

1 Short People Got lots of Reasons to Legitimately Feel Paranoid

2 by Diane Cole

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4 Your physical **height** can affect your emotional state of mind, according to a new study. We already know that language
5 bestows positive **value** on people of tall stature: We look up to them rather than down. Various studies have found
6 **correlations** between being taller and earning more. Now virtual reality is adding to the understanding of the short state
7 of mind. A study **conducted** at Oxford University used avatars to let **participants go through** the virtual **experience** of
8 riding a subway at their normal height and then at that height reduced by 25 centimeters. For the study, 60 women wore
9 headsets and viewed monitors as they participated in two 3-D virtual-reality trips on the London subway system. They
10 were able to move and **interact** with other virtual passengers, **exchanging** glances, for instance. The virtual train trips
11 took about six minutes each, and were programmed and animated identically except for one thing: In one ride, the avatar
12 **representing** the participant was **reduced** in height by 25 centimeters. That's "approximately the height of a head" in the
13 words of Oxford clinical psychologist and lead researcher Daniel Freeman. The results: Participants **reported** that during
14 the ride in which they were made to feel shorter, they felt more **vulnerable**, more negative about themselves, and "they
15 thought people were being more **hostile** or trying to isolate them" says Freeman.

16 Short on Confidence

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18 That doesn't **suggest** that if you're short you're always less trustful or more paranoid, says Freeman. But the findings do
19 reinforce **common perceptions** about height. "Height seems to affect our sense of social status," he says, and being taller
20 **tends to** be socially desirable. "The **implication** is that greater height can make you more **confident** in social situations,"
21 he says. "All of us can **recognize** that when we feel worse about ourselves, we can hunch up and stoop and **take up** less
22 space, but when we feel more confident we feel taller and take up more space." Being shorter seemed to **replicate** the
23 sense of vulnerability of a little child, not yet grown into the full height of adulthood. Perhaps that's not so surprising if
24 you think about how little children feel vis-à-vis taller grown-ups, says Denver clinical psychologist Susan Heitler. While
25 two people of the same height **literally** will see eye to eye, if one is a foot taller than the other, one person actually must
26 look up while the other looks down. That **unequal** gaze is connected to the **association** of greater height with greater
27 power. "It's not a perfect correlation," Heitler says, but when she asks depressed patients to close their eyes and imagine
28 their situation, they tend to see themselves as very small in comparison to the seemingly much larger figures in their lives
29 who are **overwhelming** them.

30 Tall Hunters Got More Game?

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32 Clearly, our internal landscape is telling us something about how we compare and equate height and status. But how and
33 why did our brains come to **incorporate** such meanings? From an evolutionary perspective, "taller is better" may **date**
34 **back to** when humans were nomadic hunters, explains Linda A. Jackson, a Michigan State University psychology
35 professor who has studied height stereotypes. According to this view, being taller had reproductive **advantages** for
36 capturing prey and **avoiding** predators, which **provides** a higher likelihood for survival for tall parents and their offspring.
37 Today's society is radically different from the societies of the hunter-gatherer era. But height continues to have a small but
38 **measurable** impact on how others view us, particularly for men. "Taller men are **perceived** as having higher status,
39 stronger leadership **skills**, and as being more occupationally successful than average or shorter males," Jackson wrote.
40 Men of average or shorter height also **suffer** in the realm of social attractiveness, which includes personal **adjustment**,
41 athletic orientation, and masculinity. Her caveat: "What NONE of these studies **establish** is that it is HEIGHT per se that
42 is responsible for these benefits or characteristics associated with height (strong leadership skills, self-confidence,
43 professional development)." Although the **evidence** that such stereotypes **affect** women is "weaker," she said, short
44 females, too, are perceived less favorably in the occupational realm, she writes, adding, "The 150 cm tall manager may
45 need to work harder to be taken seriously."

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47 Adapted from the [National Geographic](#)