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Sexual selection on male vocal fundamental frequency in humans and other anthropoids

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31 Abstract

32 In many primates, including humans, the vocalizations of males and females differ dramatically, with male vocalizations and vocal anatomy often seeming to exaggerate size. Males may evolve 33 34 low-frequency vocalizations in order to intimidate rivals and/or attract females, but this 35 hypothesis has not been systematically tested across primates, nor is it clear why competitors and potential mates should attend to vocalization frequencies. Here we show across 36 37 anthropoids that sexual dimorphism in fundamental frequency (F_0) increases during evolutionary transitions toward polygyny, and decreases during transitions toward monogamy. Surprisingly, 38 humans exhibit greater F_0 sexual dimorphism than any other ape. We also show that low- F_0 39 vocalizations predict perceptions of men's dominance and attractiveness, and hormonal (cortisol 40 and testosterone) profiles related to immune function. These results suggest that low male F_0 41 42 signals condition to competitors and mates, and evolves when male primates compete more 43 intensely for mating opportunities.

44 Introduction

45 Explaining why sexual dimorphisms evolve is central to understanding the evolution of primate mating systems and social organization. In many primate species, the vocalizations of males 46 47 and females differ dramatically, with male vocalizations and vocal anatomy often seeming to 48 exaggerate size (1-7). Among humans, men's approximately 60% longer vocal folds (12-13) 49 contribute to an average rate of vocal fold vibration during phonation (fundamental frequency, F_0) that is about five standard deviations below women's (5). To human listeners, utterances 50 lower in F_0 are perceived as being deeper in pitch and as emanating from larger individuals (14-51 52 15). The evolutionary reasons for such apparent size exaggeration have been the subject of speculation since Darwin noted the pubertal enlargement of male vocal structures and their 53 54 deployment during the breeding season in many mammals (16).

55 Some have suggested that masculine vocalizations evolve to intimidate male 56 competitors and/or attract mates (6, 17). For example, among orangutans, lower-ranking males 57 avoid long calls given by higher-ranking males (18), indicating that acoustic cues suggest threatpotential to conspecifics. Several studies in humans suggest that F_0 has relevance under both 58 59 inter- and intrasexual competition: experimentally lowering F_0 increases perceptions of men's 60 dominance and attractiveness (15, 19), and raising F_0 increases women's vocal attractiveness (20-21). However, little is known about whether these effects persist in unmanipulated speech 61 when F_0 and other acoustic parameters vary naturally and simultaneously. 62

Moreover, it is unclear why F_0 should signal formidability to same-sex competitors or mate value to potential mates; F_0 is only weakly associated with body size (5, 7, 22-23) and perhaps strength (5, 24) in humans, although F_0 may be modulated according to relative formidability (25) and mate quality (26-27). Steroid hormones may provide a link between F_0 and condition. Growing evidence indicates that glucocorticoids such as the stress hormone cortisol (C) negatively interact with testosterone (T) in affecting both immune function and the expression of secondary sex traits (28-30). Infection stimulates C production (31), which

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70 downregulates and rogen receptors and inhibits the action of T on target tissues (32-36). Hence, 71 T should be more potent in individuals in good condition with low immune system activation. In 72 humans, positive relationships between T and immune response to a vaccine (37), and between 73 T and both facial attractiveness (37) and dominance (38), were stronger in males with low C. 74 Furthermore, the interactive effect of T and C on attractiveness was mediated by immune 75 function, supporting the stress-linked immunocompetence handicap hypothesis (SL-ICHH) that T-related traits that interact with C are linked to immunocompetence (37). At present, it is 76 77 unknown whether T and C negatively interact in predicting F_0 , as the SL-ICHH would suggest if 78 F_0 reflects underlying condition.

More generally, scant evidence exists to support a role for sexual selection in shaping F_0 and other vocal sexual dimorphisms across primates (6), and there are plausible alternative hypotheses: F_0 dimorphism may represent a byproduct of selection for greater male size or long-distance transmission of male calls (39), or reflect selection for sex identification.

Here, we report the results of three studies designed to clarify the evolution of sexual dimorphism in F_0 . In Study 1, we examined the evolution of F_0 dimorphism as a function of mating system across anthropoid primates. In Study 2, we tested the stimulus-response properties of F_0 on intrasexual competitiveness in humans by examining the independent contributions of F_0 controlling for other acoustic parameters to assessments of attractiveness and dominance. In Study 3, we explored the indexical value of F_0 by testing the SL-ICHH prediction that F_0 will be more strongly linked to T in individuals with low C.

90

91 Study 1: *F*⁰ across anthropoid primates

92 Methods

93 Please refer to *SI Materials and Methods* for additional details.

94 We obtained recordings of nonhuman primate calls from our own fieldwork and by

contacting other primatologists. From these, we selected 1723 files such that each was without

96 substantial background noise and was produced by a single individual of known species, sex, 97 and adult status. Files were measured as uncompressed .WAV or .AIFF files using the acoustic analysis software Praat version 5.3. F_0 was measured from each file by identifying in the raw 98 99 waveform a segment in which cycles were clearly discernible. Cycles were counted along this 100 segment up to 20 cycles, and then divided by the duration of the interval to calculate F_0 . This procedure was repeated for a second segment, if possible (78% of files). Mean F_0 values from 101 102 each recording were averaged with all other mean F_0 values per sex to arrive at separate male 103 and female F_0 averages for each species (Table S2). Between-segment reliability was high for 104 files with two measurable segments (Cronbach's α = 0.973). First segments of a randomly chosen 11% of files were re-measured to determine intra-measurer reliability, which was very 105 106 high (Cronbach's α = 1.000). Body size, habitat, and mating system were obtained from the 107 literature (Table S2). We conducted phylogenetically-informed analyses using a consensus 108 phylogeny for all species represented in our sample (40) and assessed correlated evolution among our variables with phylogenetic generalized least squares. 109

Mating system was utilized as a proxy for the intensity of sexual selection (41-42) and 110 was categorized as monogamous, promiscuous, or polygynous (43) rather than using an 111 112 interval-level measure such as socionomic sex ratio, as such measures often vary widely within species and hold uncertain relationships to the intensity of intermale competition (41, 44-45). 113 Habitat was categorized as arboreal, terrestrial, or arboreal/terrestrial. We conducted 114 115 phylogenetically-informed analyses using a consensus phylogeny for all species represented in 116 our sample (40; Fig. 1) and assessed correlated evolution among our variables with phylogenetic generalized least squares (46). 117

118

119 Results

- Across analyses, F_0 and F_0 dimorphism exhibited strong phylogenetic signals ($\lambda > 0.8$). In
- general, New World primates showed little sexual dimorphism in F_0 , averaging a mean F_0

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122 dimorphism of 1.05 across 7 species, while male cercopithecines averaged half of the F_0 of females (mean F_0 dimorphism = 0.48 across 10 species). With a similar F_0 dimorphism of 0.51, 123 124 humans surprisingly exhibited the greatest dimorphism that we measured in any ape. 125 We first tested whether low F_0 predicts greater body size across species for each sex. 126 Previous tests relied on published acoustic data measured using varying methodologies and either averaged male and female measurements (47) or included only males (39). In our data, 127 128 body mass negatively predicted F_0 (both variables natural log-transformed) in males (t_{27} = -3.74, p < 0.001; model $F_{2,27} = 14.01$, p < 0.0001, $R^2 = 0.34$) and females ($t_{26} = -2.62$, p = 0.014; model 129 $F_{2,26} = 6.88$, p < 0.001, $R^2 = 0.18$; Table 1). These results suggest that body size constrains the 130 evolution of primate call frequencies in both sexes (47). 131

We then regressed F_0 dimorphism (male F_0 /female F_0) on mating system, controlling for 132 133 body size dimorphism (male mass/female mass). Sexual selection tends to be more intense in polygynous than in monogamous primates, which are less dimorphic in size and weaponry (48). 134 Although some evidence suggests intermediate levels of male contest competition in 135 promiscuous species, the ability of males to monopolize females varies widely (49), other 136 137 mechanisms of sexual selection such as sperm competition are more salient (48), and the 138 degree of sexual dimorphism relative to monogamous or polygynous species varies widely by 139 trait (48). Although such apparent diversity in the mechanisms and intensity of sexual selection precludes straightforward predictions regarding F_0 dimorphism in promiscuous species, which 140 were therefore excluded from this analysis, promiscuous species indeed appear intermediate in 141 F_0 dimorphism (see Fig. 2a). We found that greater F_0 dimorphism evolves in transitions to 142 polygyny than in transitions to monogamy (t_{13} = 3.36, p = 0.004; model $F_{3,13}$ = 6.42, p = 0.007, 143 R^2 = 0.50; Table 1, Fig. 2). In this model, changes toward greater F_0 dimorphism also tended to 144 145 be accompanied by decreases in body size dimorphism ($t_{13} = 2.62$, p = 0.021). Humans were 146 treated as polygynous and exhibited F_0 dimorphism that was outside the range of monogamous

species (Fig. 2a); however, we obtained similar results when humans were treated as

148 monogamous, or excluded from the analysis (Table 1).

149 Finally, we tested the relationship between F_0 dimorphism and habitat. Waves reflected 150 from the ground produce interference that especially attenuates low frequencies, whereas 151 greater atmospheric absorption and scattering in arboreal vocalizations particularly attenuate 152 high frequencies (50). Thus, if male vocalizations are selected primarily to propagate over distance, then arboreal species should exhibit relatively lower male F_0 than terrestrial species. 153 154 We found the reverse: arboreal primates showed less F_0 dimorphism than terrestrial primates (F_0 dimorphism regressed on habitat and mass dimorphism: model $F_{4.19} = 3.33$, p = 0.032, $R^2 =$ 155 0.34; arboreal vs. terrestrial t_{19} = -2.58, p = 0.018; arboreal/terrestrial vs. terrestrial t_{19} = -1.37, p156 = 0.118; mass dimorphism t_{19} = 1.30, p = 0.209; Table 1). 157

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- 159 **Study 2:** *F*₀, dominance, and attractiveness in humans
- 160 Methods

161 Please refer to *SI Materials and Methods* for additional details.

162 Two hundred fifty-eight female $(20.0 \pm 1.6 \text{ y})$ and 175 male $(20.1 \pm 1.7 \text{ y})$ students from 163 Michigan State University provided written consent to participate in this study approved by the 164 university's Institutional Review Board. Participants were recorded reading a standard voice passage (51) in an anechoic, soundproof booth using a Shure SM58 vocal cardioid microphone. 165 166 Voices were recorded in mono at a sampling rate of 44,100 Hz and 16-bit quantization, and 167 saved as uncompressed .WAV files. Recordings were rated by 558 female (19.1 \pm 2.4 y) and 568 male (19.4 ± 1.8 y) students from The Pennsylvania State University. Each female 168 169 recording was rated by 15 men for attractiveness for short- and long-term romantic relationships 170 using 7-point Likert scales. Each male recording was rated by 15 men for dominance (7-point 171 scale) and 15 women for short- and long-term attractiveness. Ratings were averaged to produce Page 9 of 24

172 composite ratings of short- and long-term attractiveness for each recording, and dominance for173 each male recording.

Recordings were analyzed using Praat version 5.3 for mean F_0 , standard deviation in F_0 174 175 across the utterance (F_0 -SD), duration, number of voice breaks, harmonics, four measures of 176 jitter (cycle-to-cycle variation in F_0), and five measures of shimmer (cycle-to-cycle variation in amplitude) using the 'voice report' function in Praat (Table S3). Pitch floors were set to 75 Hz 177 and 100 Hz, and pitch ceilings were 300 Hz and 500 Hz, for men and women, respectively. 178 179 Otherwise, default settings were used. We also measured the first four formant frequencies (F_{1} - F_4 , Table S3). Formants were measured at each glottal pulse, averaged across measurements, 180 and then used to compute formant position (P_f) , the average standardized formant value for the 181 182 first four formants (5).

183 We utilized multiple regression to examine the effects of acoustic parameters on184 perceptual variables.

185

186 **Results**

 F_0 predicted men's perceived dominance to heterosexual male listeners (β = -0.43, p < 0.0001) 187 and attractiveness to heterosexual female listeners for both prospective short-term (β = -0.36, p 188 < 0.001) and long-term (β = -0.32, p = 0.001) romantic relationships (Table S4). When 189 190 perceived dominance and short-term attractiveness were entered into a multiple regression to predict men's F_0 (model $F_{2,171}$ = 12.99, p < 0.0001, $R^2 = 0.13$), dominance negatively predicted 191 F_0 (β = -0.30, p = 0.001), but short-term attractiveness did not (β = -0.09, p = 0.314), suggesting 192 a stronger role for male contests than female choice in shaping men's F_0 . F_0 did not predict 193 women's attractiveness to men for either short- ($\beta = 0.03$, p = 0.695) or long-term ($\beta = -0.03$, p =194 195 0.722) relationships when other acoustic parameters were statistically controlled (Table S4). 196 These results are thus more consistent with sexual selection (primarily intrasexual selection) on

197 males, rather intersexual selection on females, influencing the evolution of human F_0

- 198 dimorphism.
- 199

200 Study 3: *F*₀ and hormonal profiles in humans

201 Methods

202 Please refer to *SI Materials and Methods* for additional details.

Participants from The Pennsylvania State University provided written consent to participate in this study approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Fifty-three normally-cycling women ($19.4 \pm 1.6 \text{ y}$) and 62 men ($19.9 \pm 2.0 \text{ y}$) were recorded in an anechoic recording booth in a quiet room (Sample 1), and 58 men ($19.9 \pm 1.2 \text{ y}$) were recorded in a quiet room (Sample 2), with a Shure SM58 vocal cardioid microphone.

208 Participants rinsed their mouths with water before providing two saliva samples of 1-2 ml 209 each via passive drool approximately 30 (Sample 1) or 20 (Sample 2) min apart. From each sample, 0.5 ml of saliva was aliquotted into a third tube, which was shaken and then frozen at -210 211 20°C until analysis by the Johns Hopkins Center for Interdisciplinary Salivary Bioscience 212 Research (Baltimore, MD) using Salimetrics® kits. Samples were analyzed in duplicate via 213 enzyme immunoassay. Duplicates correlated highly for both C and T (all $r \ge 0.97$, p < 0.0001), 214 and were consequently averaged. For cortisol assays, sensitivity is $<0.003 \mu g/dL$, and average intra-assay coefficient of variation is 3.5%. For testosterone assays, sensitivity is <1.0 pg/mL, 215 216 and average intra-assay coefficient of variation is 4.6%. We utilized multiple regression to examine the effects of C and T on F_0 and statistically 217 controlled for diurnal decreases in C and T (52), but results were similar without controlling for 218

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221 Results

these effects (Table S5, Fig. 3).

In women, F_0 was unrelated to C, T, and their interaction (Table S5). However, in both male samples, C and T interacted in predicting F_0 (Sample 1: $\beta = 0.36$, p = 0.007; Sample 2: $\beta = 0.28$, p = 0.033; Table S5) such that T was negatively related to F_0 only in low-C men (median split for C; Sample 1: partial r = -0.44, p = 0.018; Sample 2: partial r = -0.40, p = 0.034; Fig. S1). This pattern of relationships between hormones and a putative sexually selected trait has been found to indicate men's immune function (37), as well as attractiveness (37) and dominance (38), and is consistent with the SL-ICHH (37).

229

230 Discussion

Our data supported the sexual selection hypothesis: F_0 dimorphism increased with evolutionary 231 changes toward polygyny and decreased with transitions toward monogamy across anthropoid 232 233 primates. Moreover, the pattern of F_0 dimorphism across mating systems was similar whether 234 we examined all available calls or only those calls for which we had examples from both sexes 235 (SI Results, Fig. S2), indicating that the observed pattern does not merely reflect sex differences in the use of particular calls types, which may differ in F_0 . Our data also indicate that sex 236 237 differences in F_0 result primarily from selection on males rather than females: We observed 238 greater F_0 dimorphism in polygynous species, where male sexual selection is stronger, and F_0 239 affected components of men's but not women's mating success. These results thus provide a plausible explanation for the prior finding that F_0 predicted men's but not women's reproductive 240 241 success among Hadza foragers (53).

By contrast, F_0 dimorphism appears unlikely to be a byproduct of greater male size: With mating system controlled, F_0 dimorphism decreased with relative male size. Although F_0 dimorphism likely facilitates sex identification, if it evolves primarily for this function, then one might expect it to be greater in arboreal species where visibility is obscured, and in monogamous species where the sexes are otherwise less dimorphic (54), yet in both cases we found the opposite. Our finding that male F_0 is relatively lower in terrestrial species than in

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arboreal species also challenges the long-distance transmission hypothesis and is more
consonant with elevated male-male competition in terrestrial compared with arboreal species
(55-56).

251 Inspection of Fig. 1 indicates an increase in F_0 dimorphism from the last common 252 ancestor of the apes to modern humans, culminating in humans exhibiting the greatest F_0 dimorphism of all apes. These results contrast sharply with moderate human body mass 253 dimorphism and negligible canine length dimorphism, which some have suggested indicate 254 255 weak sexual selection in ancestral humans (57). However, unlike other primates, in humans, 256 female adiposity greatly exceeds that of males, and males fight with handheld weapons and fists rather than teeth in combat (56, 58). These unique features preclude conclusions about the 257 strength of human sexual selection based on overall mass or canine size dimorphism (59-60). 258 259 Yet, if mating competition also tends to decrease male F_0 relative to female F_0 across primates, 260 then F_0 dimorphism has the potential to elucidate human sexual selection in ways that 261 comparisons of body mass or canine size cannot. Our results suggest that, contrary to some claims (57, 61), ancestral human mating should not be viewed as fundamentally monogamous. 262 When phylogeny and mating system were statistically controlled, evolutionary changes 263 264 toward greater F_0 dimorphism were associated with changes toward less body size dimorphism 265 and vice versa. This suggests that, where costly fights cannot be avoided, males may receive less benefit from exaggerating size acoustically and instead invest in mass that is useful in 266 267 contests. Conversely, where acoustic threats and displays are more effective, perhaps when 268 female choice is more important to male fitness, there may be lower payoff to investing in mass. 269 In humans, male F_0 was indeed important in mate attraction, yet F_0 more strongly predicted 270 perceptions of men's dominance, consistent with previous experimental research (25, 62). 271 Masculinity in men's faces is similarly perceived as aggressive across human societies, 272 whereas the influence on attractiveness is more variable in magnitude and direction (63). While such male traits appear better designed to function in male contests than in female choice (56), 273

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it remains possible that female choice is relatively more important in humans compared to other polygynous primates, and that stronger female choice tends to favor lower male F_0 and more modest size dimorphism among polygynous primates.

In many species, males exaggerate size to intimidate conspecifics, but attention to these exaggerations is likely maintained by a continued association between apparent size and formidability (4). Although F_0 decreased with increasing body size in both sexes across primate species, body size only weakly predicts F_0 in adult humans (5, 7). However, our data show that C and T interact to predict men's F_0 in a pattern that has previously been found to predict men's dominance (38), attractiveness (37), and immunocompetence (37), and hence that F_0 is likely to reveal male condition to same-sex competitors and potential mates.

Our results thus not only demonstrate a likely influence of sexual selection in the origins and maintenance of sexual dimorphism in F_0 across anthropoids, but also suggest that male contests, and to a lesser degree female mate choice, favor low male F_0 as a signal of condition, shedding new light on the intensity and mechanisms of sexual selection in humans and other primates.

289

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448 Figure Legends	448	Figure	Legends:
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449

450	Fig. 1.	Phylogenetic t	ree of anthrop	oid primates	included in Stu	dy 1, for which data were

451 available on at least 2 vocalizations from each sex (mean number of vocalizations: females =

452 38.6, males = 22.1; max: females 181, males = 155; Table S1). Sexual dimorphism

453 (male/female) in F_0 is shown in the column to the left of species names, and inferred ancestral

454 states are shown at nodes on the tree using squared change parsimony.

455

456 Fig. 2. Sexual dimorphism in vocal F_0 as a function of mating system. Sexual dimorphism in F_0

457 is most extreme in polygynous anthropoid primates and lowest in monogamous species (a).

458 This remains true after adjusting for body mass dimorphism (b), and after adjusting for both

459 body mass dimorphism and phylogenic non-independence (c). Least-squares regression lines

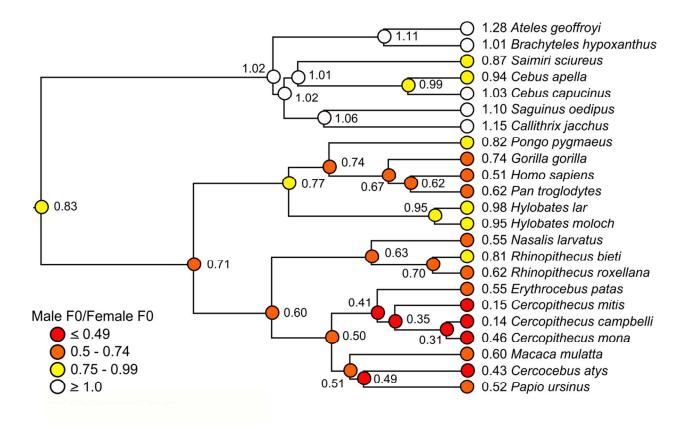
460 with 95% CI are plotted for species with monogamous or polygynous mating systems in (b) and

461 (c); monogamy increases from left to right. Key for independent contrasts in (c) is shown in (d).

462

Fig. 3. Relationships of vocal fundamental frequency (F_0) with cortisol (C) and testosterone (T) in men from (a) Sample 1 and (b) Sample 2. Hormone concentrations are natural logtransformed, then standardized to reduce collinearity with interaction terms. In both samples, cortisol and testosterone negatively interacted, such that testosterone was significantly

467 negatively related to F_0 only in men with low cortisol levels (see also Fig. S1, Table S6).





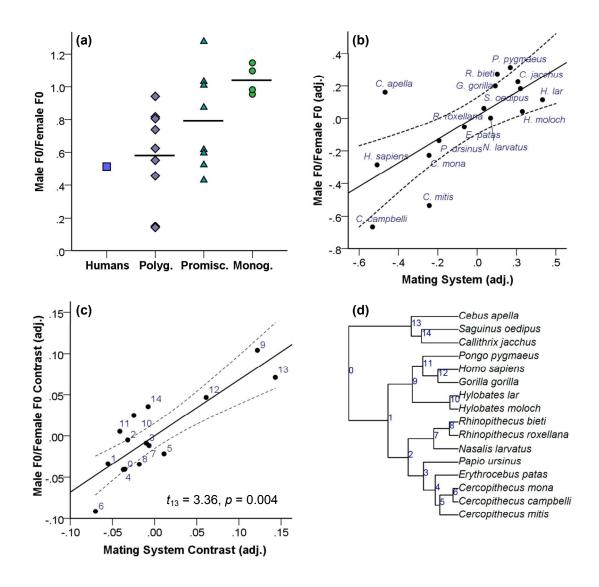


Fig. 2

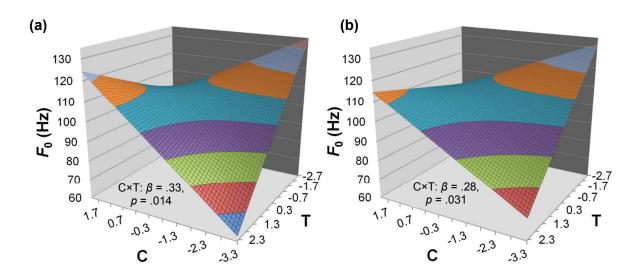


Fig. 3

1	Table 1. PGLS regression mo	dels predicting evolution	onary changes in F_0
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		F	df	R^2	٨	Est.	t	p
Body mass	Model (males)	14.01	2,27	0.32	1.00			<0.0001
	In(mass)					-0.74	-3.74	<0.001
	Model (females)	6.88	2,26	0.21	0.98			
	In(mass)					56	-2.62	0.014
Mating system	Model ¹	6.42	3,13	0.50	0.82			0.007
	Polygyny vs. monogamy					0.55	3.51	0.004
	Male/female mass					0.16	2.62	0.021
	Model ²	6.31	3,13	0.49	1.00			0.007
	Polygyny vs. monogamy					0.58	2.89	0.013
	Male/female mass					0.30	3.55	0.004
	Model ³	6.03	3,12	0.50	0.85			<0.01
	Polygyny vs. monogamy					0.56	3.40	0.005
	Male/female mass					0.17	2.50	0.028
Habitat	Model	3.33	4,19	0.34	1.00			0.032
	Terrestrial vs. arboreal					-0.18	-2.58	0.018
	Terrestrial vs. arb./terr.					-0.16	-1.37	0.188
	Male/female mass					0.06	1.30	0.209

2

3 1. Humans treated as polygynous. 2. Humans treated as monogamous. 3. Humans excluded.