Male height preferences in very tall heterosexual women.

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Introduction

Men and women are different in many ways. One of these sexual dimorphisms is height. A height ratio called the sexual dimorphism ratio (SDR) has been defined as SDR = male height / female height. A number greater than 1.0 indicates the male is taller than the female. In many countries the average man is about 8% taller than the average woman, so the SDR would be 1.08.

Palowski et.al.\(^1\) examined preferences to images of body types where female and male images were scaled to show a relative SDRs of 1.19, 1.14, 1.09, 1.00, and 0.96. Heterosexual subjects were asked to give their height, view the images and pick the one they would be most likely to select as a partner. Males tended to prefer 1.09 and women 1.14. There was a relationship between the heights of the participants and the SDR. Short men preferred a smaller SDR than tall men and short women preferred a larger SDR than tall women. Women who preferred SDRs less than 1.0 were almost non-existent in the survey.

In a later paper Palowski et al\(^2\) performed a more elaborate study that, among other things, considered preferred sexual dimorphism in height and one’s own stature. The tallest and shortest acceptable SDRs for females falls a bit as females get taller, and it rises with rising height in men, but it never drops below 1.0.

The studies did not look at very tall women or very short men. My personal observations are that very tall women are often happy with shorter men, but I do not know how common this is or if this is convenience rather than preference as it can be difficult for very tall women to find partners. Height is certainly not the only attraction.

\(^1\) Variable preferences for sexual dimorphism in stature (SDS) Further evidence to an adjustment in relation to own height  B. Fink, N. Neave, G. Brewer, B, Pawlowski, Personality and Individual Differences, (43) I2007

Method

An online study was posted on surveymonkey.com. To sample as many tall women and men as possible, notices were placed on tallwomen.org and thetallstreetjournal.com. Both sites have tall readerships, the former is largely tall women. 49 tall women with heights ranging from 70 to 81 inches tall completed the survey along. The majority were from the tallwomen.org link.

The first chart is a histogram of the reported heights.
The second chart shows the tallest acceptable, ideal and shortest acceptable sexual dimorphism ration, which is male height divided by female height. Other studies show for people of average height this is usually close to 1.08 and rarely drops below 1.02 for the shortest acceptable potential mates and rises to 1.19 and more for the tallest acceptable potential mates. What interests me is my data falls with increasing height and drops below 1.0 for ideal and shortest acceptable SDRs, but the sample is small.

This is consistent with personal observations of tall women. Note that SDR increases with falling height and may approach an the SDR for women of average stature. The shortest SDR is interesting at very tall statures and perhaps this is an indication that there is a limit to how much shorter a male can be.

The third plot shows the tallest and shortest acceptable male heights and the ideal as a function of the women's height. The flatness of the ideal height is very
remarkable. It seems a male should be 75” tall. The shortest drops with increasing female height to about 76” tall and then starts increasing. I suspect this is an increasing willingness to date shorter males and then the height difference becomes too unwieldy.

Respondents were asked to rate how desirable a height difference was on a 1 to 9 point scale where 1 is completely undesirable and 9 is extremely desirable. The differences in height ranged from the male being 12 inches shorter to 12 inches taller in 2 inch increments as well as more than 12 inches shorter and more than 12 inches taller. The fourth plot shows the distribution for two groups: women with a stature from 70 to 73 inches, and those who are taller than 73”. The shorter group had a preference for males about 4” taller and the taller group of women were preferred men of equal height. The taller women tended to favor somewhat shorter men more than the shorter group.
The survey asked for comments on why going beyond the shortest and tallest acceptable heights were unacceptable. The data were clustered into two groups for a shorter group of females from 70 to 73” tall and a taller group with heights greater than 73”. Only 22 respondents made comments and many had several comments each. A rank ordering of a synopsis is provided:

shorter women (70” to 73”)

short male limit
  • needs to feel feminine
  • difficult to hug and kiss
  • difficult sex

tall male limit
  • worries about extremely tall offspring
  • a very tall couple gets too much attention in public
  • difficult sex
taller women (over 73”)

short male limit
  • difficult to hug and kiss
  • short men remind them of children too much
  • difficult sex

tall male limit
  • worries about extremely tall offspring - particularly tall girls
  • very tall men can be physically intimidating

Discussion

In summary very tall women prefer have a preference for a taller mate, but are willing to consider mates with heights less than their own. At increasing female height women this trend increases to the point where women may show a preference for a somewhat shorter male.

The study sample, particularly for female statures exceeding 75” in height, is small and should be considered qualitative and directional. A larger sample is needed to understand sexual dimorphism at the extreme and a sample of extremely short heterosexual men would be interesting.

A much deeper question that is not probed is why this shift in acceptable and ideal height is taking place. One hypothesis is the sample of acceptable males becomes extremely small and finding an acceptable mate with other perhaps more important characteristics may be impossible. Another is that these women become used to smaller people and their perception of height differences is different from the average population. A male who is three inches shorter may be quite tall compared to the average population of males and may be perceived as tall to the extremely tall female. Perhaps something genetic is going on to move the height of offspring to more normal ranges.
Studying the preferences of very tall males would be interesting to study along with the influence of online dating services. With these services it is possible to connect a large number of very tall people who would normally not encounter any potential tall mates.