

## Can you judge a man by his fingers?

Study finds link between relative lengths of index and ring fingers in men and behaviour towards women



*Maybe you should take a good look at your partner's fingers before putting a ring on one. Men with short index fingers and long ring fingers are on average nicer towards women, and this unexpected phenomenon stems from the hormones these men have been exposed to in their mother's womb, according to a new study by researchers at McGill University. The findings might help explain why these men tend to have more children.*

The study, showing a link between a biological event in fetal life and adult behaviour, was published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Men's index fingers are generally shorter than their ring fingers. The difference is less pronounced in women. Previous research has found that digit ratio – defined as the second digit length divided by the fourth digit length – is an indication of the amount of male hormones, chiefly testosterone, someone has been exposed to as a fetus: the smaller the ratio, the more male hormones. The McGill study suggests that this has an impact on how adult men behave, especially with women.

“It is fascinating to see that moderate variations of hormones before birth can actually influence adult behaviour in a selective way,” says Simon Young, a McGill Emeritus Professor in Psychiatry and coauthor of the study.

### **Smiles and compliments**

Several studies have been conducted previously to try to assess the impact of digit ratio on adult behaviour. This one is the first to highlight how finger lengths affect behaviour differently depending on the sex of the person you are interacting with. “When with women, men with smaller ratios were more likely to listen attentively, smile and laugh, compromise or compliment the other person,” says Debbie Moskowitz, lead author and Professor of Psychology at McGill. They acted that way in sexual relationships, but also with female friends or colleagues. These men were also less quarrelsome with women than with men, whereas the men with larger ratios were equally quarrelsome with both. For

women though, digit ratio variation did not seem to predict how they behaved, the researchers report.

### **Digit ratio and children**

For 20 days, 155 participants in the study filled out forms for every social interaction that lasted 5 minutes or more, and checked off a list of behaviours they engaged in. Based on prior work, the scientists classified the behaviours as agreeable or quarrelsome. Men with small digit ratios reported approximately a third more agreeable behaviours and approximately a third fewer quarrelsome behaviours than men with large digit ratios.

A previous study had found that men with smaller digit ratios have more children. “Our research suggests they have more harmonious relationships with women; these behaviors support the formation and maintenance of relationships with women,” Moskowitz says. “This might explain why they have more children on average.”

The researchers were surprised to find no statistically relevant link between dominant behaviours and digit ratios. They suggest future research could study specific situations where male dominance varies – such as competitive situations with other men – to see whether a correlation can be established.

**“Fetal exposure to androgens, as indicated by digit ratios (2D:4D), increases men’s agreeableness with women”** D.S. Moskowitz, Rachel Sutton, David C. Zuroff, Simon N. Young, *Personality and Individual Differences*, March 2015 (available online 27 November 2014)

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886914006400>

## Finger length indicates how nice men are to women

(NEWSER) – A study released earlier this month relied on the "2D:4D" ratio to determine that [57% of men are inclined to be promiscuous](#). Now, a second study says the same ratio—which makes use of the length of the index and ring fingers—can also indicate how nice men are to women. The study, published in *Personality and Individual Differences*, notes that a lower ratio "indicates greater androgen exposure"; in less scientific-speak, it means the longer a man's ring finger compared to his index finger, the more male hormones (chief among them testosterone) he was exposed to in the womb. As lead author Debbie Moskowitz explains in a McGill University [press release](#), "When with women, men with smaller ratios were more likely to listen attentively, smile and laugh, compromise or compliment the other person."

The results stemmed from 155 participants' self-reported behavior. Over the course of 20 days, they selected which behaviors they exhibited in any social interaction of at least five minutes. The researchers mapped those behaviors as agreeable or quarrelsome, and discovered men with lower digit ratios reported roughly a third more agreeable behaviors with women, and also a third fewer quarrelsome ones. The results went beyond the romantic: They held regardless of who the woman was, from a romantic partner to a co-worker. But in terms of the romantic, Moskowitz noted her findings may support previous research that also linked smaller ratios to having more kids. "Our research suggests they have more harmonious relationships with women ... This might explain why they have more children on average." Somewhat incongruously though, the smaller-ratio men were the ones who fell into the potentially [more promiscuous camp in the previous study](#).

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