Definition of Height Discrimination

Height, subconsciously and consciously, determines men’s perceived and actual quality of life. Men, specifically short men, are the demographic most impacted by this form of discrimination, called height discrimination. They are paid less, considered less attractive, and have lower overall self-confidence than average and tall men. Some 5’6”–5’7” men might consider themselves short, and will probably complain about being discriminated against , but in actuality men 5’5” and under are most affected by this discrimination, whereas men 6’ or taller benefit from it. Height discrimination is defined as prejudice against short individuals, and it is accepted, ignored, and even in most cases favored by men 6’ or taller.

Heightism is one of the most accepted forms of prejudice, and is considered by many the last acceptable form of discrimination. To illustrate, two American psychologists, Leslie Martel and Henry Biller, wrote a book “Stature and Stigma, The biopsychosocial Development of short males”. Furthermore, “Mr. Martel and Mr. Biller asked several hundred university students to rate the qualities of men of varying heights on 17 different criteria. Both men and women, whether short or tall, thought that short men – heights between 5’2” and 5’5” – were less mature, less positive, less secure, less masculine, less happy, less capable, less confident, more inhibited, more timid, more passive, and so on”(Rauch). To sum up, this statistic shows that short men even view themselves negatively, because heightism is so commonplace. It is alluded to as one of the last forms of discrimination because it is so covert and aside from the idea of Napoleon complex,is not based in historical implications and therefore misrepresented.

The significance of height is embedded in our language. “ We “look up” to those we admire, while “looking down” upon those who are shameful. The words “ big” and “tall” are associated with greatness, while small is associated with lacking in ability, intellect, or significance, such as small-minded” (Lindeman,1999). In short, the idiomatic nature of height discrimination shows us how ingrained this prejudice is. In addition, shortness is a bigger liability than tallness is an asset. “Jackson and Ervin (1994) examined the role of height stereotypes by merging the areas of attraction, personality, and occupation into one study. Short targets were rated lower while tall and average targets were rated equally. Based on their findings, Jackson and Ervin concluded that “being short is more of a liability than being tall is an asset” (Anderson 5).

Society has also placed a premium on height in the workplace. After analyzing the results of four large-scale studies, judge and co-author Daniel Cable, and business professor at the

University of North Carolina at Chapel-Hill, found that extra inches could add up to thousands of dollars. For each inch in height, a person earned about $789 more in pay. So a 6 foot person would earn $5,525 more each year than someone who is 5’5(Judge). Moreover, a large study done by Judge and Cable found that height was positively related to income, even after common determinants such as age, sex, and weight were controlled for. However, they also concluded that the correlation between height and job performance was more subjective more than anything, indicating that the perception of short people affects their job performance, not their inherent skill level.

When confronted about heightism being a real issue, most people will respond with typical platitudes of denial such as “I didn’t even think of that. “It is ignored to the point where many people are not aware it exists, and can’t fathom shortness being a potential detriment to one’s success” (Popkie). In addition, shortness is correlated with inferiority, and, thus, we make snap judgements unconsciously about short men. People will be quick to label short men with a complex if they act in a cocky manner and are accused of compensating.On the other hand no matter how tall people act they are just acting based on a feeling, and on the contrary short men can only act a certain way. People , generally speaking, will proclaim they don’t view short men any different, but without much though, label short men with these discriminatory labels and double standards, even though there is little evidence to suggest height and personality are correlated. “ It is also interesting to consider Adler’s concept of the Napoleon complex in the context of the workplace. To the extent that some short individuals overcompensate for their lack of stature with overaggressive, belligerent, or arrogant actions, it is possible that aggression may mediate the relationship between height and workplace success. Although one study (Willoughby & Blount, 1985) did reveal that shorter police officers displayed more aggressive behavior than tall officers, there is almost no empirical data on the height-aggressiveness relationship. More research is needed on this topic” (Judge, Cable 438).

Many peer reviewed studies are dismiss, criticized, and belittled by scholars even though decades of empirical research has been conducted on height . People do not want to hear the truth, especially when it pertains to a prejudice that gets little to no attention and is not well understood. “ There has been little serious inquiry regarding this topic since the early 1980s. Moreover, results from studies that are conducted often are greeted with a mixture of skepticism and humor by scholars” (Keyes, 1980). “The haphazard treatment of the height-workplace success topic may be due, in part, to researchers’ unwillingness to believe that such a nonperformance-related attribute could play much of a role in performance-oriented environments”. Since it can be demonstrated that this culture positively values tall stature, particularly for males, reflected in most advertising, fashion design, athletics, occupational qualifications, leadership, social status, and heterosexual relationships, the consequences of short stature deserve attention from behavior scientists.(Judge, Cable 437). In conclusion, it could be said that scholars do not want to believe height affects success because of the lack of understanding, and can’t imagine a nonperformance attribute having such a pronounced cause and effect relationship. They are also putting too much stock into their own biases , as opposed to the multitude of peer-reviewed studies that have been conducted on this prejudice.

Height discrimination is not thought of as comparable to discrimination based on other success determining attributes, such as attractiveness and weight, even though studies show it qualifies. “ First, and perhaps, most important, results from our analyses revealed that height clearly matters in the context of workplace success. The overall meta-analytic results, based on 45 independent studies, demonstrated that height has a non-zero association with success(p = .26). Height was also significantly and positively related to earnings in all four of our earnings studies, controlling for sex, age and weight. Moreover, the unstandardized coefficients suggested that 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 in. tall. Our analysis in study 2 revealed that the effect of height appears to be quite stable over the course of one’s career; height does not appear to be an ephemeral advantage that matters only early in life and then dissipates. In general, the combined results presented in this article suggest important, meaningful differences in workplace success depending on physical height. Thus one important takeaway from this investigation is that the topic of physical height deserves equal footing with other types of physical attributes that garner serious scholarly attention, such as attractiveness and weight”(Judge, Cable 437). An important take-away from this is the understanding of how and why height affects people’s success in the workplace with respect to income (p = .26), and Also, this specifically illustrates that the advantages of height do not peter out , consequently showing that height discrimination is prevalent the vast majority of one’s career and is still not taken seriously.

Typically, men 6’ or taller are unaware of the pervasive discrimination against short men, or enjoy benefits. “On the other side of the interviewing table, economist John Kenneth Galbraith says he’s experienced his tallness as a competitive asset on the job market. At 6’8.5, he explains, my height gave me a range of opportunity that I would have never had otherwise, because people always remember the guy who’s head stands high above the others when they are trying to think of somebody for a job”(Keyes 34). They have privileges that are likely to remain, since there is no group of short people fighting for abolishment of height discrimination, and additionally, before the ADAAA, a short person would not be eligible for legal protection. Furthermore, height that falls below the third percentile, related to an additional medical impairment qualifies as a disability, but that number is too subjective to make a case for, so nevertheless, only those with “extreme short stature” would be protected. On the other hand, “short adults, however, do not qualify for these Social Security benefits, although the qualifying standards for “disability” under the Social Security Administration tend to be more rigorous than those for protection under the ADA”(Americans with Disability Act)(Rosenburg 937). “The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) has further clarified that “impairment” does not include physical characteristics such as eye color, hair color, left-handedness, or height, weight, or muscle tone that are within ‘normal’ range and are not the result of a physiological disorder”. “A plain reading of this language would suggest that the definition of “physical impairment” includes either (1) a normal deviation in height that is the product of a physiological disorder, or (2) an extreme deviation in height that may or may not be caused by a physiological disorder” (Rosenburg 928).

In addition, normally short people get nowhere trying to make height discrimination claims under actual impairment prongs. “ The remaining short people comprise a “heterogeneous group of otherwise apparently normal [people] who are at or below the 5th percentile for height, but who respond normally to growth hormone. This group includes those classified as having genetic short stature, normal variant familial short stature (if they have short parents), constitutional delay of growth (if they experience a delay in skeletal maturation) or idiopathic short stature (in the absence of any other diagnosable cause. Courts have already recognized that short stature resulting from a variety of the aforementioned medical causes, notably achondroplasia, and diastrophic dysplasia, qualifies as an impairment. Those who are just plain short, however, had virtually no success bringing pure height-based claims under the “actual impairment” prong” (Rosenburg 930).

Additionally, there are many stories based on pure subjective anecdotes written from the perspective of tall men that suggest they are not happy challenging the notion of height discrimination, because they face so little sizeable disadvantages. To illustrate this is an answer to the question” What is it like being tall?” ,taken from the blog TheSocialComplex, author Geoffrey Arnold (some bullet points are taken out since they don’t involve social or workplace privileges, on the contrary minor physical inconveniences “9, In the end, the negatives are minor annoyances I dealt with in my earlier years but rarely anymore today” (Arnold) . “ There are few disadvantages to being tall, in fact the only one that comes to mind is this: people a little shorter can be intimidated, especially men shorter than me. Getting over that isn’t such a big deal as long as I help them feel comfortable when I’m around. Here’s a few noticeable advantages “1. If you want attention, being tall certainly helps” “2.You can see very far into the distance past people” “3. It’s almost embarrassing to say, but I’m almost sure I’ve sealed 2 or 3 (out of the 12) jobs I’ve had with height being a factor” “4. Instant Respect” “6. As a male I attract quite a bit of female attraction and interest”(Arnold). To sum up, normally short people (above the 5th percentile) make little progress convincing courts that their struggles qualify as an “impairment prong” from the ADA, or the EEOC, because of such concise clarification of impairment, and men enjoy the social and workplace benefits that height discrimination offers them.

In conclusion, height discrimination remains a powerful factor for short men. Your height affects other’s perception of you, your perception, your dating prospects, and your income. It is very difficult to convince most tall persons that this form of discrimination exists, and others are aware, don’t need convincing and exploit height discrimination. There is next to nothing legally normally short people can do to convince the ADA or EEOC that they experience real discrimination, heightism is embedded in our language, peer reviewed studies are met with criticism, skepticism, and humor despite the empirical evidence, Scholars don’t believe such a nonperformance attribute affects occupational success, and short people are labeled with complexes that have no basis in any research conducted on height discrimination. Height discrimination is defined as prejudice against short individuals, and it is accepted, ignored, and even in most cases favored by men 6’ or taller.

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