

Short Rage Revisited

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Abstract

This article is looking at the impact of height on how people define their reality. How heightism impacts career choices, income, playing of sports, choosing a partner, and the impact of bullying and name calling. The results indicate, through the use of both quantitative (20 respondents) and qualitative data collection (14 respondents), that the majority of respondents feel that being vertically challenged does have a negative impact on their life. One-hundred percent of respondents believed that there is discrimination against short people in the social and economic arenas, but not as much when it comes to politics. Many of the female respondents felt that it was an interaction between both being female and height that led to their inability to make as much as their male counterparts, but did agree that the disparity in income existed. The findings support the previous literature that has been written on this topic, with the exception of height playing a role in the election of political candidates. The majority of the literature concluded that being vertically challenged did impact promotions and income negatively.

Reflexive Statement

Back in 2002, I published a book titled: *Short Rage*. At the time, I was trying to emotionally cope with the struggles of being a 4'8" academician in the field of sociology. In that book, I discussed issues of being discriminated against because of my height. I mentioned the times I had been ignored, talked down to, pushed aside, stared at, and made fun of. I worked hard to achieve my goals in life and felt completely disrespected and invisible. I am revisiting this issue, because today, I still feel that height discrimination is ever present in education, economics, politics, and social interactions in general. To this day, I am still invisible in crowds. I am paid, on average \$30,000 per year less than my department head counterparts in the College of Liberal Arts at Tennessee State University. And when it comes to making recommendations at meetings, my ideas are ignored only to be brought back up later as original ideas by colleagues who are usually male, average height or taller, and because of this, considered credible. I have seen my ideas and recommendations come back up in later meetings by my male counterparts only to be accepted, processed, and seen as brilliant ideas or excellent recommendations. In this article, I will discuss each area of inequality and attempt to support my claims with data supporting the argument that discrimination is still present in 2018. At this time, it may be one of the only socially acceptable means of discrimination, with the exception of obesity. People may still voice their hatred and superiority towards other outside groups based on race, religion, gender, etc. However, rational, educated people know how to filter their hate. They know that verbalizing their prejudices is no longer acceptable, and when push comes to shove, "normal" people (white, average or taller height, heterosexual, and male) will at minimum, practice tolerance.

Introduction

When listening to any parents, family members, or friends discussing each other's children, there are always comments being made like "she is growing so fast, I hope she is going to be tall like her father." Or, "he is so small, I hope he starts growing soon." "Please don't let her be short like me." Or they tell their children things like "eat your vegetables so you can grow up big and strong."

There is a real feeling that short people are inferior, which drives the real concern parents have when their child is below the average height growing up. It is evident in the language that we use. For example, “He is short sighted.” Or I drew the “short end of the stick,” he is “looked down on,” She is a “little bit of nothing,” How dare that little person talk to me that way,” or my favorite “who does that little piece of shit think she is?” even comments like “it is just a small problem” insinuates that something small is insignificant. Or language is used implying the invisibility of small people. Like, “you are so small, I didn’t even see you standing there.

Lora Nakamura, in her article “Looking Up: A Short Woman’s view of a Heightist” (2006) states “I stopped growing in 6th grade...After the nurse weighed and measured me, we waited in the examining room for the doctor. As the doctor entered, reviewing my charts, she specifically focused on my growth history. As she looked up with a saddened expression, she stated that I had probably stopped growing. Partly because of the doctor’s grave look, and partly because I had already internalized heightist ideologies, I looked at my mom and began to cry. My mom became tearful too, not because she had hoped for a tall daughter, but more because she knew the pain I was feeling and anticipated the hardships I would face as an adult of four feet eight inches.” (Nakamura, 2006, p. 66). I can share similar feelings of sadness and vulnerability from my own personal experience of the realization that I would only be 4’8” going into adulthood, but I never knew how bad it would be until I got there. While in my 20s, I worked my way through college working at a bar. I was constantly patted on the head, picked up, groped, made fun of and called names. People thought I was lying when I told them I was attending college and I plan to go onto graduate school. I actually had several people pat me on the head and say “sure you are honey.” I had to ask myself, would they have done any of this to me if I had been taller?

Once I started teaching, I was constantly struggling with people not believing I was a college professor, but one of the students. I also dealt with students constantly challenging my knowledge in the classroom. Again, I had to ask, would that have happened if I was 5’7,” 5’8”, or better yet, a 6’0” male.

The comments still continue today. I had a male colleague from MTSU, when he first met me, actually say to me “you are a tiny little shit aren’t you.” Was that appropriate, or necessary? I was a senior faculty member and the Head of the Department of Criminal Justice at Tennessee State University at the time.

As we will see in Goffman’s work (1963), name calling and degrading comments hurt and can even define a person’s perception of self and who they think they are or can be. I fought hard to prove people wrong about who they thought I was based on my physical size, but for many people the derogatory words and dehumanizing treatment can define and work to destroy them. They may give up and become who everybody thinks they are, invisible, weak, unintelligent, and unworthy of equal treatment. I sometimes still struggle to understand why, even after earning my Ph.D. and teaching, researching, and publishing journal articles and books, I question whether or not I am living a lie about who I think I am. I don’t look or sound like other college professors. I have never been asked to share my expert opinion on anything. I understand from the perspective of social constructionism, that the image of a professor is socially constructed, and I do not fit that image. When someone is asked to be the voice of authority, they most fit the expectations of a person in that role in our society. I question myself, can I really continue with fighting this dichotomy between how I see myself and how the other views me?

The Impact of Stigma

According to Goffman (1963), most “normal people” believe that the stigmatized individual is not quite human. Especially when the difference in the stigmatized person is visible. Being stigmatized can result from spending time in prison, being in rehab for drugs and alcohol, being a prostitute, or a homosexual. These are all categories that may not be immediately visible, and can be hidden by the carrier of the stigma. However, when the abnormality that carries the stigma is visible, it is difficult for the carrier to hide the difference that allows the normal persons to attach a stigma to the abnormality. For example, being a person of color, having a physical disability like being blind, missing a limb, being obese, etc. are usually conditions a person cannot hide, and in most cases cannot change. Once a person with a visible abnormality enters into interaction with a person who considers themselves normal, the normal person puts expectations and applies stereotypes to that person. Whether real or imagined, these expectations and stereotypes impact the outcome of the social interaction (Goffman, 1963). Using a recent example, a young black male in a hoodie may be stereotyped as dangerous and criminal. In all actuality, he may very well be a very bright young man pursuing a college education, but if treated as a criminal enough, that young black male will develop a defense mechanism to protect him from the negativity that surrounds him.

He may avoid driving at night, for fear he will get stopped by police, he may avoid predominately white communities, and may crossover to the other side of the street when someone of another race is approaching him for fear that he may intimidate the other.

In a similar fashion, a short person may avoid certain social situations as well. Or alter their behavior to avoid dealing with being stereotyped and treated differently because of height challenges. For example, I avoid going anywhere that is crowded, unless it is absolutely necessary. When in crowds, I am usually pushed, stepped on, overlooked, looked down on, stared at, and made fun of. I have anxiety attacks if placed in a situation that involves a lot of people in a small space. I run marathons, and the start line usually includes cramming as many people as they can into corrals. I usually have to be at the edge of my corral, or wait just outside of my corral before the race begins. Once in the corral, I am usually pushed around, elbowed in the eye, etc. It is just not a pleasant situation.

“Given what both the stigmatized and we normals introduce into mixed social situations, it is understandable that all will not go smoothly. We are likely to attempt to carry on as though he in fact wholly fitted one of the types of person naturally available to us in the situation, whether this means treating him as someone better than we feel he might be or someone worse than we probably feel he is. If neither of these tacks is possible, than we may try to act as if he were a ‘non-person,’ and not present at all as someone of whom ritual notice is to be taken. He in turn is likely to go along with the strategies, at least initially” (Goffman, 1963, p. 18).

I have also been put in this situation many times, treated as if I do not exist. I have adapted to just blending into the scenery, or at professional meetings, just not talking. Even if I feel I have something important to add, I just stay silent due to my voice usually not being heard.

Another thing Goffman addresses in his work, is the impact of the stigma. Once stereotyped, many stigmatized people adapt to the behavior that is expected of them given their physical abnormality. For example, I was recently at a meeting with all the other Department Heads and brought up the issue of faculty salary disparities. I mentioned that I had just hired two new faculty at a salary higher than mine. My whole comment was overlooked and we moved on to another agenda item. When another faculty member brought up the same issue at the next meeting, using himself as an example, everyone appalled and agreed that it should be something that we need to discuss at our next meeting. So many times this has been the case, to the point that while at meetings I don’t even bother to talk. Goffman (1963) discusses how the treatment of the individual based on the stigma impacts the individual and how it changes the individual’s view of self. I have gotten to the point where I just started, not necessarily believing in that fact that what I do and say is insignificant, but that what I do and say is not important. I cannot believe that I am the only person with a visible physical abnormality that feels this way. This limits our freedom and our achievements of goals. So many stereotyped people just give up trying to get their voices heard. That is what inspired me to write this article. I want my voice back. I went through a period in my early fifties where my favorite song was a Bob Dylan Song titled: “I Used to Care, But Things Have Changed.” That was a sad moment in my life. I now realize I still care about others, and I still want to be a voice for the disadvantaged, and I am going to continue to try to be heard. That is why I decided to write this article.

In the following pages, I will outline the economic and political advantages afforded to those white males above average height.

Leaderships Roles and Advantages in the Workplace

In an article posted on February 2, 2007, (CNN.com) titled “Why tall people make more money,” Meg Donahue discusses an article published by Nicola Persico, Andrew Postlewaite and Dan Silverman of the University of Pennsylvania which found that teens who are taller end up earning more money once they get established in their careers. The authors pointed to the advantage of taller people having more access to social activities and clubs which provide them with necessary skills and social networks necessary to gain self-esteem. “Weak self-esteem and underdeveloped social skills, can negatively affect the image one portrays to co-workers and managers as an adult. A person who lacks confidence is generally seen as less authoritative, and may have a harder time convincing employers of his or her leadership potential”

(<http://www.cnn.com/2007/us/careers/02/02.cb.tall.people/index.html>).

In the same CNN.com article on why tall people make more money, a study by Timothy A. Judge, a Psychologist from the University of Florida, reported findings that “every inch of height amounts to a salary increase of about \$789 per year” even when gender, weight and age are controlled (<http://www.cnn.com/2007/us/careers/02/02.cb.tall.people/index.html>).

Melvyn R.W. Hamstra, similarly found that “physical height substantially affects individuals’ success in society, predicting outcomes such as higher salary and increased likelihood of occupying leadership positions.” (Hamstra, 2014, p. 190). This may explain why the average height of fortune 500 CEOs is 6’2”.

Doug McMillion of Walmart: 5’9”

Matthias Muller of Volkswagen: 6’2”

Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway: 5’10”

Tim Cook of Apple: 6’3”

Bob Dudley of BP: 6’3”

Bill Gates of Microsoft: 5’10”

Sundar Pichai of Google: 6’3”

John S. Watson of Chevron: 6’4”

Because height is important in determining who occupies leadership positions in this country it should be no surprise that U.S. Presidents have also grown taller over time as is illustrated in “Heights of Presidents and Presidential candidates of the United States.” Using a linear trend estimation, this article shows how in almost every election since the 1900s, when the media influence started to impact the elections, the winning candidate has been taller than their opponent. As a matter of fact, 80% have been taller. In those cases where the winner was not taller, they were only about an inch shorter on average. For example,

Barack Obama was ½ inch shorter than Mitt Romney

George W. Bush was 5 and ½ inches shorter than John Kerry, but was running for his second term.

George W. Bush was also 1 and ½ inch shorter than Al Gore

Jimmy Carter was 1 and 1 and ½ inch shorter than Gerald Ford

Richard Nixon was 1 and ½ inch shorter than George McGovern

Calvin Coolidge was only 1 inch shorter than John Davis.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heights_of_presidents_and_presidential_candidates_of_the_united_states.

However, we have not had a President under 5’10” since William McKinley in 1900 (Tenner, 2004). McKinley, standing at only 5’7” was ridiculed in the press as being a “little boy” (Judge & Cable 2004). Tenner cites Daniel M. Cable, an Associate Professor of Organizational Management at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on this very topic. Stating that “William McKinley, elected in 1896, was the last president shorter than the average man.” (Tenner 2004, p. B 13). Continuing on to say that most political scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries felt that height was an indication of a throwback to more primitive times as a result of African, Asian, and European immigration. They believe that the diverse populations of the urban centers would lead to the degeneration of the American people.

Tenner (2004) goes on to talk about John Komios and Baur article that showed how “within the course of the 20th century the American population went through a virtual metamorphosis from being the tallest in the world, to being the most overweight” (p. B 13). However, Komios and Baur do not blame immigration, but contributes the growth and strength of Europeans to their superior health and welfare state.

Tenner (2004) also concludes that historically we have subscribed tallness to superior intelligence and performance, a sign of imperialism and wealth. He attributes the height of leaders to the assumptions Americans make about strength, power and intelligence. He also states that Americans want a leader they can look up to.

Blaker et, al. (2013), supported Tenner’s (2004) argument by reinforcing the claim that taller people have an advantage when it comes to social capital. Although, the authors claim that it is not clear why. They make the argument that the taller person is seen “as more leader-like because they are perceived as more dominant, healthy, and intelligent” (Blaker, Rompa, Dessing, Vriend, Herschberg and van Vugt, 2013, p. 17). Basing their argument on evolutionary leadership theory, the authors conclude that society may have a bias when it comes to tall people in leadership roles. It is a bias that is instinctive and implicit.

This is the result of the evolutionary process where the dominant male who emerged as a leader has stereotypically been taller and stronger than the other men in the group. Murray and Schmitz made the same claims back in 2011 in their article on height and leadership (Murray, 2011).

Other studies have concluded that not only does height have an impact on Presidents and C.E.O.s, but also those who are promoted at the middle management level tend to be taller as well. Some of those works include, Feldman (1975), Keyes (1980), and Gillis (1982). Feldman (1975), concludes that heightism and the unfair treatment of shorter employers is rooted in the bias that shorter people are inferior to taller people in the workforce.

According to an article written by Gawley, Perks and James in 2009, “Egolf and Corder (1991) conducted two surveys of workers employed in positions that they dichotomized as managerial versus non-managerial. The first study involved a nonrandom sample of 201 employees from a Fortune 500 company, and the second used a random sample of 200 employees from a large non-profit organization....The researchers found, for both studies, that those in managerial positions were significantly taller on average than non-managers, regardless of gender” (Gawley, Perks, and Curtis, 2009, p. 210).

Judge & Cable (2004) concluded that height does have an impact on promotions and earning potential in the workforce. Even when controlling for weight, sex, age and race, being taller has a significant impact on earnings over time. “An individual who is 72 in. tall would be predicted to earn almost \$166,000 more across a 30-year career than an individual who is 65 inches tall” (p. 437). In conclusion, the article found that that height is important when determining income and earning potential and should be taken seriously and given the same scholarly attention as other issues that impact a person’s ability to generate income. Dittman (2004) also found, in his study, that “when it comes to height, every inch counts—in fact, in the workplace, each inch above average may be worth \$789 more per year” (p. 14).

Concluding Thoughts

Here it is, sixteen years after I published *Short Rage*, and I am still troubled by the discrimination against all people who do not meet the media image of what it means to be normal, beautiful and intelligent. I am bothered because the discrimination based on physical characteristics hurts all of us. It leads to bullying, disenfranchisement, unequal pay, lack of educational and employment opportunities. It even determines how and who we fall in love with, or who we choose as a life partner. In order to confirm that I am not alone in my thoughts and my concerns, I have chosen to complete face-to-face interviews with other vertically challenged people. These interviews will be designed to get at what some of the pressing issues are and what are some of the challenges short people face. I am hoping that the results will help others understand that challenges do exist for people who fall below average height. For the purposes of this research, below average height for females will be defined as 5’2” and below and for males 5’7” and below http://theaveragebody.com/average_height.php.

Research Questions

Do those who are vertically challenged feel discriminated against socially, economically, and politically?
Have those who are (or are not) vertically challenged reported being bullied, or have people reported hearing about short people being bullied and/or made fun of?

Methodology

I have chosen to use a mixed methods approach, simply because there has not been much research conducted on heightism. At least not a lot of research that involves giving people who are vertically challenged a voice through the interview process. “Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge and action. It expands our horizons for choice and widens our experimental capacity to see, hear, and feel” (Thomas 1993, p.2). Short people have few opportunities to express the way they construct the realities of their lives. Allowing them the opportunity to share their experiences would give them some form of empowerment. We cannot use traditional forms of research methods to understand this group, or their voices will continue to be silenced. We, as social scientists cannot continue to make value judgements and assessments based on traditional research approaches that clearly function to repress the richness of our diversity as a society. Whether short, tall, white, black Asian Hispanic, rich or poor. All voices deserve to be heard. The information gathered from this group of vertically challenged males and females can help us as social scientists better understand how the stigma of being short impacts their definition of self and how it impacts their lives every day.

Logistics of data collections

The original respondents were chosen because of personal relationships with people whom I knew fit the criteria of being vertically challenged (5'2" and under for females and 5'7" and under for males). I then ask those respondents if they could forward my survey on to others they may know that would fit the criteria. I had designed specific topic areas that emerged from the literature, but I gave myself and the interviewees enough freedom to discuss other topics which emerged from the original questions (see appendix A for questionnaire). I ask respondents indirect questions regarding their experiences with being short and how those experiences impacted their lives. I assured them that I would keep their responses anonymous, so that they would feel comfortable to freely discuss their experiences. However, if they wanted to give their real name, and requested I use it, I would do that as well. I felt it important to give them the option. This way, if they wanted their voice to be heard, they would have the option to put their name with their comments. Otherwise, their voice would still be heard, but done anonymously. Therefore, some of the names attached to the responses are real names and other names are fictitious.

The qualitative questionnaire included 9 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). There were 14 respondents (7 males and 7 females). The average height of the Males was 5'4.5" with one respondent at 5'7", 2 at 5'6", 1 at 5'4" and 3 at 5'3". The average height of the female respondents was 4'9.5" with 1 respondent reporting being 4'8," 3 reporting a height of 4'9", two at 4'10", and one at 4'11".

An additional questionnaire was put out on Survey Monkey to get at how people of average height felt about short people as it was related to being bullied, politics, income disparities, and leadership positions. The questionnaire contained eight questions (see Appendix B). There were 20 people who responded to this survey. The results can be found in Appendix B and they will also be discussed in the findings section of this article.

Results and Research Findings

Research Question 1: Do those who are vertically challenged feel discriminated against socially, economically and politically?

When addressing the social aspect of this question, we must reflect on Goffman's research and his findings that people who are stigmatized generally avoid social situations (Goffman, 1963). 12 out of the 14 respondents who answered my qualitative survey said that they do avoid social situations. All seven females and 5 of the males reported that they try to avoid crowded places like parties, malls, etc.

Debbie: "I do not like malls, grocery stores, or crowded venues. I hate shopping period!"

Tia: "I hate crowds. I always get pushed and stepped on."

Maria: "I do not like crowded places. People are constantly bumping into me, pushing me, elbowing me, etc."

Abbey: "I chose not to attend my prom because I could not find any dresses to fit me."

Alan: "I avoided dating taller women. If a photo opportunity arises with taller folks, I try to get a sitting photo."

Chris: "I am sure I have avoided situations due to my short stature; there are too many for me to name. Yet, I can't think of any specific time that stands out. It has happened too often."

Peter: "The only situation that I tend to avoid is hugging men as a sign of friendship. Given my height, my head is more likely to fall on their chest as in a position of a child. I will extend a hand for a handshake to avoid most of these situations. This is also the same with hugging a tall women."

Randy: "Yes. I do not go shopping for clothes. I am very small and can only wear children's suits. I am constantly being stared at. I usually go to the men's department and buy a suit and pay dearly to have it altered. Kids point and stare when I am shopping in the children's department."

Pat: "I do not like places where there are a lot of people. I am constantly stared at, pushed, or ignored. When I try to join into conversations, taller people stand in front of me and block my view, closing in the circle. It is also uncomfortable, as a man, when I am talking to women and they are looking down at me."

Question #1 of the close-ended questionnaire that was put out on Survey Monkey simply asked if the respondent's believed that there was discrimination against short people, 90% of the 20 respondents said yes.

When addressing height and the impact of promotions and earning potential, Judge & Cable (2004) concluded that height does have an impact. Tenner (2004) also concludes that historically we have subscribed tallness to superior intelligence and performance. Blaker et. al. (2013), supported Tenner's (2004) argument by reinforcing the claim that taller people have an advantage when it comes to social capital. Other studies have concluded that not only does height have an impact on Presidents and C.E.O.s, but also those who are promoted at the middle management level tend to be taller as well. Including the works of Feldman (1975), Keyes (1980), and Gillis (1982).

There were two questions in the qualitative survey that addressed this topic. Questions 4 and 6 (See Appendix A). For question number 4, 5 of the female respondents answered yes. They do believe that short people have to work harder to prove they are deserving of leadership positions. The two females that answered no to question 4, believed that gender played a stronger role in determining how hard they had to work to prove their worth. For question number 6 (see Appendix A) 5 out of the 7 females did believe that being short impacted their earning potential negatively. Again, of the 2 that responded no to question 6, one felt that gender played a bigger role in earning potential and the final respondent felt that it was a combination of both height and gender that impacted negatively their earning potential.

Tasha: "Absolutely!" and "Yes. I make less than everyone else in my department that have the same position and I have been with the firm longer than any other person."

Debbie: "Yes. I am currently trying to get my salary to match those of my colleagues. I am underpaid significantly compared to others who are employed in my same position."

Tia: "No. However, I have had that problem, but I think it is more about being female than height." And, "No. I do feel gender plays a larger role in pay disparities than height."

Susie: "No. I have not had that problem. Because I am female yes." And, "No."

Maria: "Yes. People are constantly challenging my authority. I do not believe they would question my position if I were taller and/or male." And, "Yes. I know for a fact that I get paid much less than my co-workers and I have been in the same position for the same amount of time with the same credentials."

Micah: "Yes. I do believe we have to work hard just to prove that our height does not define who we are as a person." And, "I do not believe height would affect your earnings."

Abbey: "Absolutely! I used to work at a music store called FYE (For Your Entertainment) and I was the shortest one there, I solemnly feel like I worked harder than everyone else because I couldn't reach a lot of things and I had to put more effort into bringing out those heavy ladders, I had to carry heavy things, and I could barely see the register screen! I wanted to be promoted to Assistant Store Manager but all my hard work was over-looked (pun intended). They kept hiring in new people for management positions while I kept working and working, they didn't see me fit as a manager because they believed I wasn't big enough for it, even though I was totally capable. Eventually I was finally promoted, I still didn't feel like I was being treated like a manager. I feel like my superiors pushed me around a lot so I would pick up after them and all those crappy things. I wanted to be equal with every other manager and did the same jobs as them but I was always pushed to do something else so I had to quit and find a place elsewhere that would treat me like an equal instead of someone they can pick on." And, "I believe when it comes to earning things we're all treated equally, but the smaller one's achievements are overlooked by their shortness. People are too concerned with their height more than what they've earned."

For the male respondents, 6 out of 7 answered yes to both question number 4 and 6. All males believed that vertically challenged people had to work harder to prove their worth and that their height impacted their earning potential.

Rick: "Yes. Stature does play a role in that. The visuals take us down a bit." And, "depends on if you are in the hard labor field, but not so much business."

Larry: "Yes. Although television obscures this to some degree." And, "Belief only."

Chris: "Yes, short people definitely have to work harder to achieve things in life. You can't just be an average performer and get noticed as a short person; you have to excel! Taller people don't have to work as hard; they can be average and they will get noticed. Take our athletes as an example: sadly you will never see a short baseball, football or basketball player who puts up average numbers like his taller peers."

They have to outperform them or they will never see playing time. Short politicians always get mocked also. And, “I do think there is definitely a pay disparity happening based on height alone, which there is no justification for. I know one of my coworkers was making more than me a few years ago, though she had much less experience than I had and I was 15 years older also with military experience. We were hired at same time also. There was a study, which I am sure you are familiar with, conducted about fifteen years ago now by Timothy Judge saying that with every additional inch of height a person can be expected to make \$789 more a year than someone an inch shorter.”

Peter: “No. This has never been my professional experience. Even when I did run for a political office, I never thought that my height created a disadvantage, not having money to fund the campaign and name recognition and social networks was I think the most dominant factor.” And, “Yes. I don’t know this to be true and don’t know of any examples where I have firsthand knowledge of this occurring as a result of overt discrimination.

Randy: “Yes. I work at a place which requires hard physical labor. Even though I can handle myself, people are always trying to help me which makes it look like I cannot handle my job.” And, “Yes. I have been with my company for 28 years and have never been promoted. I have even earned my degree, never missed work, etc. and they still assume I am not deserving of a promotion.”

Pat: “Yes. I feel denial of certain promotions were due to lack of trust my supervisors had in me. The lack of trust is not due to my job performance, but due to height.” And, “I know that I am underpaid significantly compared to my colleagues who are holding the same middle management position with less experience and time invested.”

Question #5 addresses the respondent’s belief on whether or not Americans would vote for a politician that was vertically challenged. This question allowed me to investigate whether or not respondents felt that most people vote for those candidates that are taller than their opponents. As was pointed out in the literature review, in the article titled “Heights of Presidents and Presidential candidates of the United States,” the winning candidate has been taller than their opponent. As a matter of fact, 80% have been taller. In those cases where the winner was not taller, they were only about an inch shorter on average.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heights_of_presidents_and_presidential_candidates_of_the_united_states

Five of the 7 male respondents said that they did believe that Americans would vote for a President that was shorter than their opponent. However, one of those five stated that the shorter candidate would have to be stellar. Two of the respondents responded that they did not know if height would impact the outcome of the election, but that shorter candidates and politicians are made fun of in the media.

Chris: “Well, John McCain ran in 2008 and he was 5’8” with a female running mate. I do not think it’s impossible. But, the candidate would have to be stellar if they were shorter than the average. Sadly, in this country of supposedly tolerant people, they don’t tolerate short people.”

Randy: “I don’t know. I do know that shorter candidates and politicians are usually made fun of. Or, they make them look taller on TV with the hopes that people will not notice because they know, once it gets out how short they are, they will lose votes.”

Pat: “I don’t know. I do know that shorter politicians are made fun of. Trump had a field day with Senator Bob Corker.”

Alan: “Probably not. Two examples, Dukakis and Mitch McDaniel. One tried, one would not because of his height.”

For the female respondents, two said yes, Americans would vote for a political candidate who is shorter than their opponent, two said no they wouldn’t and three said maybe or probably.

Debbie: “Probably, but I can’t say for certain. However, I hear comments around me about short politicians and them having a short man’s complex.”

Tia: “Maybe, I am not sure. I do know that Trump has made fun of short Senators and political candidates for their height.”

Abbey: “I think the media wants to make people in power look taller than they really are. I believe it is possible for someone shorter to win office, but only because nobody would really know how tall they are unless the candidate was asked. I believe the media tries hard to make people seem average height when they are not.”

Maria: “No. Short candidates and political leaders, like senators and congressmen are constantly being made fun of and called names because of their height. Like, Little Bob Corker and Little Rocket man.”

Micah: “No. I do not believe Americans would vote for a candidate below average height.”

The close-ended questionnaire also included a question about whether or not Americans would vote for a short person running for President. Twenty-five percent said yes, 15% said no and 60% believed they would if the candidate was the most qualified.

As for drawing conclusions for the impact of height on social, economic, and political success. 12 out of the 14 respondents avoided social situations, and 10 out of the 14 respondents felt that height impacted earning potential, however, the question regarding the impact of height on running a successful political campaign, the results leaned more toward their not being an impact when it comes to politics. The researcher can definitively say that the results, although the sample being very limited, support that most vertically challenged people believe that their height has impacted their social life and earning potential. Also, the qualitative data supports previous researcher’s findings that discrimination does exist among the vertically challenged.

Research Question 2: Have those who are (or are not) vertically challenged reported being bullied, or have people reported hearing about short people being bullied and/or made fun of?

As cited in the literature review, Goffman (1963) made reference to the stigma of the label when a person is different (physically or mentally). The stigma of the label can impact both the internal thoughts of the person who has been stigmatized, but can also impact the way an outsider views, or treats those stigmatized. The marginalization of the vertically challenged has led to differential treatment in the form of bullying and name calling (Burriss-Kitchen 2002).

The quantitative results (see appendix B, Q3 and Q5) indicated that 80% of respondents believed that short people are more often victims of bullying and, 90% responded that they have heard someone make fun of someone short.

The qualitative results were analyzed by reviewing the responses to questions 3 (see appendix A). Of the seven female respondents, all 7 reported being a victim of bullying.

Tasha: “Yes. People use to take my money all the time when I was in elementary, junior high and high school. They used to take things and hold them high up over their heads so I would have to jump up and try to get them back. They thought it was funny.”

Susie: “Yes. A girl was bigger than me and she tried to beat me up because she was bigger.”

Debbie: “Yes. I was stuffed in my locker a couple of times in high school. I was shoved to the ground and money was taken from me later in life. I now carry a concealed weapon and I have been trained in MMA. I am fearful, because of my size, that people will see me as an easy mark.”

Tia: “Yes. Bigger girls always wanted to fight me and stuff me in lockers.”

Abbey: “People bullied me for a lot of reasons. Some reasons being ethnicity, my personal life, my choices and views, but the thing was, there were other people who were like me, but taller and they didn’t get as much harassment as I did. I believe people found me easy to pick on because I am smaller than everyone else and they think I can’t do anything about their behavior because they think I am helpless, because I am so small.”

Maria: “Yes. I was challenged to several fights in middle school and high school simply because I was small. I have been pushed down, shoved, and called several degrading names. Names like pee-wee, short shit, midget, etc.”

Micah: “Yes. I have been a victim of bullying. While in school I was picked on because of my height. I was mentally and physically abused because of my height.”

In a similar fashion, all 7 males reported being bullied because of their height.

Rick: “A little bit, but I have some Martial Arts. I have learned to channel my aggression through Martial Arts.”

Alan: “Yes. In my youth I was bullied by a bigger person. It made me determined to get stronger and skilled to put him, and others like him, in their place.”

Larry: “Yes. My small size, both height and build, frequently made me the target of bullies in school and in the neighborhood growing up through about age 14 or 15. They bullying through threats was routine and frequent. The bullying that became physical violence was more infrequent, usually shoving, kicking, hitting.”

Chris: “Yes, I have been bullied. Whether it has been verbal abuse, ostracizing or physical abuse. Been called a midget numerous times, whether at school or in workplace. Had enough instances where I have been ignored/disregarded. I do recall an incident in my senior year when a sophomore grabbed me by neck and threw me against a wall. I attribute most of this to my short stature, which of course led to my attitude issues, which made things worse. I’ve been picked on for other things but not as bad as my stature.”

Peter: “Yes, during my boyhood and adolescence being bullied because of my height was present. It was a sign of weakness for boys and young men. I compensated for this by weight lifting during early adolescence and being involved in athletics.”

Randy: “Yes. When I was younger, people always wanted to start a fight with me. Once I was stabbed in the back with a pencil on the school bus. I didn’t feel like I could retaliate because this guy was so much larger than I.”

Pat: “Yes. People are still trying to bully me into getting their way, even in the office setting. Taller and bigger men will puff up and talk down to me when I am trying to get them to do their job.”

Upon close investigation of both the qualitative and the quantitative research responses, it is safe to report that everyone feels that they have been bullied because of their height. Most reported the bullying happening when they were younger, but a few did report that they felt they were still being bullied into adulthood. Also, ninety percent of those who responded to the close-ended survey reported that they have heard someone being made fun of because of their height.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how heightism impacts people’s lives. Being vertically challenged can impact decisions on playing sports, taking certain jobs, dating, and avoiding social situations. It may also impact how the vertically challenged view themselves. While the sample sizes were very small and not large enough to make generalization to the larger group, it is important to note that every respondent, including those who responded to the qualitative and quantitative survey, believed that people are discriminated against because of height.

For future research, it would be important to isolate exactly what the discrimination is. It has been well documented that there is disparity in pay and promotion opportunities, but how important is it to look into the impact that language used and jokes made has on the self-esteem, setting of dreams, and achievements for those who are vertically challenged transitioning into adulthood?

Appendix A

Research Questionnaire

1. Do you feel like you are treated differently because of your height? If so, in what way have you been treated differently?
2. Have you ever avoided social situations because you thought you would be uncomfortable in that situation because of your height?
3. Have you ever been a victim of bullying? If so, what was the circumstance and do you feel that your height played a role in your being a victim?
4. Do you think people who are short have to work harder to prove that they are deserving of leadership positions in business and politics?
5. Do you think Americans would vote for a Presidential candidate below average height?
6. Do you believe that, on average, short people have less earning potential than those people who are above average height?
7. Do you believe that being vertically challenged has altered your life choices? For example, decisions to play certain sports, date certain people, run for political positions, take on a certain major in college, attend certain social functions, etc.?
8. In conclusion of this Interview, I would like to give you an opportunity to share any personal experiences you have had to deal with because of your height. If you feel comfortable sharing your experiences.

Appendix B

Survey Monkey Questionnaire

Q1. Do you think that there is discrimination against people who are short? (women 5'2" and under and men 5'8" or under)?

Response: 90% Yes 10% No

Q2. If female, would you date a man shorter than you? And if male, would you date a man taller than you?

Response: 50% Yes 50% No

Q3. Do you feel that people who are short are more often victims of bullying more often than those of average height or taller?

Response: 85% Yes 15% No

Q4. Would you vote for a short person running for resident of the U.S.?

Response: 20% Yes 10% No 70% if they were the most qualified candidate

Q5. Have you ever made fun of, or heard someone else make fun of someone for being short?

Response: 100% Yes 0% No

Q6. When you think about the physical characteristics of a boss, is being tall one of those characteristics that comes to mind?

Response: 30% Yes 70% No

Q7: Do you feel that short people have a little bit more hostility than people of average height or taller?

Response: 45% Yes 55% No

Q8. If you were in the position to hire someone and two people came in to interview with the exact same qualifications and experience, with the only difference being one person was average height and the other was short, would you choose the average height person over the short candidate?

Response: 15% Yes 85% No

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