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Summary

This dissertation investigates the relationship between someone's physical size and assessments of their social status. Physical size is related to status in many species – including humans – and may affect both real and perceived status. I refer to this as the status-size association, the automatic association between physical size and position in a status hierarchy. To form hypotheses about the status-size association, I draw from literature in several disciplines (biology, anthropology, psychology). Furthermore, I distinguish between different aspects of physical size and different pathways to obtain status in groups with implications for the status-size effect. I suggest that height and muscularity differently affect status perception, and that status obtained through coercion (dominance) differently affects size perception than status obtained through voluntary deference (prestige). The dissertation contains four empirical chapters testing different aspects of a status-size association.

Chapter 2 – The Height Leadership Advantage in Men and Women

Research suggests that tall individuals have an advantage over short individuals in terms of status, prestige, and leadership, though it is not clear why. Applying an evolutionary psychology perspective, I predicted that taller individuals are seen as more leader-like because they are perceived as more dominant, healthy, and intelligent. Being fit and physically imposing were arguably important leadership qualities in ancestral human environments—perhaps especially for males—where being a leader entailed considerable physical risks. In line with expectations, these results demonstrate that by manipulating an individual's stature height positively influences leadership perception for both men and women, though the effect is stronger for men. For male leaders this height leadership advantage is mediated by their perceived dominance, health, and intelligence; while for female leaders this effect is only mediated by perceived intelligence.

Chapter 3 – The Status-Size Association

Physical size and status are related in humans and several other species, referred to here as the status-size association. In humans, height's positive relationship with social status is well-known. This relationship can be partially explained by the positive effect high SES

environments have on height, and partially by height's association with physical formidability and dominance. I recognize there are multiple strategies to gain and maintain status, namely prestige (voluntary deference from others) and dominance (intimidation, force), and test how these strategies relate to perceptions of height and muscularity in males. Results support a status-size association, and show that, on average, a high status male is estimated taller and more muscular than a low status male. Differentiating between prestige and dominance-based status further shows that while a high status male characterized by dominance is estimated equally tall to a high status male characterized by prestige, a highly dominant male is estimated more muscular than a highly prestigious male. These findings suggest that while status and perceived physical size are indeed related, it is important to differentiate between different aspects of social status and different aspects of physical size.

Chapter 4 – Development of the Status-Size Association

Higher status males – both high in dominance and high in prestige – are estimated to be taller and more muscular than low status males, by adults participants. Chapter 4 investigates whether this status-size association is already exhibited by young children, and whether and how the status-size association changes across childhood (ages 6 to 12) and adolescence (ages 12 to 17). Results show that all age groups associate high dominance with taller stature and increased muscularity – like adult samples in previous research also did (see Chapter 3). However, not all age groups associated height and muscularity with prestige. In the adolescent sample, a prestige-size association increased in strength with age, whereas a dominance-size association attenuated with age. No clear pattern was detected amongst the elementary school group concerning the prestige-size association. Unexpectedly, the association between dominance and size became somewhat stronger with age in the 6 to 12 year-old age group. The differences in developmental patterns in the two samples may be due to large differences in Socio-Economic Status of the participants. I conclude that dominance and physical size are likely associated earlier than prestige and physical size.

Chapter 5 – The Napoleon Complex

Physical size is positively correlated with dominance in several species. In humans, taller males enjoy a number of advantages compared to their shorter counterparts. For instance,

height positively affects perceived social status, as well as actual income. This would then suggest that shorter males are at a disadvantage, perhaps leading to strategies to compensate for the status-drawbacks of shorter stature - a largely untested lay-theory known as the Napoleon Complex. The current research tests whether having shorter stature compared to an opponent in a dyadic competitive situation increases dominant behaviour under certain conditions. A pilot study showed that males, but not females, who feel smaller take more money in an anonymous dictator game. Additionally, two studies show that relatively shorter males take more money from a shared pool in a dictator game against a real opponent – Study 5.1 showed that this effect is only found when retaliation by the opponent is not possible. Study 5.2 additionally showed that relatively shorter males did not act more physically aggressive in general toward an opponent. I conclude that when a male has the opportunity to gain valuable resources relative to an opponent in a competitive situation without possible retaliation, relatively shorter males assert a higher degree of dominance.

