



Preferred and actual relative height are related to sex, sexual orientation, and dominance: Evidence from Brazil and the Czech Republic[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Height and dominance influence mate preferences and choices. We explored preferred relative height (PRH) among ideal partners and actual relative height (ARH) among long-term partners in heterosexual and non-heterosexual men and women from Brazil and the Czech Republic. Furthermore, we tested whether PRH and ARH are influenced by own height, and submissiveness-dominance in relationship and sexual activities. In a sample of 1709 respondents (379 heterosexual men, 311 non-heterosexual men, 853 heterosexual women, and 166 non-heterosexual women) heterosexual individuals showed the ‘male-taller-pattern’ preferences and choices, while non-heterosexuals preferred and chose partners of a height similar to themselves; an ‘equal-height-pattern’. Regression analyses further showed that own height positively predicted both PRH and ARH in all four groups of participants. Moreover, non-heterosexual men and women who preferred to be dominant in sexual activities and heterosexual men who preferred to be dominant in relationships preferred to be taller than their partner. Thus, in Western populations, preferences for relative height differ between heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals, but in both cases they relate to dyadic submissiveness-dominance and own height. Preferences for relative height and dominance can work as a guide to actual mate choices enhancing ancestral fitness, although they differ from actual choices in modern humans.

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1. Introduction

Human body height, as an evolved sexually dimorphic trait, strongly influences mate preferences and actual choices of men and women (Salska et al., 2008). The high heritability of human height means that few environmental factors are responsible for individual differences in this trait (Silventoinen et al., 2003). However, the very low heritability of the variation in the actual mate choices that people make in relation to height (Zietsch, Verweij, Heath, & Martin, 2011) indicates that environmental factors crucially influence individual variation. Therefore, search for factors that modulate mate choice and also preferences, is relevant for evolutionary-based research.

Studies have shown that a preference for males being taller than their female partners is widespread in Western populations (e.g., Fink, Neave, Brewer, & Pawlowski, 2007; Pawlowski, 2003). Male height is associated with intra-sexual dominance, which leads to a higher resource acquisition (Stulp & Barrett, 2014). Thus, female preferences for taller

men are suggested to be adaptive, because they direct them to better resource providers. Preferences for relative height are, however, systematically modulated by several factors, such as population, individuals own height, self-esteem and personality characteristics. Preferences for the ‘male-taller-pattern’ were not supported in several studies of non-Western populations. For example, Datoga men and women from Tanzania preferred extreme height differences where a woman would be much shorter or much taller than a man (Sorokowski & Butovskaya, 2012). The present study included samples from two historically, culturally and ethnically diverse Western populations: Brazil and the Czech Republic.

Further, recent research suggests that individuals might adaptively adjust their preferences for relative height in accordance with their own height. It was, for example, shown, that in Western countries taller men and shorter women tend to prefer larger partner height differences than shorter men and taller women (Pawlowski, 2003; Stulp, Buunk, & Pollet, 2013). Moreover, inter-personal dominance as another sexually dimorphic trait was shown to be positively connected to individual height (Stulp, Buunk, Verhulst, & Pollet, 2015). Both own height and dominance might thus similarly moderate individual differences in preferences for relative height. Indeed, three recent studies showed that personality (Swami et al., 2008) and inter-personal characteristics, for example, dominance, influence relative

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height preferences. More specifically, more dominant heterosexual women tend to prefer relatively shorter male partners than less dominant women (Sorokowski, Sabiniewicz, & Sorokowska, 2015), while homosexual men who prefer to be more dominant also prefer to be taller than their partners (Valentova, Stulp, Třebický, & Havlíček, 2014).

Another factor that could influence relative height preferences is sexual orientation. Recent studies reported that, on average, non-heterosexual men (i.e., bisexual and homosexual) generally prefer rather masculine physical characteristics in their potential male partners (e.g., Zheng & Zheng, 2015), whereas non-heterosexual women, tend to prefer more feminine physical traits in their potential female partners (e.g., Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Cohen & Tannenbaum, 2001). However, these preferences are also modulated by individual factors, such as preferences of sex roles during sexual activities (Zheng & Zheng, 2015), participants' own masculinity–femininity (Bailey et al., 1997), and relationship status (Valentova, Roberts, & Havlíček, 2013). To our knowledge, only one study has focused on relative height preferences in non-heterosexual men (although not non-heterosexual women), who generally preferred somewhat taller male partners – although a substantial proportion of men preferred partners of the same height and a smaller proportion preferred shorter partners (Valentova et al., 2014). Furthermore, taller men preferred relatively shorter partners, and men who preferred to be taller than their partners also preferred to be more dominant in relationship and sexual activities, and vice versa. However, this study did not compare preferences of non-heterosexual and heterosexual populations; this is one of the main goals of the current study.

Finally, most studies have focused on factors that influence preferences, rather than actual choices regarding relative height among partners. However, preferences and actual choices can differ to some degree, since people make many compromises when it comes to actual pairing (Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). In respect to height, although both heterosexual men and women prefer the 'male-taller-pattern' in the Western populations, women prefer men much taller than themselves, whereas men prefer women only slightly shorter than themselves (Stulp, Buunk, Kurzban, & Verhulst, 2013). Consequently, actual height difference between partners is a compromise between preferences of both sexes (Townsend & Wasserman, 1998), resulting in relationships with bigger height difference among partners than men would prefer and smaller than women would prefer. Thus, it is important to study both preferences and actual choice in order to disentangle how preferred height is translated to actual height.

1.1. Aims of the current study

One of the main aims of this study was to explore and compare preferred and actual relative height in heterosexual and homosexual men and women, from two diverse populations, Brazil and the Czech Republic. Height was chosen as a model sexually dimorphic trait because it can be studied in both sexes, in contrast to other characteristics that are specific to only one sex (e.g., beard). Moreover, height was unambiguously shown to be linked to male dominance (Stulp et al., 2015). Thus, here we aimed to extend the previous study (Valentova et al., 2014) of associations between preferred and actual relative height and dyadic submissiveness–dominance.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The total sample consisted of 2195 participants from Brazil and the Czech Republic, recruited as a part of a larger study of ideal partner preferences and actual partner choice. For the subsequent

analyses we included participants between 18 and 50 years of age, and for the analyses of actual partner choices we included non-heterosexual coupled participants who indicated that they were in a long-term relationship with a partner of the same sex, and heterosexual participants who indicated they were in a long-term relationship with members of the opposite sex. Thus, 1709 responses (mean age = 26.61 years, range 18–50, SD = 6.72) entered the final analyses, including 22.2% heterosexual men ($n = 379$), 18.2% non-heterosexual men ($n = 311$), 49.9% heterosexual women ($n = 853$), and 9.7% non-heterosexual women ($n = 166$). Non-heterosexual women were significantly younger than heterosexual women ($p = .002$), and there was no other age difference between the groups.

The participants were recruited via snowball sampling through the use of mailing-lists obtained from our previous studies, through posts on Facebook, and LGBT oriented web pages in both countries. Data were collected through an online questionnaire using Qualtrics platform (<http://www.qualtrics.com>). Participants gave their informed consent, which required a mouse-click to confirm their willingness to complete an approximately 40-min, anonymous survey.

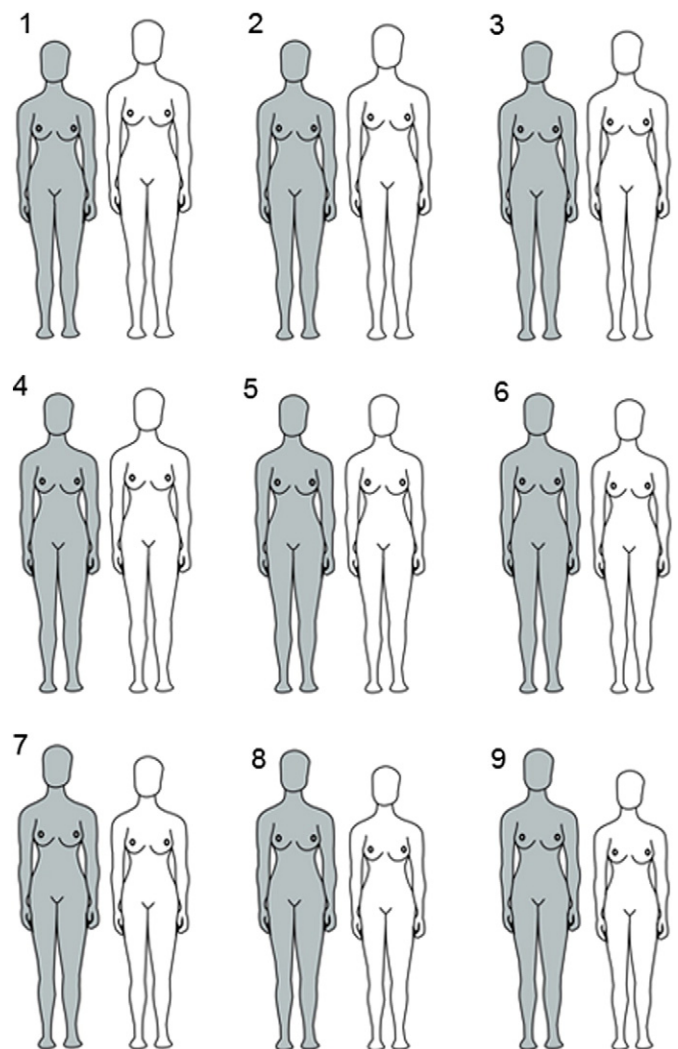


Fig. 1. Illustration of the stimuli used for assessing preferred and actual relative height among partners. This version of the stimuli was presented only to non-heterosexual women; adequate versions were presented to other groups of participants. The question asked: 'Indicate your preferred/actual height of your partner (white figure) compared to your own height (gray figure) – individuals in couple 5 are of the same height'.

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