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## Height in women predicts maternal tendencies and career orientation

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### Abstract

Previous research has shown that variation in sex-specific personality traits in women can be predicted by measures of physical masculinisation (second to fourth digit ratio and circulating testosterone). This study aimed to test the hypothesis that certain sex-specific traits in women (maternal tendencies and career orientation) could be predicted by one index of masculinisation, height. Data was collected via online questionnaires. In pre-reproductive women (aged 20–29,  $n = 679$ ), increasing height related to decreasing maternal personality (lower importance of having children, lower maternal/broodiness) and decreasing reproductive ambition (fewer ideal number of children, older ideal own age to have first child). Increasing height also related to increasing career orientation (higher importance of having a career, and higher career competitiveness). In post-reproductive women (aged over 45,  $n = 541$ ), increasing height related to decreased reproductive events (fewer children, had first child at older age) and increased career orientation. Results provide further support for previous studies that show physical masculinisation is associated with psychological masculinisation.

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## 1. Introduction

This study looks at how sex-specific personality traits in women relate to a measure of physical masculinisation, height. Height is a universally sexually dimorphic trait, with adult males being taller than their female counterparts in all human cultures. Pre-pubescent girls and boys are anatomically similar, with the sexual dimorphism in height only emerging at puberty under the influence of androgens on the human skeleton (Vanderschueren & Bouillon, 1995). In vivo animal studies have shown that androgens promote the growth of long bones (Orwoll, 1996). The effects of androgens on bone size are demonstrated with male animals having both larger bones and thicker cortices than their female counterparts (Kasra & Gryn timer, 1995).

Personality research has shown that there are reliable sex differences in certain personality traits. While men generally exhibit more assertive and competitive personalities, women possess more caring attitudes and sociability (for review see Collaer & Hines, 1995). There is also evidence that *within* women, sex-specific personality dimensions are associated with physical masculinisation. Second to fourth digit ratio (2D:4D) is proposed to be a marker of prenatal gonadal hormones (see Manning, 2002). Csatho et al. (2003) showed that women with a more masculine (low) 2D:4D ratio had more masculine personality traits as measured by the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Wilson (1983) also found that women with low 2D:4D ratios were more likely to describe themselves as assertive and competitive than those with high 2D:4D.

Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) is another sexually dimorphic trait, with women possessing lower WHRs than men due to their tendency to store body fat on their hips and buttocks rather than their waists and stomachs; whereas the opposite is true for men (Leibel, Edens, & Fried, 1989). WHR has also been shown to be a marker of physical masculinisation and testosterone levels *within* women (DeRidder et al., 1990; Evans, Hoffmann, Kalkhoff, & Kissebah, 1983). Cashdan (2000) found that female students with higher WHRs report more competitive feelings and more displays of aggression. A direct role for testosterone and masculinisation of personality has also been demonstrated. In many studies, women with higher testosterone report possessing more masculine personality traits (Al-Ayadhi, 2004; Baucom, Besch, & Callahan, 1985; Grant & France, 2001; Udry & Talbert, 1988). There are no studies to our knowledge linking sex-specific personality traits with height in women. A recent study has shown that height of women influences *perception* of their character (Chu & Geary, 2005). Taller women are rated as more intelligent, assertive and ambitious than shorter women. Only men also rated shorter woman as more considerate, nurturing and homely. Our study aims to test whether women's height is associated with their *actual* personality characteristics.

One key aspect of sex-specific personality traits are parental or maternal tendencies. Sex differences in parental responsiveness present themselves very early in life with females typically spending more time involved in care giving and nurturing activities (Berman, 1991). There are no studies to our knowledge linking any kind of physical masculinisation with maternal personality in healthy adult females. However, there are studies using females with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a condition which results in hypersecretion of adrenal androgens (New & Levine, 1984). In addition to physical masculinisation, females with CAH are less interested in infants (Dittmann et al., 1990; Leveroni & Berenbaum, 1998), score lower on measures of parental or nurturant tendencies (Helleday, Edman, Ritzen, & Siwers, 1993) and show less parenting 'rehearsal' behaviors such as doll play or infant care compared with control females (Ehrhardt

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