D:4D).

When we re-ran all analyses with 2D:4D as a continuous variable we observed that male 2D:4D was positively related to their partner WHR ($r^2 = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$ for right-hand and $r^2 = 0.08$, $p = 0.04$ for left-hand 2D:4D). No statistically significant relationships were observed between male digit ratio and their partner BUR ($r^2 = 0.05$, $p = 0.13$ for right-hand and $r^2 = 0.01$, $p = 0.46$ for left-hand 2D:4D). After controlling for length of relationship, male 2D:4D was also positively related to their partner WHR ($p < 0.001$ for right-hand and $p = 0.04$ for left-hand 2D:4D), but not to their partner BUR ($p = 0.16$ for right-hand and $p = 0.65$ for left-hand 2D:4D).

The relationship between male right-hand digit ratio and partner's body type was significant ($\chi^2_{(1, N = 50)} = 4.77$, $p = 0.03$, $\phi_c = 0.31$). Men with lower right-hand 2D:4D were more likely to be partnered with women with both relatively narrow waists and large breasts (41%) than men with higher 2D:4D (11%). This relationship was similar (37% vs. 13%), but was not statistically significant for left-hand digit ratio ($\chi^2_{(1, N = 50)} = 2.83$, $p = 0.09$, $\phi_c = 0.24$). These results are compatible with a notion that right-hand 2D:4D is more sensitive to the effects of fetal testosterone levels (Hönekopp & Watson, 2010).

4. Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine relationships between male's 2D:4D, a proxy of prenatal testosterone levels, and indicators of attractiveness of their actual mate. Previous studies have shown that men with more masculine digit ratios have more children (Klimek et al., 2014) and the reason for this phenomenon may be explained by our results.

The evolutionary psychology of human mating predicts that men with high mating value should be partnered, especially in long-term relationships, with women also characterized by high mating value (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men with more masculine digit ratios are perceived as more attractive (Bogaert et al., 2009). They also possess some observable indicators of higher biological quality, such as greater facial symmetry, and therefore higher mating value for women (Fink et al., 2004). That may explain the results presented here, that men with more masculine digit ratios are partnered with women characterized by more attractive body shape, such as a low WHR, and four times more often than men with more feminine digit ratio are partnered with women who have both relatively narrow waists and large breasts.

For men, one of the most important factors in assessing a mate is their reproductive value (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Waist-to-hip ratio and breast size are both indicators of women's reproductive value. Women with low WHR and women who are characterized by both relatively narrow waists and large breasts have a higher potential fertility, as indicated by higher levels of reproductive hormones (Jasienska et al., 2004). Eye-tracking studies have shown that, during evaluation of female body attractiveness, men focus mainly on the waist and breast areas, which deliver honest signals about a woman's reproductive status (Dixson, Grimshaw, Linklater, & Dixson, 2011). A narrower waist in relation to wider hips is a visual sign of nulliparity, healthiness and youthfulness (Singh & Singh, 2011). Numerous historical and cross-cultural studies have shown that low WHR may be considered a universal indicator of women's attractiveness and their high mate value (for review see Singh, 2002). The significance of breast size is much more uncertain. Larger breasts may be a sign of age, sexual maturity, and nurturing ability; however, mainly in Western cultures they are considered a sign of attractiveness (Dixson et al., 2015; Galbarczyk, 2011). Therefore, larger breasts cannot be considered a universal indicator of a woman's mate value. WHR also seems to be a better predictor of reproductive potential than breast size (Jasienska et al., 2004). Considering these factors, it is not surprising that we failed to find a direct significant association between men's digit ratio and their partner's breast size.

Our results are consistent with some previous research on mate

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