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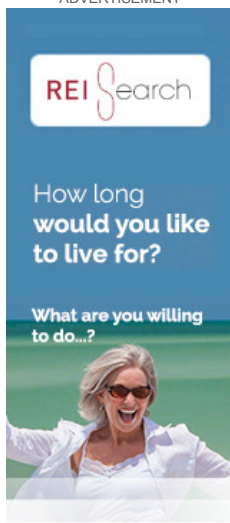
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Short Communication

'Big' men: Male leaders' height positively relates to followers' perception of charisma

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Highlights

- Charisma refers to the perceived possession of exceptional, supernatural qualities.
- Male leaders' physical height predicted followers' perception of charisma.
- Evidence for a social-perceptual bias toward tall people.
- Suggest a reason why tall individuals are more successful.

Abstract

Physical height is associated with beneficial outcomes for the tall individual (e.g., higher salary and likelihood of occupying a leadership position), presumably because being tall constituted an adaptive characteristic in ancestral societies. Although this account hinges on the presence of an evolved positive social-perceptual bias toward tall people, little direct evidence exists for this claim. Physical height literally implies the ability to reach higher, see further, and have greater overview; it also affords dominance, which others may equate with ability as well. Hence, leaders' physical height may be positively related to followers' belief that a leader has extraordinary talents, that is, charisma. However, because leadership positions were, in ancestral societies, occupied by males, an evolutionary perspective might further suggest that height is less relevant to followers' perceptions of female leaders. In line with this reasoning, the current study found a positive relationship between male leaders' height and their followers' perceptions of charisma, while no such relationship was found for female leaders.

Keywords

Height; Charisma; Leadership; Sex differences; Physical characteristics

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