

HEIGHT, POWER, AND GENDER: POLITICIZING THE MEASURED BODY

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ABSTRACT

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In the last couple of decades, feminist research on the body has experienced a tremendous upsurge. Despite the high level of academic interest in bodily issues such as fat and disability, scholars and other feminists have been curiously silent on the subject of height. In this thesis, I politicize height by critically exploring its place within gendered networks of power, informing my arguments with the work of Michel Foucault and feminist work on the body. Positing my argument against the evolutionary biological theory that dominance is the “natural” consequence of greater height, I contend in my first chapter that the association of power with height is a socially constructed phenomenon: taller bodies are institutionally and discursively imbued with power. Grounded within what I term “the mythology of tallness,” systemic heightism – the unequal system of power based on height – privileges the tall body and oppresses the short, while also intersecting with other systems of oppression. Recognizing that heightism cannot be separated from considerations of gender and patriarchy, I devote a chapter each to the tall woman and the short man, both of which are non-normative bodies. I discuss the tall woman’s inadvertent challenges to patriarchy, including her carnivalesque potential, while pointing out their important limitations. Paralleling the short man to the tall woman, I examine the hegemonic punishment of the short male body for the patriarchal anxiety he creates by occupying little space and therefore embodying femininity. I show how this anxiety is manifested in representation, where the short male

is emasculated and vilified. I also look at the controversial practice of “treatment” of the short boy with human growth hormones to make his body taller. Following my case studies, I deconstruct Western discourses of limb-lengthening surgery in China, a nation currently the focus of Western anxiety. Applying Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, I argue that these discourses construct the West as rational and civilized and the East – specifically China – as the overly consumerist, barbaric, and, most importantly, feminine Other. I conclude by offering several strategies for resisting heightism.

To my Grandfather, Donald Gillmore, who will always be fondly remembered

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INTRODUCTION

Since I was a young child, I have been keenly aware of height. Because I was a short girl, my father made jokes about me manufacturing cookies in a tree, a reference to the Keebler Elves. I was nicknamed “Little Laura,” clearly a moniker derived from my stature. However, according to our pediatrician, my younger sister – who is five years my junior – was destined to become tall. When this prediction came true, suddenly she was indeed taller than I. Following this epic event, I endured annual comments from infrequently seen relatives who inevitably exclaimed, “Your sister is taller than you now!” Despite my sister having been taller than me for several years, my relatives could not resist pointing out this obvious fact *ad nauseum*. Their comments seemed to be based in an assumption that height somehow always functions hierarchically by age: the oldest child should be the tallest. Thus, being older and shorter appeared to them a comical paradox. I also sensed, embedded within their seemingly innocent observations, an implicit negativity associated with my being shorter, as if I had somehow failed, had stood idly by while my sister surpassed me in height. The other jokes and nicknames contained this same hidden message: my shortness was somehow *wrong*.

Years of teasing, in addition to many a frustrated attempt to reach a desired object from a cupboard just out of reach (invariably necessitating a perilous climb onto a counter), had left me sensitive to the issue of height. It was this awareness that set the stage for a serendipitous collision of two separate revelations. First, I was becoming conscious of the social control and production of the body while enrolled in a Theories of Othered Bodies course. Second, I noticed a peculiar trend as I walked across my college campus. As I strolled down the slim sidewalk, I would often find myself in the direct path of another person coming from the opposite direction. Suddenly, I would find myself locked in an unintended game of chicken; who would be the one

to move? I realized that the odds were almost never in my favor. Anyone taller than I, regardless of any other factor (gender, race, etc), automatically expected that with my five-foot-three-inch body, I was obliged to step aside. The taller individual would exhibit a sense of ownership towards the sidewalk, seeming not even to *contemplate* the idea of swerving in order to allow me to pass on a linear line. In each incident, I was *expected* to move, and at my relatively “short” stature, I had to, and continue to, move very frequently.

As I stewed over another bodily displacement of myself upon sidewalk territory, and contemplated what I would choose for an essay topic for Theories of Othered Bodies, the idea was conceived: I would examine height through the frameworks I had been learning in class. I realized that, contrary to the way people usually think of it, height is no mundane bodily fact of existence: height is *political*. Height does not exist outside of the realm of power relations – rather, it is bound up within them – nor is it free of issues of gender inequality.

As I wrote my paper about height, it occurred to me that what I had to say about height could not possibly fit into a short essay. Logically then, it made sense to expand the paper into the thesis I would write for my Master’s program. When I at last settled on a thesis topic, family members began inquiring as to what I had chosen to write about. One family member – my grandmother – responded to my description quite unexpectedly. When I explained to her that I was interested in writing about height and the body, her puzzled reaction was: “Some people are tall. What more can you say about it?” While I love my grandmother dearly, I disagree wholeheartedly with her assessment of the topic. Height is a very complicated – and, as my thesis demonstrates, significant – issue. Even the simple statement that “some people are tall” sparks a number of questions. What exactly is meant by the word “tall”? How does a particular body’s definition as “tall” vary within differing cultural contexts? How and what do “tall”

bodies mean in these contexts, and conversely, what do “short” bodies mean? To further complicate the issue, what do these bodies signify when including gender as a variable? What patterns occur in representations of these bodies in popular culture texts? How are these representations connected to power and privilege? These are the issues I grapple with in this project.

Despite the proliferation of feminist literature on the body that has emerged in the last few decades, with subjects like fat studies and disability studies, theoretical analysis focusing on height has been strangely lacking. I propose that we shift our focus to the vertical axis, to examine this issue of height that is so largely ignored in the academy. As the connection between power and height – and its relationship to issues of gender – is a significant one, this unfortunate oversight ought to be rectified. Heightism, or the system of oppression and privilege on the basis of stature, will not simply vanish if it remains unacknowledged; quite the opposite, it will become further entrenched.

In my thesis, I draw on feminist work on the body, including its sub-disciplines of fat studies and disability studies. The theoretical work of Michel Foucault (combined with feminist insight) informs my thinking and my analysis. I utilize scientific journal articles and books about height-related issues both as sources of information and as discourses to critically deconstruct.

In Chapter One, I argue that height is socially constructed, both in terms of identity and power. I explore the cultural mythology of tallness, which intersects in particular ways with gender/patriarchy. I demonstrate how tall bodies are imbued with power through various institutions, resulting in systemic heightism, which includes the oppression of short people and the privileging of tall people. I outline the myriad intersections of heightism with other systems

of inequality. Lastly, I examine how heightist ideologies are manifested discursively alongside other problematic myths.

Chapter Two focuses on the body of the tall woman, who is “grotesque” (to borrow Mary Russo’s conception of the term) in her location outside the bounds of feminine normativity. Although she unintentionally presents several challenges to patriarchy, including a carnivalesque flip-flop of the gendered power dynamic, I look critically at how the tall woman’s threat may not be as subversive or effective as it may appear. Additionally, while the tall woman does have some power and privilege by virtue of the myth of tallness, because of the threat she poses to patriarchy, she is recuperated into a non-threatening feminine embodiment. This is accomplished both literally – in the treatment of the tall girl with estrogen to make her a shorter adult – and representationally through the objectified, vilified, and feminized images of the tall woman and the giantess in popular culture texts.

The non-normative tall woman’s situation parallels that of the short man, the body I explore in the third chapter. Because the short man intrinsically does not match the patriarchal masculine body, he is read as feminine. This male femininity – as well as the short man’s carnivalesque potential – causes patriarchal anxiety and fear. Thus, in representation, the short man is vilified, feminized, and denigrated, reflecting his cultural status and simultaneously punishing him for his transgression.

In Chapter Four, I broaden my scope internationally, analyzing Western discourses of a practice in China known as extended limb-lengthening, in which the legs are broken and stretched to add height to the person undergoing the procedure. Rather than reproduce discursive hysteria over the surgery by attempting to understand this supposedly troubling Chinese practice, I look at how these Western discourses are Orientalist. They construct the West as superior to

the barbaric Chinese who would undertake such gruesome surgeries. These discourses also mobilize the concept of woman-as-nation to ultimately critique China as nation-as-woman; in other words, to cast China as feminine.

In my concluding chapter, I wish to leave the reader on a hopeful note. I contend that heightism can be resisted, struggled against, and broken down through a number of strategies, and I look at the potential of the website shortsupport.org for accomplishing these goals.

While the idea for my thesis admittedly originated in my irritation with frequent comments (or mockeries, for that matter) of my height, I do not intend to use this project as an arena to vent my personal frustrations. In my belief in the feminist mantra that “the personal is political,” I do not feel that the height issues I face, and undoubtedly that others face as well, are simply personal issues outside of the realm of cultural systems or networks of power.

Height plays a greater role in our everyday lives than we often acknowledge, and it is therefore crucial that this issue be addressed. I realized in the course of the project that the perceived sense of having a body that did not measure up (pardon the pun) to others’ expectations due to its shortness was part of a larger cultural myth of which I was previously unaware. (As I will explore further in the following chapter, shortness is devalued and problematized within the mythology of tallness.) The development of a detailed theory about height is critically important to both men and women; everyone in some way either benefits or is disadvantaged as a result of the way height is situated within socio-cultural networks of power. It is also important to delve deeply into this bodily topic so that we may continue to break down male privilege, with which height is closely linked.

CHAPTER I. HEIGHT AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

In order to elucidate my theoretical standpoint on the role of height culturally, I would like to revisit the sidewalk anecdote I shared in the introduction. In my own personal experience, the sidewalk can suddenly be transformed into a symbolic battlefield. Two people are walking toward one another on the same path along the sidewalk. One must move, or a collision of bodies is inevitable. The contour of the standoff prompts the question, which individual will eventually veer from his or her path to allow the competitor to pass? In responding to this question, I would suggest an explanation beyond a simple psychological decision (who thinks to move first) or the politeness factor. My dismissal of these factors arises in light of a common pattern that I noted: the winner of each “battle” I engaged in was the taller person.

Consequentially, at a height an inch less than the average American woman, my 5’3” body, often called “short,” is not the one marching down the sidewalk causing others to leap out of the way.

What exactly is happening here? And what does height have to do with it? While I document here just a small example of the significance of height, this strange power play has led me to think about how height functions culturally. While height often appears to be the most natural of bodily dimensions, I aim to challenge this perception by situating height within the realm of the socio-cultural. In this chapter, I contend that height is socially constructed in a number of ways. In addition, I argue the existence of heightism – the system of oppression based on height rooted in what I term “the mythology of tallness.” I also explore how systemic heightism intersects with other systems of oppression, as well as how its ideologies are reflected discursively.

The Social Constructedness of Height: Measurement, Identity, and Power

As a preliminary point, it may be useful to note that in using the term “height,” I am referring to the actual length of the body when measured vertically. This practice of measuring comprises one of the facets of the social construction of height. Clearly, there is a biological component of height simply in that it is the result of processes of human growth (Hall 9). However, the decision to take this particular measurement (as opposed to the circumference of one’s head, for instance) and invest it with significance is in itself a social practice. Indeed, the compulsion to measure height did not occur on a large scale until the eighteenth century in Europe, as a method to locate tall men to join infantries; this may have contributed to the “martial sheen that tallness began to acquire in Western societies” (Hall 13). In the contemporary United States, the recording of height is obligatory; all children are subject to “a lifetime of measurement” (Hall 44). Even prior to birth, the fetus is measured: during an ultrasound, the technician determines the “crown-to-rump length, or CRL (Ludlow n.p.) Newborns are measured from the moment they leave the confines of the mother’s body, a practice that continues throughout their childhood and likely into their adult years.

Doctors are not only incessantly recording the heights of children, but additionally compulsorily mapping them onto growth charts, a practice which further attests to height’s social component. The intended purpose of these charts is to place the child’s height in the context of what is deemed “normal” for the age group (Kaplowitz and Baron 49). Although a seemingly neutral document intended to “crystallize timeless truths about childhood development,” the growth chart itself is a cultural product very much embedded within particular cultural and temporal contexts and laden with the biases and inequalities of those time periods (Hall 49). While to recent generations the growth chart is simply a given, a standard element of a routine

trip to the pediatrician, in actuality widespread use of the growth chart has occurred for only a little over thirty years; indeed, the first national growth chart in the United States was not implemented until 1977 (Hall 65). Both height in general and what is considered “normal” height (which appears to be scientific fact) are both constructions.

Height – whether measured or perceived visually – also translates into a facet of identity. Most people are assigned a label related to their height, which may or may not align with how the individual would self-identify. (I was christened “Little Laura” because of my shortness in childhood, but I did not begin to identify as “short” until others continually pressed the issue throughout my life). Thus, height can be considered a socially constructed phenomenon in that certain bodies are identified as “tall” and others “short,” labels which only derive meaning through their relationship to an Other. In other words, these descriptors of height are always relative. In a group of women of the same height, for example, the concepts “tall” and “short” would be meaningless. A person cannot be “tall” without Others who, possessing a lesser amount of height, are “short,” or shorter at the very least.

An individual’s particular height identity is subject to a large degree of fluidity, emphasizing its basis in the social rather than natural (e.g. one’s height identity is not a naturally occurring fact outside of the social world). Within this slippery aspect of identity, several factors can influence the way a certain body is (self-)identified. First, height identity varies by age; children are generally perceived to be shorter than adults and thus they are all “short” from the adult perspective, albeit up to a certain age and depending on the adult’s height. On an individual level, a short child may end up a tall adult, or vice versa. Second, height identity can be contingent on a particular group context, ranging from micro level (a group of friends or peers) to macro level (national or global). The label can easily change depending on the cultural

context in which the person is situated. For example, in the United States, a woman who is 5'6" would be a little on the taller side (two inches taller than the average American woman who is 5'4"), while in the Netherlands, this same woman would be short (two inches less than the average Dutch woman who is 5'8") (Roth n.p.). These identities can be constructed transculturally as well, in that individuals belonging to cultures with lesser height averages may feel or be perceived as "short" within a global context in comparison to a generally taller culture. However, people seem to most often label others, or identify themselves, in relation to what they think is average in their culture. As a point of clarification, in my chapters dealing with tall women (Chapter Two) and short men (Chapter Three), I use these terms in relation to national averages.

More importantly – and the central thesis I wish to articulate in this chapter – the social construction of height goes beyond simply measuring and subsequently categorizing some bodies as short and others tall: height is further constructed such that power is inscribed onto taller bodies. This argument is positioned in direct contrast to theories of the connection between power and height located in sociobiological or evolutionary biological discursive frames. These theories maintain that greater height is naturally equal to power and dominance (Judge and Cable 428), a perspective that I find problematic from a feminist standpoint. In arguing against these theories, I am not rejecting evolutionary biological theory outright. Rather, I wish to unearth and counter the troubling sexist underpinnings of the discipline in regards to height. In order to accomplish this task, I turn to an insight derived from feminist disability studies. Feminist authors Castelnovo and Guthrie, in theorizing about disability, explain that

social theorists...have tended to view disability as a biomedical, not a social, construct. This viewpoint has fostered another version of biological determinist

ideology, similar to that which framed the defense of sexism, racism, and heterosexism (116).

Although the authors are specifically talking about disability, the tendency they describe applies equally well to the height issue. Evolutionary biologists conclude that height is naturally synonymous with power: they claim that animals use height as an “index for power and strength when making fight-or-flight decisions,” (Judge and Cable 428) and assume that humans must function similarly. In equating animals and humans in terms of the height-power connection, these sociobiologists implicitly naturalize the domination of men over women by ensconcing patriarchal ideology in “scientific” discourse; since men are generally taller, they must “naturally” be more powerful and dominant. This scientific power/knowledge thus justifies and thereby bolsters sexism, creating a scientifically-based explanation for why men are, or should be considered to be, more powerful than women.

While height has been used as a tool for the scientific justification of men’s innate power over women, I believe that the causality here is faulty and sexist. I advocate moving outside of the discursive framework of evolutionary biology and sociobiology and repositioning ourselves within a feminist viewpoint. Instead of considering that men’s taller stature naturally makes them more powerful than women, I theorize that tallness itself has been invested with power, partially in order to maintain patriarchy. Investing tallness with power, in a society in which men are usually taller than women, puts women at a great disadvantage by already and automatically placing women in subjugated positions by virtue of their sheer physicality alone. Height is not a natural phenomenon; it is socially constructed so that men can “naturally” claim power over women. Applying Foucault’s concept of biopower, I contend that a variety of different institutions work concomitantly to cultivate power on the site of the tall body. Height

itself does not naturally create social inequalities; the way that height is socially constructed does. Underpinning the unequal distribution of power on the basis of height is the cultural mythology of tallness, which I describe further in the next section.

The Mythology of Tallness

The social construction of height as power is grounded in what I would term, using Barthes's concept of myth, "the mythology of tallness." The question of whether the myth of tallness emerged first and caused the tall body to be powerful, or the suffusing of the tall with power created the myth of tallness, involves an unanswerable chicken-egg scenario. Whatever the case, they now exist in a state of mutual reinforcement, in which the myth of tallness imbues the tall with power, which further reifies this self-perpetuating myth.

Within the myth of tallness, the tall body functions as a signifier of a constellation of positively valued traits: "success, wealth, leadership, and sexual desirability" (Hall 15), and additionally, I would argue, power. Most people "automatically associate leadership ability with imposing physical stature" (Gladwell 88). It is this myth that causes us to "swoon" at the sight of a tall individual (Gladwell 88). According to Roland Barthes, "myth essentially aims at causing an immediate impression – it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations that belie it" (130). In other words, it is irrelevant whether or not a tall individual actually possesses the traits that are immediately signified; the myth still causes us to see through its lens, to view the tall body as superior, better, desirable, and powerful. The myth holds even more of a foothold in that it reproduces itself through actually causing power to be inscribed onto the tall, thus justifying itself.

Inherent in the mythology of tallness is that its opposite, shortness, signifies the opposite of the positive traits symbolized in the tall. Artist Randy Newman, in his controversial song, “Short People,” sings: “Short people ain’t got no reason to live.” While Newman is presumably being tongue-in-cheek in his lyrics, his attitude reflects (albeit exaggeratedly) the perception of shortness according to the myth of tallness. Within this myth, shortness is devalued, standing as a signifier of inferiority, weakness, and powerlessness, which notably are traits associated with femininity. The following quote from psychologists Martel and Biller adeptly summarizes the tenets of the mythology of tallness:

Even in the first few months of life, and continuing throughout the preschool years and later childhood, it is very clear that every individual receives a vast multitude of messages emphasizing that big and tall relate to goodness whereas small and short are much less desirable and indeed, often represent an especially defective condition. (Martel and Biller 18).

The “defectiveness” associated with shortness points to the manner in which shortness is pathologized within the myth of tallness. This aspect of the myth is reproduced discursively: “The notion of shortness as a psychological disadvantage – indeed, disability – runs deep and persistently through a huge scientific literature on human physical stature” (Hall 16).

Because the myth of tallness is embedded in discourse, children unfortunately internalize this myth at a young age, much the same way they do the dominant myths of gender behavior:

‘It’s a no-brainer,’ said David E. Sandberg, a researcher at the University of Buffalo who has studied the psychology of stature for many years. ‘Everyone wants to be taller. If you’re five-ten, you want to be six-two. So when you ask a child, “Do you want to be taller?” they all say “Yes!”’ In the eyes of virtually all

children, in other words, tallness is both a universal desire and a philosophical good. (Hall 9)

As opposed to tallness, shortness is encouraged to be viewed as an undesirable state, especially for boys and men. The link of morality to tallness further strengthens the myth.

Boiled down to its essence, the myth of tallness asserts that tall equals good and short equals bad. (Because the myth of tallness is shot through with gender ideology, shortness is even more “defective” in men, a topic I will undertake in Chapter Three.) As is the case with other hegemonic mythologies, the mythology of tallness is constructed as natural and unquestionable, especially because its ideologies are reproduced institutionally. Through this illusion of its naturalness, the myth of tallness inspires “popular belief in the inevitability of the dominance/subordination structure” (Frye 34) of heightism. Further, the myth has a real, palpable effect, in that it underpins the institutional imbuing of power into the tall body, which I describe in the subsequent section.

Institutional Biopower

Many different institutions work in tandem to produce power at the site of the tall body. Patriarchy – if one can conceptualize this system as an institution within itself – has a role in making the tall body powerful. Investing power in the taller body functions to keep patriarchal social structures intact in that a natural occurrence (men usually being taller) is constructed in such a way as to serve male privilege. In order to demonstrate the link between height and patriarchy, allow us to return to the sidewalk I discussed at the opening of this chapter. The taller body, in this battle over space, is always constituted as the more powerful, the one who is entitled to claim the sidewalk space. The occupation of vertical space somehow translates into

entitlement to control of a greater amount of horizontal space. Beyond my own observation, this phenomenon has been demonstrated in scientific research on the link between height and personal space. Psychological studies revealed that when instructed to walk towards a specific individual and stop at the point at which they felt discomfort, participants stopped much further from taller people. The results of the experiment suggested “[h]eight is clearly a major factor in the amount of physical space accorded an individual” (Martel and Biller 35). This taking up of more vertical space, with its accompanying claim to horizontal/personal space, exudes masculinity. Masculinity, in a patriarchal culture, is considered to be valuable, and makes the person expressing it more valuable, especially in comparison to femininity. (This claim will be problematized when I look at the tall woman in the next chapter). Thus, one reason tallness is considered powerful is because of its link to masculinity, in that the male body claims more space. On the flip side, the shorter body takes up less space, and is perceived as feminine, which invokes passivity and powerlessness. As masculinity equals power and value in American culture, height is then inexorably and intimately linked with power. In this way, patriarchy feeds heightism and tall privilege, which then cyclically reinforce patriarchy. Patriarchy is able to maintain itself by reproducing its ideologies through bodily dimensions like height.

The investment of power in the tall body is also linguistically reified in that certain figures of speech in the English language work to reinforce the way power is structured in terms of height. For example, the phrase “to look up to someone” means to admire the individual, and indicates a sense of authority of the person that is being looked up to, and inversely, the one looking up is interpellated into a subjugated position. The more powerful subject looks down on the less powerful and the latter is continuously in a state of “looking up.” If one considers gender in this looking relationship, this scenario reinforces patriarchal assumptions about the innate

power of men over women. Since most women, who are shorter in stature than men, exist in a condition of always “looking up” to men, this language invests this action with meaning, creating a script wherein men are powerful authority figures and women are their subordinates. As one scholar explained, “To look up or to look down in relation to the other is an experienced bodily comportment which carries many subtle significations – including gender relations, given the dimorphism of the human species” (Ihde 235). Other phrases also function in reinforcing the power inscribed on the taller body. To “stand tall” means to be proud and courageous, traits that are associated with powerful people. Those who already physically “stand tall” are thereby infused with this linguistically-based power. To “come up short” is to fail; a “shortcoming” is a flaw in one’s character. A quick survey of other common idioms indicates many more heightist ideologies embedded within the language.

An etymological investigation of the word “tall” reveals yet another instance of the language-based endowment of power on the tall. Obscure/archaic definitions of “tall” comprise a host of positively inflected traits: “Becoming, seemly, proper, decent,” “Comely, goodly, fair, handsome; elegant, fine,” or “Quick, prompt, ready, active” (Oxford English Dictionary Online n.p.). Originating in these meanings, the word still continues to carry the positive connotations of its roots.

The institution of sports, basketball in particular, also imbues the tall body with value and power. Many tall (or perhaps taller than average) men with whom I have been acquainted have told me that in high school, they were frequently asked by strangers, upon meeting them for the first time, if they played sports – usually basketball. Since they take up a greater amount of vertical space, as I discussed earlier, it is assumed that they can, or should, lay claim to control of

a greater amount of horizontal space. These tall men are thus perceived as better suited for sports, in that

sport is masculinizing; which is why women in patriarchal societies have been mostly discouraged from participating. Boys raised on sport learn to desire and to make connections according to the imperative to take space away from others and jealously guard it for themselves. Sport trains desire to conquer and protect space. The most masculine sports are those that are the most explicitly spatially dominating: football, soccer, hockey. In these sports players invade the space of others and vigorously guard against the same happening to themselves. (Pronger 73)

Since tall men signify the “most invasive phallus” they are entitled to the penetration and control of space. Thus, in sports, the taller the man, the more space he is entitled to, which makes for better game play in that he will enact “the unyielding occupation of space that communicates the latent power to dominate” (Pronger 73). In the end, the masculinized tall man emerges powerful and valuable. If this translates to actual winning of games, the tall man is then bestowed with greater economic power, which translates culturally into individual value. For example, basketball player Michael Jordan, who stands at 6’ 6” (“Michael Jordan” n.p), was paid \$33 million for playing with the Chicago Bulls during the 1998 season (Dixon n.p.). Jordan’s staggering salary reinforces the idea of tall bodies as valuable, and at the same time strengthens patriarchal notions of the innate value of masculinity.

While I use basketball as my primary sports example, nearly all sports privilege the taller body, including tennis, running/track, football, baseball, and boxing. Pediatric endocrinologists Kaplowitz and Baron claim “short children are at some disadvantage playing certain sports, such

as basketball” (108). Indeed, they are at a disadvantage; however, this framing locates the trouble, or “shortcoming,” with the body of the short child, when in actuality sports *themselves* are developed and designed for a tall male body – the problem lies with the institution of sports, not the child. Sports, rather than egalitarian forms of amusement, are constructed to the advantage of particular types of bodies. Just as sports are “built on physically trained men’s bodies” (Lorber 42), they are also developed for tall bodies, thus disadvantaging short people and women.

The disciplining of the child’s body, particularly in an educational setting, also serves to rearticulate the tall body as powerful body. According to Foucault, the body is disciplined into docility - subject to manipulation and shaping by others. In my own personal experience, when I belonged to middle school choir, the teacher instructed us – the “docile bodies” of the choir – to line up according to height in class, to prepare for how we were to stand during an actual concert performance. Whether or not it was done for aesthetic purposes, the practice still was part of a disciplinary mechanism, or “a policy of coercions that act upon the body” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138). This “calculated manipulation” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138) of the children’s bodies seemed to create a hierarchy, or maybe render an invisible hierarchy visible, in which the most powerful, at one end, were the tallest, and at the opposite end were the least powerful – the short kids. As a short child and now short woman, this arrangement was always a bit humiliating and degrading; the practice seemed to convey a message as to exactly where one stood in the hierarchy of social power. And since the “reading-perception of relative height (and prowess) is much less direct in adulthood than in childhood” (Ihde 235), this experience was probably much more intense than the same event would be in adulthood.

Extending beyond the educational system, the heightist ideological system has infiltrated American government as well. Out of forty-three United States presidents, only three were shorter than 5'7" in height. In the newspapers, the 5'7" William McKinley was dubbed a "little boy" because of his less than average height (Judge and Cable 428). The term "boy," in African-American history, "bespeaks a legacy of forced underachievement, thwarted goals, misplaced history – or, simply, a presupposed lack" (Poulson-Bryant 175). Not used innocently against blacks, the term is certainly not innocent when used against short men, and indeed, the two share the same legacy in this sense.

Another instance of governmental heightist practice occurs in presidential elections, where the taller candidate is typically the one elected (Stossel n.p.). The biased practice of selecting a president who is tall in order for them to exude a sense of power is reflected in popular culture; for the part of the woman president on the television show *Commander in Chief*, actress Geena Davis was chosen, who is, significantly, six feet tall ("Famous Tall Ladies" n.p.). This fictional mirroring of real life biases may also work to further construct the tall body as the powerful body, just as the press's heightist criticism of McKinley may have.

Business institutions also function to inscribe the tall body with power. Author Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, discusses the way in which people make snap judgments, forming immediate reactions prior to thinking. In researching this phenomenon in relation to height, he surveyed half of the Fortune 500 companies, inquiring as to the height of the corporations' CEOs. He discovered that nearly all were tall men: their average height was only slightly below six feet. Not only does this reflect the underlying social structure that got these men where they are, it also further reinforces the notion that the tall body has more power. CEOs themselves recognize that height is crucial to

their success: given the choice between being bald or two inches shorter, the majority of CEOs would choose to abandon their hair (Jones n.p.). Gladwell also shares that researchers in a large study, done with thousands of people, “calculated that when corrected for variables like age and gender and weight, an inch of height is worth \$789 a year in salary” (88). Another study corroborates this finding, discovering that income and height are positively related – one increases as the other increases – which led the researchers to conclude that “the results suggest that tall individuals have advantages in several important aspects of their careers and organizational lives” (Judge and Cable 428). Further, although feminists so often focus on the income discrepancy between men and women, the researchers found – surprisingly – that “height has a more important effect on earnings than gender” (Judge and Cable 438). Additionally, according to research studies, taller men in the workplace are afforded a higher degree of trust, as well as being chosen over their shorter candidates for job positions (Gieske 2000: 376).

Like all social construction, the notion of tallness as equivalent to power is cyclically reinforced. Height is constructed so that the tall body is powerful, which makes people “unconsciously, ascribe positive qualities to the tall,” according to recent studies (Stossel n.p.). Since tallness is attached to these types of characteristics, people will choose the tall person, who seems “more likable, more dependable and more commanding” (Stossel n.p.) for positions of power, upon which we come full circle, where the tall embody real power.

Heightism: (Tall) Privilege and (Short) Oppression

The institutional flow of power into tall bodies creates what I term “systemic heightism.”¹ Systemic heightism constitutes one of those “invisible systems conferring dominance” (McIntosh 31) on a certain group of people, specifically tall people. As Peggy

¹ The term “heightism” itself has been used by several other writers and is not my original creation.

McIntosh points out, unearned privilege afforded to one group depends upon the oppression of another group, whose members belong in “some category understood as a ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ category” (Frye 8). Tall privilege – the “unearned power conferred systemically” (McIntosh 34) on tall people – relies upon the oppression of short people. Marilyn Frye provides a succinct definition of oppression:

Oppression is a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group (individually to individuals of the other group, and as a group, to that group). (Frye 33)

Frye’s definition of oppression matches the experiences of short people: as an oppressed group, they experience a “network of forces and barriers” which shape and confine their lives (Frye 7). This is evident in the institutional privileging of the tall – in sports, language, business, government, etc. – that I outlined in the previous section as well as in the mythology of tallness which permeates institutions.

While I recognize that tall people do face certain obstacles (discomfort in airplanes or cars, stooping down to talk to people), these difficulties do not have the “systematic nature of oppression” (Frye 7). This point is comparable to the argument some men make against the existence of patriarchy: men face hardships just as women do, thus men are also oppressed. That difficulties do exist for men is unfortunate, but nevertheless they do not discount the existence of a systemic, institutional system of gender oppression in which men have power. Similarly, the problems tall people face do not contradict the mythology of tallness that exists, or the general/systemic privileging of tallness constituted institutionally.

In writing about how privileged groups maintain their dominance, Frye argues that dominant groups must make it appear “natural that individuals of the one category are dominated by individuals of the other and that as groups, the one dominates the other” (Frye 34). This scenario is also applicable to heightism; the mythology of tallness functions in naturalizing the short/tall hierarchy. Tallness as good and shortness as bad become givens in this hegemonic ideology, thereby naturalizing the dominance of tall people.

If, at this point, the concept of short oppression seems preposterous, consider the following questions: Would a short man be likely to become president of the United States? (Answer: “The tallest presidential candidate almost always wins; pip-squeaks need not apply for the Oval Office” [Hall 15]). What about CEO of a company? (Answer: “[B]eing short is probably as much, or more, of a handicap to corporate success as being a woman or an African-American” [Gladwell 86]). Whose body signifies power and respect, the tall or short person’s? (Answer: “Countless social science surveys have shown that the public uncritically ascribes positive traits to tall people – more intelligent, more likable, more dependable, and better leaders [Hall 15]). As I hope to have illustrated, because of the negative view of shortness bound up within the myth of tallness, and the institutional privileging of tall people, short people’s lives are systemically more difficult than tall people’s – making them an oppressed group – although this changes according to gender, as I will explain shortly.

Intersections of Heightism

If the myth of tallness existed in a vacuum, gender would not be a consideration. But, since cultural systems intersect to create a network of interlocking power relationships, the gendered nuances of the myth must be parsed out. Within the myth, tallness is masculine-inflected while short is coded feminine. This has real life implications for each combination of

short/tall and man/woman. Tall men are seen as the normative human body, are tall both literally and symbolically, and are assigned the most power and privilege. Since men are expected to embody every sense of the word tall (larger height, phallic, powerful, masculine, etc.), short male bodies do not reflect their assigned gender roles, creating a unique, demasculinized situation for the short man (as will be discussed in Chapter Three). For the opposite gender, since women are expected to have feminine traits, it makes sense when they are short; they fit neatly into patriarchal expectations, and ultimately are disempowered on the basis of height and gender. The woman who is tall – the topic of my second chapter - is the parallel to the short male, as she is also viewed as non-normative in terms of gender standards. Using Mary Russo's concept of the female grotesque – bodies falling outside of normativity – I discuss how the tall female body can also be read as carnivalesque: she has the potential to flip gender hierarchies.

As previously stated, height can constitute a particular form of oppression. Like most oppressive social structures, systemic heightism intersects with other structures of oppression. Kaplowitz and Baron, authors of the book *The Short Child* (2006), claim that among the primary factors that regulate a child's growth – and thus influence height – are “nutrition and general health” (6). Assuming the truth of this claim, one can identify a class intersection with heightism. First, people who are economically disadvantaged often lack the financial resources to obtain good health care. Even middle-class families often do not have the means to afford healthcare: of the 47 million Americans who are uninsured (as of 2005), about 40 percent belong to households with an income of \$50,000 a year or more (National Coalition on Health Care n.p.). Second, in terms of nutrition, access to nutritional food promoting healthy growth is not necessarily a guarantee, especially for the financially disenfranchised who often must dwell in poorer neighborhoods. Even where grocery stores are readily available, the cost of a steady diet

of healthy food is not always economically feasible. Echoing my point about the nutrition-height link, one author claims that growth varies according to “social classes, primarily because of variances in nutrition and access to medical care” (Hall 10). These factors can influence “prenatal development” and “early postnatal nutrition” of a child, which are also important in growth (Hall, “Success is Relative” n.p.). Underscoring the existence of “interlocking oppressions” (McIntosh 35) in the height-class intersection is the fact that due to systemic racism, people of color or ethnicities other than white are over-represented among those who are monetarily disadvantaged, and thus less likely to have access to good nutrition and health care.

While connections between height and nutrition reveal important intersections of race and class oppression and the disadvantages this entail, this link is also a bit precarious, containing within it the potential to simply reify the mythology of tallness. While it is true that inadequate nutrition or poor health may lessen height, this point potentially has the effect of supporting the ideology of shortness as pathology, as necessarily having a *cause* rather than occurring as a normal variation in height. Finding reasons for why one is short rests on the assumption that shortness itself is a problem; shortness signifies the existence of some underlying medical condition. Connecting shortness to poor nutrition or health also contributes to the signification of the tall body as healthiness and strength and the short body as lack of both. The fact that shortness potentially can be a result of health problems has come to be applied to all short people, seeping into the myth of tallness so that short people seem somehow disordered. Parents come to pediatric endocrinologists asking: “Why is my child short? Is there a medical problem? How tall will my child be as an adult? Should we be doing something about it? Is there a particular diet that helps growth?” (Kaplowitz and Baron vii). The pathologizing of

shortness is evident in the fact that it seems odd to think about parents worrying about why their child is so tall (unless the child is a girl, an issue which I will discuss in the next chapter).

As I stated earlier, race intersects with class in terms of nutrition and height. However, race is significant to height beyond its connection to poverty. Surprisingly, racism is inherent in historical instances of height measurement as a practice. Francis Galton, cousin of well-known scholar of evolutionary theory Charles Darwin, endorsed the concept of measuring height during the nineteenth century. While this may appear an innocent enough endeavor, his motivations for doing so are much more sinister: his height measurements were part of his early ventures toward eugenics, or “the selective breeding of desirable genetic traits” (Hall 14). Here the mythology of tallness combines with racist ideologies in the dangerous discursive field of eugenics; the “best” human is tall and white. The linkage between height and eugenics is even more troubling, in that

the Nazi justification of racial purity has been traced in part to a specific passage in Tacitus that also extols height as a particular physical – and moral – virtue of the ancient Germanic tribes. The intellectual roots of heightism, it seems, draw on a poisoned well (Hall 14).

In the historical desire to measure height we see the disturbing mobilization of racism, as well as primitivist myths which equate greater height to greater evolutionary advancement, an ideology which will also be evident in the discourses I now turn to.

Discursive Constructions of Height

The height-power connection – the imbuing of the tall body with power – is further reified in discourses of height. The mythology of tallness is also reflected in these discourses, which function as sites where other myths, such as primitivism, intersect. Consider the

following discourses about the tendency for particular ethnic populations to be short or tall cited in *The Short Child*:

A striking example is the African Pygmy; adult men are approximately 4 feet, 11 inches, and women approximately 4 feet, 8 inches.

...in the Netherlands the average height for young women is approximately 5 feet, 7 inches. This tall stature presumably reflects a favorable environment, including good nutrition and good medical care, and a tall gene pool (Kaplowitz and Baron 14).

Within these opposing explanations, the authors implicitly create a value judgment, placing greater worth on the taller population. The phrase “tall gene pool” – which would otherwise be a neutral descriptor – takes on a positive connotation as it is placed at the end of a string of positive qualities in the sentence. While the authors stress the “good” and “favorable” conditions which, as they imply, must have led to the tallness of people of the Netherlands, these positive connotations are noticeably absent in discussing the African group. The authors’ description of the latter reflects the tendency to devalue shortness, to equate it with some type of lack; in this case, a lack of good healthcare, adequate food, and good genetic material.

The statements about the two groups also contain a racist component, apparent within the authors’ brief mention of “*the* African Pygmy,” (think of how the sentence would sound if it read, for example, “a striking example is *the* Mexican”). The phrasing adds an animalistic quality to this group of people, especially through its discursive connection to “pygmy” animals, like the goat and hippopotamus. According to one scholar, the term “Pygmy” is actually a “derogatory term that emphasizes short stature” for which there is unfortunately yet no generally accepted substitute; in his article about the “African Pygmies,” he chooses the term “African tropical

forest forager” instead. He also reveals that the idea of “African Pygmies” as a homogenous group is false; because of the amount of diversity within the group, “it is difficult if not impossible to refer to an African ‘Pygmy’ culture” (Hewlett n.p.).

Primitivist ideologies can be discovered even in texts that take a more critical approach to the issue of height. The following excerpt from Hall’s *Size Matters* is uncannily similar to the previous quote:

...we could be talking here about the Netherlands, where the average *Dutch citizen* is taller than the average height anywhere else on earth, or those parts of equatorial Africa where pygmies *still* gather and hunt (4-5, emphasis mine)

As in my previous example, the discourse implicitly contains a racist, biased characterization of each cultural group. While an individual in the Netherlands is humanistically described as a “Dutch *citizen*,” pygmies (which is not capitalized) are not described as people or citizens. Hall’s use of the word “still” suggests that the pygmy tribes exist in a primordial state of primitive, pre-modern backwardness, hanging on to the ancient lifestyle of those who dwell in darkest Africa. This specific characterization of pygmy peoples interestingly extends into everyday discourse; a short white female author writing about her experiences recalls that she was derogatorily called “spear-chucker” by her peers in school, which she explains is a reference to the use of spears by African Pygmies as hunting equipment (Burriss-Kitchen 20). This insult is both heightist and racist, in that it assumes the negativity of both shortness and blackness.

The notion of shortness as negative and pathological is implicated within economic discourse as well. For many economists, average height of a culture accurately indicates the overall health of a country (Hall 20-21). This method of ascertaining overall national health contains a dilemma. On one hand, this method underscores the class component of height

oppression that I described earlier in relation to nutrition. On the other hand, it may also constitute another instance of the mobilization of the myth of tallness as well as the racist myth of increased height as equated to evolutionary advancement. Although possibly a valid technique for measuring national health, it may result in the Orientalizing of Third World countries to show how ostensibly superior the West is, this time because its people are taller. Since wealthier countries tend to have access to better medical care and nutrition, it is likely that the citizens will be taller. This may have the effect of stigmatizing Third World countries, making their lesser height appear to reflect their inferiority. These types of discourses ideologically endorse colonialist/imperialist views of different cultures, making the attainment of greater height synonymous with progress, civilization, and better health (of a nation-state).

This chapter explains why, as I explain in the introduction to this thesis, I have always felt as if my shortness was somehow a flaw and a point of recrimination. According to the myth of tallness, it acts as a signifier of inferiority, of lack. No wonder then that this was how others tended to read my body. In this chapter, I hope to have demonstrated the social constructedness of height while deconstructing the myth of tallness and heightism. In the next two chapters, I examine the meaning of bodies positioned problematically at the intersection of patriarchy and heightism: the tall woman and short man.

CHAPTER II. “THAT’S A HUGE BITCH!”: THE TALL FEMALE BODY

As a short woman living in a patriarchal society, my body is non-threatening. In terms of height, I am entirely complicit with patriarchal standards of women’s bodies. Like the “proper” feminine woman, my body takes up very little (vertical) space. Because of my gender and bodily dimensions, I am doubly oppressed: I am a woman and I am short. Not only do I experience sexism, American culture is structured such that tall people are privileged, as I explain in the previous chapter. This heightism also intersects with sexism – tall privilege is nearly equal to male privilege, since the majority of men are taller than most women. But a feminist perspective leads me to hone in on these crucial words – “majority” and “most.” What about the women who, unlike me, are not shorter than most men, who are not immediately slapped with the label “short”? What about women who stand at eye level with the average American man (who is 5’9” [Roth n.p.]) or peer down at him? How do power relations play out with the tall woman? The tall woman, whom I define as about 5’9” or taller, is an important subject for feminist analysis and deserves further theoretical consideration.

In exploring the meaning of the tall female body, I draw examples from several sources. I present posts from the discussion forum www.tallwomen.org, a space where tall women can vent their frustrations about their height, share their experiences, and support one another. I examine various representations of the tall woman in popular culture, including representations of the tall woman taken to her logical extreme – the giantess. I explore a variety of texts, including the 2000 music video for Lit’s “Miserable” (2000), the 1958 and 1993 versions of the movie *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman*, and the comedy *Dude, Where’s My Car?* (2000).

Through the mythology of tallness and systemic heightism, the tall woman’s body shares the power and privilege granted to the tall man. However, she certainly does not share an *equal*

amount of power to that which is conferred upon the tall man. Because she is situated at the cultural crossroads of heightism and patriarchy, her tallness may actually place her in a disempowered position, in contrast to average (or even short) women. A theoretical feminist reading of the tall woman's body would argue that her body (unintentionally) subverts patriarchal expectations of a female body. Her body is "grotesque" (non-normative) in claiming more space, presenting a challenge to patriarchal expectations of femininity and men's "natural" dominance. I take up the "politics of hierarchy inversion" (Stallybrass and White 4) here in analyzing the transgression of what I view as the carnivalesque tall female body. I explore limitations to her subversion, one of which is that patriarchal hegemonic power structures attempt to ease the anxiety she causes by eradicating her threat both literally (through bodily practices) or symbolically (in terms of representation).

The Threat of the Tall Woman

The tall woman is a female grotesque, to invoke Mary Russo's term, in that she falls outside of normative standards for the female body. She is not "short," as most women are in comparison to the male body, which is perceived as the normative human body (Russo 12). American patriarchal culture dictates that women's bodies "must take up as little space as possible," as they are "forbidden to become large or massive" (Bartky 284). While this expectation is usually framed in terms of a "tyranny of slenderness" (Bartky 284), in that women's bodies must not become bigger due to excess bodily fat, it can be viewed outside this fat paradigm in terms of vertical space occupied by greater height. Purely on the basis of her body, the tall woman unintentionally subverts the patriarchal tenet that women must occupy very little physical space. In her largeness, "she implicitly violates the sexual roles that place her in

physical subordination to the man” (Hartley 62). The tall woman’s larger body continuously subverts patriarchal expectations of petite femininity by the mere fact of its existence, and the impossibility of becoming smaller (i.e. shorter). In addition, the tall woman defies one of the roles assigned to women by patriarchy, which is, according to French psychoanalytic feminist Luce Irigaray, “specula(riza)tion” – to reflect the man back to himself at twice his original size (207). The body of the tall woman does not and cannot reflect masculinity back at double its normal size either literally or metaphorically. As opposed to my short female body, the tall woman’s body threatens patriarchy in its (involuntary) refusal to conform to the feminine body shape and role.

The threat tall women pose to patriarchy is further enforced in that the “natural” stature of the tall woman casts doubt on the “natural dominance” of men. In her article about female bodybuilding, feminist scholar Laurie Schulze argues that the body of the female bodybuilder “interrogates patriarchy at the level of one of its essentialist foundations,” which is the ““natural” physical supremacy of the male” (Schulze 69). I argue that this same principle can be applied to the tall woman. As I discuss in Chapter One, sexist evolutionary biological theories argue that, as with animals, greater height naturally “equals power and therefore demands respect” (Judge and Cable 428); according to this theory, then, the taller gender – men – must therefore be more powerful and dominant. However, the tall woman discursively disrupts the ideology underlying this theory. If she is tall, and thus taller than some men, she also must be more powerful than some men; therefore, she challenges the myth of men’s inherent power over women.

A challenge may also be presented in the physical comportment of the tall female body. Since height is viewed as synonymous with power, greater height can allow a tall woman to feel

more physically powerful, which can then influence her behavior. In discussing the bodybuilders with whom they conducted ethnographic research, Castelnovo and Guthrie claim:

Some of the bodybuilders comprehend the liberatory possibilities of their bodybuilding practices. They experience their bodies as physically powerful, and as their bodies become more powerful, the way they feel about themselves is altered, as is the way they walk and physically posture themselves. Several women mentioned that their physical and emotional spaces are not as easily penetrated, whether it be on the street or in work and social settings (64).

This embodied empowerment as experienced in a physical way may also occur with tall women who derive a sense of power from their bodies, again challenging patriarchy.

The concept of carnival and the carnivalesque, as it is conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin and further developed by Stallybrass and White, is a useful analytical tool for interpreting the challenge of the tall woman to patriarchy. The grotesque body of the tall woman may be read as carnivalesque because she undermines and reverses the hierarchical system of gender. Carnival involves the inversion of hierarchical binary oppositions through which societies are structured, such as high/low; in other words “socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life” (Bakhtin 251) are reversed. Applying the high/low binary to the gendered situation at hand, I would argue that men, who obviously have dominance/power and are part of the “official culture” in a patriarchal society, can be seen as the “high” and women as the “low.” Thus, the carnivalesque tall woman enacts a reversal of these hierarchies, establishing women as “high” and men as “low.”

This flipping of the gendered hierarchy takes place because of the significations of the carnivalesque tall female body. When women are tall, they take up a greater amount of space.

Because occupying space is a masculine trait, tall women are therefore perceived as performing masculinity. Because the tall female body is masculine in terms of space and power, she is viewed as challenging the masculinity/power of other men – she appears more powerful – and threatens to feminize/emasculate them. Additionally, the carnivalesque tall woman becomes the “high” because her body is read as powerful according to the myth of tallness, while men become part of the “low” in being feminized by her and appearing to be less powerful.

This logic underpins the following quote, taken from a James Bond-related website, in which the writer comments on actor Daniel Craig and actress Nicole Kidman dually presenting an award at the Academy Awards Ceremony:

If you play James Bond like Daniel Craig does, it ought to be written into your contract that you can't be accompanied to present an award by a woman who's taller than you. Seeing Nicole Kidman towering over James Bond really made me discount Craig's ability to save the world or even defeat any madman taller than 5-feet-4.

The commenter implies that actor Daniel Craig's masculinity – as well as that of the James Bond character he plays – is threatened by standing next to a tall woman. Nicole Kidman, as female and carnival grotesque, is interpreted as a challenge to Craig's masculinity. As illustrated by this example, when the tall woman exudes masculinity, she simultaneously undermines it in the shorter man. Her carnivalesque body threatens to flip the cultural hierarchy wherein women are less powerful, and therefore are subordinate to men. Although the commenter's remarks are obviously sexist, his interpretation probably aligns with the dominant cultural interpretation of this scene: Kidman's expression of masculinity, in claiming more vertical space, is seen as draining Craig's. This inverse relationship is viewed as inevitable; if she becomes more

powerful, he becomes less so. The unintentionally carnivalesque body of the tall woman, in threatening the masculinity and power of men, creates patriarchal anxiety.

Fear about the tall woman's carnivalesque potential is apparent in representation, specifically through the unique dietary practices of the giantess. She literally eats men; in *Dude, Where's My Car?*, the giantess grabs a male bystander (who had been laughing at her) and devours him, and at the conclusion of "Miserable," giant-sized Pamela Anderson catches and makes a quick meal of all of the male band members. In eating men, the giantess is consuming their masculinity, a literal embodiment of the carnivalesque undermining of masculinity by the tall woman (as discussed in the Nicole Kidman example). This male fear of emasculation is also highlighted by the presence of strategies meant to appease it, which I will discuss shortly.

Limitations to the Tall Woman's Challenge

While a feminist reading of the tall female body heralds its subversion of patriarchy, this celebratory stance may be too hasty. In this section, I explore how the tall woman's threat is in many ways problematic.

Although we may be tempted as feminists to simply celebrate the tall woman's bodily transgression of feminine petiteness, we must bear in mind that the tall woman must *live* in this body. There is a price to pay for subversion, even if it does not occur purposefully. The tall woman is often marginalized because she is not "average." According to Cecilia Hartley, "when a woman's stature or girth approaches or exceeds that of a man's, she becomes something freakish" (62). Hartley's claim holds true in the case of the tall woman, if the posts on the www.tallwomen.org message board are an accurate indication. Posts by tall women on the discussion board (where, if you will recall, tall women provide each other with support and

advice regarding height and gender issues) reveal this perception. One tall woman explains that people often harassed and teased her about her height and made “comments like ‘Is that a guy or a girl?’, ‘Damn, she’s tall,’ ‘Why are you so tall?’ and ‘Frankenstein.’” She also remarked: “I truly feel like a freak.” Another woman, who was met with “Oh my God, you’re so tall!” every time she met someone new, commented that she “felt like a freak looking through a glass wall at what ‘normal’ life should be like.” The stigmatized tall woman is reminded daily of her Othered position, often painfully aware that her body is indeed non-normative.

Tall women must further contend with the fact that clothing and shoes are made according to the designers’ conceptualization of the “average woman,” which is actually even smaller than the true average woman. One tall woman on the discussion board commented, “I want to go into shoe stores or clothing shops and find what fits without getting frustrated and leaving,” and another complained that “looking for cute clothes is a nightmare.” The hunt for clothes that fit can become an economic problem as well; one woman who was generally happy about her height lamented the difficulty in “finding clothes at a reasonable price.” Because feminists are often concerned with how Othered bodies move through the world, this aspect of the tall woman’s life is an important consideration.

In addition to everyday struggles with being tall, the tall woman must live in a body made to appear freakish even in the realm of popular culture. One of the few representations of a tall woman appears in the film *Deuce Bigalow: Male Gigolo* (1999). When Deuce, the male protagonist of the film, decides to take up a career as a male gigolo, he discovers that the clientele referred to him by his new pimp consists of women who are intended to be viewed as “freaks”: a fat black woman, a narcoleptic, a woman with Tourette’s Syndrome, and a very tall woman named Tina. The only purpose for Tina’s presence in the film is to exploit her freakery

to create comic situations through the appalled reactions of people who witness her body. When Tina and Deuce are walking casually down the street on their date, Tina is greeted with a barrage of insults, meant to be comedic: “That’s a huge bitch!”; “Freak!”; “Holy shit it’s Bigfoot!”; and “Hey, keep it in the circus!” Even in a courtroom setting near the end of the film, as she is explaining that she and Deuce never engaged in sexual intercourse because it was “physically impossible” (the tall woman cannot even have “normal” sex!) someone shouts “Behemoth!” at her. In addition to persuading the viewer that she should be seen as a freak, also obvious is that we as the audience are meant to feel she takes up too much space. This message is evident in the camera’s gaze: her body is only ever shown from the neck down, her head cut off by the frame. It appears as if her body, out of control, cannot be contained within the confines of the frame.

The ideology of the freakish unnaturalness of the tall woman also is threaded into giantess narratives, conveyed through the manner in which the woman becomes a giantess. These scenarios convey the notion that women cannot be naturally tall – if tall, they must have become this way through unnatural means. Aliens, a common thematic element of the giantess narratives, are often the perpetrators of the woman’s transformation into giantess. In *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman* (1958), the main character, Nancy Archer, grows to a height of fifty feet – thereby becoming tall and powerful – because aliens zap her with a laser beam during a close encounter in the desert. In *Dude, Where’s My Car?*, the giantess is not only an inhuman (and therefore unnatural) “Super Hot Giant Alien,” she is an amalgamation of five separate alien women. According to the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com), six-foot tall actress Allison Janney once commented, in regards to her height, “Years ago, one casting agent told me that the only roles I could play were lesbians and aliens.” The tall woman must thus be presented as overly masculine (as lesbians stereotypically are) or as an alien (an unnatural being). The

cultural view of the tall woman as an aberrant “freak” manifested in these popular culture texts may work to further reify this view, and thus may worsen the treatment of the tall woman by others in her everyday life.

That the tall woman is carnivalesque, undermining and reversing gender hierarchies, would seem to be a point of feminist joy. However, we must keep in mind that “carnavalesque transgression” is not “*intrinsically* radical or conservative” (Stallybrass and White 14, emphasis in original) and therefore is not automatically positive or liberatory. Carnavalesque moments in which there is “a reversal of the hierarchy of top and bottom” (Bakhtin 1968: 81) as the gendered power dynamic is flipped do not necessarily establish lasting social change or minimize the oppression of women as a group; patriarchy maintains intact. Indeed, Stallybrass and White identify one of the problems of carnival as “its failure to do away with the official dominant culture” (19).

Critics of carnival also argue its ineffectuality on the grounds that it is “licensed or sanctioned by the authorities themselves” (Roger Sales, qtd. in Stallybrass and White 13), a permitted overturning of the social order meant to actually strengthen the power of the official culture (Stallybrass and White 13). However, the carnival world the tall woman creates is not a ritualistic event – thus not a “permissible rupture of hegemony” (Terry Eagleton, qtd. in Stallybrass and White 13) – and therefore not entirely subject to this critique. At the same time, the *backlash* to this carnival world – strategies meant to reestablish the gender hierarchy by undermining the perceived power of the tall woman (which I discuss in detail later on in the chapter) – may function in further entrenching the original power structure. Additionally, although the body of the tall woman theoretically subverts patriarchy, this does not mean that she herself derives power from this subversion; a carnivalesque body is not synonymous with a

powerful body. Despite Bakhtin's "positive embrace of carnival" (Stallybrass and White 13), in the particular case of the tall woman, carnival appears to be rather ineffectual.

The fact that the tall woman's carnivalesque transgression is accidental, i.e. not consciously chosen, may also lessen its potential for change. Heralding her potential for carnival automatically assumes that the tall woman approves of the gendered world turned "topsy-turvy" (Stallybrass and White 8) in which she is more powerful, and this is of course not always the case. Based on the tallwomen.org message board, tall women are indeed not always comfortable with this reversal of gender roles – with being the more masculine, powerful person around other men – in lived experience. Although not explicitly stated, one woman seems to be struggling to reclaim her femininity in a carnivalesque body that is culturally coded as masculine: "I tend to wear ballerina flats or sandals; this makes me feel more petite. I want to feel small and petite with him [her fiancé], and I find that the only time I feel this way is when I'm very thin. In some weird way I feel that when I'm thinner, my height is less of a concern for me." The issue of taking up space underpins her comment; since she cannot take up less space vertically, she must compensate by being thin. Some tall women, rather than making their bodies weigh less, compensating by slouching to appear shorter. These strategies are attempts to reverse the gender hierarchy which has been inverted by the carnivalesque tall female body. Carnival is thus made even more ineffectual by the fact that these tall women discipline themselves back into proper order as dictated by patriarchy.

While seemingly innately positive, the tall woman's challenge to patriarchal evolutionary biological theory – which I discussed earlier in the chapter – contains a significant downside. Though a subversion of patriarchy (in that the theory is sexist), it is problematic nonetheless. First, the challenge to patriarchal evolutionary-biological discourse is still situated *within* the

discourse. Challenging natural male dominance by establishing the existence of “naturally” dominant females still functions within (and reproduces) the sexist evolutionary-biological theory that height naturally/biologically equals power. While undermining the idea that men are naturally stronger, the tall woman still supports the false biological connection between height and power as well as reproducing the myth of tallness.

That tall women can feel power in their large bodies also appears to be positive. However, this “empowerment” presents an interesting conundrum: by accepting themselves as powerful tall women, they are experiencing empowerment within and through the very structures that caused them to be marginalized in the first place – patriarchal cultural systems that invest tall bodies with power but try to exclude women from this privilege. One woman on the discussion board remarked: “We possess power that shorter women will never understand.” While this is true in a certain sense (tall women do have certain advantages, like reaping some of the benefit of tall privilege), she contextualizes this comment in a way that suggests that tall women should learn to love their height because of the power it gives them *over* other women.

Some women on the discussion board have also internalized the notion that taller people are automatically (and perhaps “naturally”) more powerful – the biologically inflected myth of tallness. For example, a 6’3” woman who has just had children with a man who stands at 6’8” said that she is “looking[ing] forward to seeing [their] two kids become towering leaders!” She insinuates that because the children will probably be tall adults, they will be “born leaders.” These tall women uncritically adopt the myth of tallness, the very myth that constructs them as “grotesque.” Although in some ways victims of the intersection of heightism and patriarchy, these women, rather than resisting both systems of inequality, actually work to support them.

Another downside to the “challenge” of the tall woman to patriarchy is that what the tall woman views as her own empowerment may not necessarily be laudable. While the tall women on the message board do not speak for all tall women, nor do I generalize their experiences to that of *every* tall woman, their discourse does reveal drawbacks to the reading of the tall female body as inherently subversive. In an attempt to resist hegemonic responses to their bodies, several women on the message board resort to avenues of “empowerment” which ultimately feed back into hegemony and patriarchy.

Many of the women on the discussion board, in their efforts to support each other, speak of themselves and others as Amazon women: “Power to all you amazons, young & old!” Yet, the women often speak about their empowerment in ways that are confrontational towards other women. For example, one tall woman responds on the discussion forum to another’s mention of her sister’s teasing about her height with: “Your sister is merely expressing envy...pure unfiltered envy!!!!” Another advised, “Just remember, when you get those stares and comments, it comes from people who are envious and lack their own self-confidence.” Rather than blame the power structures that cause the “stares and comments” this tall woman places responsibility with others’ individual psychological issues.

Empowerment is also often explained not in terms of individual bodily acceptance, but as the attention the tall female body attracts from others, constituting the attainment of the male gaze as a type of empowerment. Some of the statements that emblemize this ideology are as follows:

“Warning...Tall women that wear heels will be notice[d] much quicker than most in the room!!!”

“...[Y]ou have yet to grow up into a woman and when you do you will be fighting the men off. Trust me.”

“The attention you get is amazing!”

“I only recently learned that guys dig long legs.”

“...[G]irls, honest, men loooove long legs so keep ur head high and know that u r beautiful.”

These types of attitudes – both antagonism towards other women and the importance placed on attracting the male gaze - will not lead to the “coalition building” that is so integral to feminist struggle (Castelnuovo and Guthrie 2). Rather, they reinforce the heteronormative idea of female competitiveness for men’s attention, re-inscribing the old rules of femininity on the “empowered” tall female body.

I would like to note that, in critiquing these methods of combating their freakery, I do not intend to judge these tall women too harshly. Because women are socialized into appreciating their bodies through attaining the male gaze, it is not unexpected that these women would choose this strategy – the one that seems most obvious and familiar to them. Accepting the myth of tallness likely appears the best route to feel empowered in a situation where they are made to feel like freaks. To their credit, the oppressiveness of the myth of tallness, and heightism, is not obviously apparent but rather systemic, as I demonstrated in the first chapter, thus making it less likely that they would recognize themselves contributing to these ideologies/systems.

Perhaps a more effective route to empowerment for these women would be to challenge biological theories about height themselves and instead examine the way height is socially constructed such that taller bodies are *culturally* invested with power, which can flow from many different institutions. Armed with this knowledge, the tall woman may understand that negative

reactions to her body are based in patriarchal beliefs (tallness is power and masculinity, women should not have either). True empowerment may require entirely dismissing discourses with sexist foundations and locating new avenues for empowerment.

Although she threatens the patriarchal power structure with her body, because she is not actively, consciously resisting it through action or struggle, the end result may only be patriarchal anxiety. This tension then unfortunately leads to increased hegemonic efforts to push the tall woman down, in real life and in representation, to where she ostensibly belongs as a woman; this is the issue I take up in the following section.

Taming the Tall Woman

The carnival grotesque tall woman constitutes multiple threats (again, involuntarily) to patriarchal constructs – and men’s masculinity – through her body. Because she disrupts the patriarchal system, patriarchal power structures attempt to lessen her dangerousness. As with the female bodybuilder that Laurie Schulze discusses, the most common response to the tall woman “seems to be a recuperative strategy, an attempt to pull her back from a position outside dominant limits into a more acceptable space” (Schulze 59). These recuperative strategies for reducing the challenge presented by the tall woman occur in both a literal, material sense and through representations (or lack thereof) in popular culture texts.

The potential challenge presented by tall women has been eliminated, in a very literal way by medical intervention to limit the growth of tall girls. Beginning in the mid-1950s, doctors in the United States, Europe, and Australia began administering estrogen treatments to young girls who were assessed with “excessive tall stature” or “constitutional tall stature,” meaning they would become tall women in adulthood. The “treatment” results in a shorter adult

height than predicted for the tall girl through increasing the rate of “epiphyseal fusion of long bones”(Bruinsma et al. 146). In the majority of instances it was not the tall girl herself who assessed her future as a tall woman negatively, but “a parent and/or doctor who considered the projected mature height problematic” (Lever et al. 192). In light of this fact, the estrogen treatment can be viewed as part of a set of disciplinary practices “that aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration” which is appropriately feminine (Bartky 279). The power/knowledge discourses of the medical institution and the family discipline the docile body of the tall girl, normalizing it according to patriarchal feminine ideals.

The functioning of power is no less absent in the much less common cases where the tall girl herself deemed her situation in need of treatment. Here the “panoptical male connoisseur [who] resides within the consciousness of most women” (Bartky 283) compels her into self-discipline in an attempt to conform her own body to existing standards of femininity. Many tall girls, facing the stigma of having a “freakish” body and having absorbed the dominant interpretation of their bodies, do not resist the discipline of the medical institution.

In this practice, the medical institution, as a source of power, is able to discipline by pathologizing tallness (in females), constructing an illness like “excessive tall stature” from a biological normality. Other feminist theorists have documented the construction of genetic/biological features as medical problems in power/knowledge discourse as well. For example, Eugenia Kaw describes the experiences of Asian-American women who were concerned with the appearance of their eyes (what Kaw would describe as a racial feature) and met with plastic surgeons to discuss possible modifications. The surgeons “used several medical terms to problematize the shape of their eyes so as to define it as a medical condition” (191). The same discourse of pathology is used on the tall girl; in this flexing of biopower, the supposed

“disorder” of the tall girl is used as a justification to discipline tall girls’ bodies, shaping them into more suitable (read: non-subversive) versions of the female body.

This pathologizing, in constructing a non-existent “problem,” allows the institution to provide a kind “solution”; through this pairing of problem/solution, the doctors and parents of the tall girls appear to be *helping* her, rather than controlling and disciplining her. Here, “biopower emerges as an apparently benevolent, but peculiarly invasive and effective form of social control” (Sawicki 67). Couched in a language of benevolence and concern for the tall girl’s “psychosocial functioning” (Lever et al. 192), the power underlying the compassionate “treatment” is concealed. Indeed, according to Foucault, “power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of itself” (*History of Sexuality* 86).

Despite the medical rhetoric about helping the tall girl, the estrogen treatments actually do just the opposite. In addition to being unnecessary, the treatments can stimulate a wide array of side effects. Documented short-term effects are an early start of menstruation or menstrual irregularities, nausea, weight gain, blood clots, pain in the limbs, thrombosis, dizziness, problems with liver functioning, hypertension, and ovarian cysts (Lever et al. 192; *Daughters* 3; *Australian Nursing Journal* 33; Blomback 416). One long-term effect has been identified as decreased fertility later in life, although other effects may still remain unknown and have yet to be discovered (Lever et al. 192). In addition, studies have also indicated “little or no evidence” of the benefit projected for women who were treated for their height as young girls (Lever et al. 192), suggesting that “the intended psychosocial benefit of treatment may not have been realized” (Bruinsma et al. 145). Ultimately, the estrogen treatments seem to be about one thing: patriarchal discipline.

While this practice has decreased considerably in recent decades, it has unfortunately not ceased completely, despite the well-known risks: as of a 2007 study, one-third of pediatric endocrinologists in the United States still offer treatments to prevent growth (Lever et al. 192). Although disheartening, this is unsurprising in a patriarchal culture becoming increasingly intent on disciplining women's bodies into proper modes of feminine embodiment.

While medical strategies for taming the tall woman have been applied much less frequently in recent years, representational methods of discipline have been and continue to be used. One such instance occurs within the occupation of modeling. One of the few areas where tall women are preferred and given monetary power, modeling ironically contributes to disempowering the tall woman. Modeling agencies require that their models be of much higher than average height; according to *Cosmo Girl* magazine, the standard height requirement for models is 5 feet 8 inches, while another source places the standard at 5' 9" (Monagle 22). According to both of these sources, the modeling industry claims that the reason for this preference is that clothes appear nicer and photograph better on a taller frame (*Cosmo Girl n.p.*; Monagle 22). Regardless of the truth of this claim, the end result is the co-optation of the body of the tall woman. Her subversion of the feminine body is commodified as her body is put to use in the service of patriarchal capitalism and male pleasure – the longer legs of tall women are assumed to be more pleasing to the male gaze – destroying its transgressive potential.

Any remaining threat to patriarchy is diluted by the fetishization and objectification of the models. According to film critic Laura Mulvey, this representation renders women non-threatening. Although the threat Mulvey refers to is castration anxiety caused by a perceived Freudian "lack" in women, the threat tall women pose is that of female power and emasculation, though the principle remains the same. Since the tall woman has the potential to emasculate any

(shorter) male in her vicinity, she must be tamed. Feminizing of the tall woman serves the same function. Not only does this pull her out of the realm of masculinity that she has entered through taking up space, but it also makes her appear less powerful given that femininity is equated with a lack of power. Schulze explains that the body of the female bodybuilder is adorned with signifiers of femininity so that her transgressive body can be (re-)placed within more acceptable discourses and spaces (60). The body of the tall woman is similarly fixed with feminine accoutrements.

Another strategy for destabilizing the carnivalesque threat of the tall woman is vilifying her in representation. Of the few tall women in popular culture, nearly all are villains: for example, Cruella DeVille in the children's movie *101 Dalmatians* (1961) and Natasha in the 1950s and 60s cartoon series *Rocky and Bullwinkle*. The tallest tall women – giantesses – are also villainous and monstrous. Nearly every female giantess is a monster, while a quick survey of well-known male giants reveal characters often culturally viewed with affection: folk hero Paul Bunyan, vegetable company mascot The Jolly Green Giant, and Hagrid from the *Harry Potter* series, to name just a few. In contrast, a comparison of the original *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman* (1958) poster with a *Godzilla* poster reveals that the two formats are nearly identical, further supporting the notion of very tall women as monstrous. “By definition, monsters live between two worlds and threaten to collapse or break down the mediating border” (Allison 32). It is no wonder then that the carnivalesque tall woman – who lives in both the masculine/powerful and feminine/powerless worlds and threatens to dissolve this distinction – is constructed as monstrous. The monstrous tall woman is both a manifestation of patriarchal fear as well as a technique to symbolically decrease her menace to the system of male domination.

The recuperative strategies used to reduce the threat of the tall women in her occupation as model – hyperfeminization and objectification – are found in abundance in the image of the monstrous giantess. In the music video for the song “Miserable,” by the all-male band Lit, the body of Pamela Anderson, made to appear as attaining giant-like proportions, is the central focus. As the video commences, she lies on her stomach clothed in only a bathing suit, her high-heeled feet poised in the air, as the band plays their instruments and sings while stationed on her butt. She wears heavy make-up and often glances seductively at the camera while it roves over her body. Her clothing, shoes, make-up, and facial expressions all convey a distinct sense of femininity, while the camera supplies an objectifying male gaze.

The strategies of fetishization and objectification used in the Lit video occur in other giantess texts as well. In the 1958 version of *Attack of the 50-Foot Woman*, Nancy wears rather modest dresses until she transforms into a giantess, at which point her apparel is a cleavage-enhancing white bikini top and tiny white skirt. In the remake of *Attack* from 1993 the same anxiety about Nancy becoming too powerful is evident in the presence of techniques which downplay her power by emphasizing her femininity. At her ultimate moment of power and strength, when she stomps angrily through town to seek out her unsupportive husband instead of remaining hidden, her hair appears teased and styled much more prominently than at any other point in the movie, vaguely reminiscent of the overly styled hair of the porn star. Because in the previous scene Nancy had been trying to host a romantic dinner with her husband, her face is conveniently heavily made up. In opposition to her rather conservative, loose-fitting clothing as a “normal-sized” woman, her apparel as a giantess consists of a cleavage-emphasizing short dress that is ripped in the center, exposing her midriff. Kathi Maio summarizes the radical transformation of her appearance in her review of the film:

Nancy's fashion sense goes from dowdy to daring in the course of the film. At the same time her face goes from natural look to a tramp paint job. And her lank locks go through the most impressive transformation of all. (I think they borrowed one of Tina Turner's electric-shock wigs for that final scene). (Maio n.p.)

While Maio reads Nancy's makeover as the film's attempt to convey "the 'empowerment' of our heroine" (n.p.), I interpret it as the attempt of the director/creators to draw the transgressive woman back into the boundaries of acceptable feminine embodiment.

My interpretation of the purpose for Nancy's makeover seems even more accurate when looked at within the context of other giantess representations which also involve fetishization following transformation. In the transformation scene in *Dude, Where's My Car?*, five alien women are all clothed in jumpsuits which, although tight, cover nearly their entire bodies. When the women merge together to form one giantess woman, the giantess now sports – in sharp contrast to the previous outfit – a small blue bikini top and short skirt. Images of this scantily clad giantess are angled precisely so that the viewer can see up her skirt, allowing glimpses of underwear. Responses of the onlookers to the giantess also indicate extreme objectification of her body. One of the protagonist "dudes" exclaims in awe, "Those are the biggest hoo-hoos I have ever seen!", at which point the shot switches to a close-up solely of her breasts. A little boy at a birthday party tells his father, "I want to go on that ride, Daddy" (the woman is nothing more than a roller coaster at an amusement park), to which his father replies, with no attempt at restoring the giantess's subjectivity, "Me too, son, me too." The fetishized giantess is the object of the male gaze, her body put on display for the male characters and the male audience; as a feminine sex object, she is far less threatening.

Other techniques for downplaying the power of the giantess are used as well. In the music video for “Miserable,” the band Lit, throughout the video, appears to be performing on various parts of Pamela Anderson’s body, including her head, butt, face, and palm. Shots of the band performing on her body are interspersed with images of them walking on her as well – up her thigh as she lies on her side and across her breasts. The act of walking, loaded with symbolic meaning, connotes a distinct power relationship in which the walker exerts power over the walked upon. This semiotic meaning of walking is indicated by such phrases in the English language as “walking all over” someone, meaning taking advantage of or exploiting a person within an unequal power dynamic. This symbolic power over her body is meant both to offset the power that is granted to Pamela as a giantess and to restore the band’s masculine power that seems to be in jeopardy in the presence of Pamela’s enormous, powerful body.

In an instance of an attempt to avoid the emasculation associated with the presence of the carnivalesque tall woman, images of the band members appearing tiny in comparison to the giantess Pamela are offset by close-up shots of the band in which they occupy a greater amount of space within the frame and appear to be of normal size. These shots function to reinscribe masculinity, undermined by the body of the giantess, onto the bodies of the men.

A final strategy of patriarchy for dealing with the threat of the tall woman is her symbolic erasure. Aside from fashion models (who do not necessarily even appear tall in their ads), the tall woman’s body – like many other Othered bodies – occupies a space of near-invisibility in popular culture texts. This absence is partly the result of cultural norms of height in terms of heterosexual couples, for which “the only acceptable form is that of the taller man with the shorter woman” (Gieske 378). Due to this cultural restriction of what Sabine Gieske terms “the ideal couple,” creators of texts with male and female co-stars must always ensure that the woman

appears to be shorter. Men who will be taller than their tall female co-stars may be chosen for roles, or particular tricks are used to create the illusion of height in the man. For example, during the filming of *Casablanca* (1942), Humphrey Bogart stood on a stool so that he appeared to be taller than his female co-star Ingrid Bergmann (Gieske 376). Often, lifts are placed in actors' shoes to make them appear taller (Roth n.p.). Thus, even when actresses are tall, as they often are, they are not permitted to *appear* so on-screen, which of course prevents them from being identified as "tall." Thus, the tall woman (at least in a way that she can be recognized as such) is denied adequate representation, and therefore her threatening body appears simply not to exist.

The tall woman, as I have shown, is vilified, feminized, and disciplined in real life and in representation because of her subversion of patriarchal norms and the anxiety this generates. Hers is not the only body that faces this particular treatment; the short man – the topic of my next chapter – must contend with nearly identical treatment for his own transgressions. It seems the opposite bodies of the tall woman and short man are less dissimilar than they appear.

CHAPTER III. SHORT MEN

In the previous chapter, I examined the non-normative body of the tall woman, who falls outside of cultural expectations of the feminine/female body. In this chapter, I wish to pay critical attention to a body that I see as the reverse but parallel of the tall woman: the short man.² Like the tall woman, the short man's body does not fit the culturally prescribed bodily dimensions of the assigned gender, which dictate that men should take up a large amount of space and should thus be tall. Indeed, "to be a tall and nonobese male is a highly valued physical characteristic" (Martel and Biller 6), an ideal of masculinity. Departing from this ideal, the short man, again like the tall woman, experiences responses to his body, as well as representations of him in popular culture, which are far from overwhelmingly positive: parents (and grandparents) chatter nervously about how short their boy is, peers hurl ugly insults at the short boy or man, doctors excitedly offer growth hormones to "cure" the short boy's stature, short men in popular culture are villainous. As I will attempt to demonstrate in this chapter, the short male body is a source of anxiety and a site of punishment. First, I discuss what the body of the short man means culturally, and argue that this meaning contributes to a reading of his body as carnivalesque. Next, I look at how representations of the short man in popular culture texts reflect the cultural meaning of the short man while simultaneously punishing him. Lastly, I discuss medical efforts to make the short boy normative, i.e. taller, specifically through the use of human growth hormones.

Why does the short male body cause such distress, concern, outrage? While short men are, as I stated, non-normative, this fact is in itself not enough to create such anxiety. For instance, men who, say, get gray hair very early in life, while not having a "normal" bodily

² In speaking of the "short man," I am defining this phrase in terms of national averages. While I recognize that attempting to define what is "short" is always a bit arbitrary (and slippery, since it varies by context), for the sake of efficiency, I am placing the short man at 5'5" or shorter, four inches less than the average American man.

attribute, are not treated in the same manner or with the hostility that short men are treated. In fact, the winner of the Season 5 *American Idol* television contest in 2006 (Berman), Taylor Hicks, was entirely gray at the time, despite his youthful age of twenty-six years. Rather than hindering his success, his unusual hair seemed to become his trademark, a point of uniqueness. Clearly, simply falling outside of the cultural bounds of normality does not *necessarily* translate into a disempowered position in which one is stigmatized. In the case of the short man, it is the particular *way* in which the body falls outside of normativity that is key to understanding the cultural reaction to it.

One facet of the short man's less than ideal treatment is based purely on height. Within the dominant cultural mythology of tallness, which I outline in the first chapter, shortness – regardless of gender – is always pathologized, always seen as lesser, the inferior Other of the tall. The short male body thus appears less powerful, less valuable; he is denied tall privilege, and faces oppression on the basis of height just as short women do. This shared oppression of all short persons would presumably put the short man on par with the short woman, if not for the fact that the myth of tallness does not exist in isolation, but is rather linked in important ways to other cultural systems. Specifically, its intersection with patriarchy – a system meant to privilege men – actually creates the uniquely difficult situation the short man faces. (This is not meant to deny the gender oppression that women face, nor is it suggesting that the situation for the short man is somehow worse than for any woman. Rather, I wish to demonstrate the distinctive kinds of difficulties that the short man must deal with.) The fact that he is short *and a man* produces his particular circumstances.

The short man's maleness actually works *against* him rather than for him, a counterintuitive twist for those aware of how patriarchy normally functions. Revealing the inner

workings of patriarchy/sexism, feminist theorist and philosopher Marilyn Frye claims that of all the attributes a man may possess, such as his race or class, “one feature which never tends to his disadvantage in the society at large is his maleness” (31). While true generally, what Frye does not mention is that privilege is construed mainly upon men who perform masculinity *correctly*. Where height and gender intersect, maleness is not always the asset it would seem to be: while the short woman at least fulfills cultural expectations of femininity (and thus creates no disturbance in patriarchal workings), the short man, albeit inadvertently, does not adhere to patriarchal expectations of the masculine male body. As opposed to the female body disciplined to minimize spatial use, the male body is expected to take up greater amounts of space in order to appear masculine (although having a large body as a result of fatness does not function as a culturally acceptable way of doing this); with his smaller stature, the short man takes up much less space than other men. Additionally, he stands at eye level with many women and is looked down upon (literally) by other men. In short, his body is culturally read as *feminine* (therefore altering the privilege he would normally receive as a male). Like a woman, the short male (boy or man) is perceived as childish, closer to nature, and most importantly, he signifies a lack of the phallus. Additionally, his transgression does not go unnoticed, or, for that matter, unpunished.

A useful comparison for illustrating the short man’s emasculation and lack comes from an unlikely place: penis size. The way in which penis size is read is remarkably similar to how the male body signifies in terms of height. As stated previously, men are expected to take up space – in other words, to be big. Susan Bordo writes, in her article on penis size, “Does Size Matter?,” “Appearing a ‘big man’ to other men is an important aspect of men’s preoccupation with size” (22). While the size she refers to is that of the penis, her statement could just as easily be referring to height – the size of the body. Masculinity is at stake in the size of the body as

with the size of the penis. Bigness – in terms of both penis size and height – constitutes a measure of the phallus.

In order to understand the short man’s position, one must first understand the *tall man* and the meaning of his body. If one will recall my discussion of the mythology of tallness in Chapter One, the tall body acts as a “signifier – of power, of prominence, of strength” (22) – the very same traits that the big penis conveys, according to Scott Poulson-Bryant, author of *Hung*, a book about black men and penis size. Tall men parallel black men (as conceived by Poulson-Bryant) in terms of how both bodies signify. Drawing on a quote from James Baldwin, Poulson-Bryant claims that in terms of the black male penis, “The color *was* its size. The size *was* its color” (67). This point, which he reiterates at key points throughout his book, means that blackness is assumed to accompany a large penis, and that its perceived largeness is a result of its blackness; black men, “defined by the hung myth” (196) are seen as phallic and hypermasculine. With tall men, the *height* is the size and the size is the *height*. The tall male body is also viewed as phallic, as masculine, as powerful – “hung” in that metaphorical sense, although the assumption that a tall man *literally* has a large penis is not (necessarily) part of the tall man myth.³ (At the same time, there is never a suggestion that the tall man *doesn’t* have a big penis – perhaps it is considered a given not worth mentioning.) Notably, the tall man’s body does not signify as *too* masculine, departing from the hypermasculine image of the black male body, which Poulson-Bryant claims is a white “invention designed to emasculate” in that it “created something that needed to be controlled, feared” (124). While the black male body – the “mythically hung” (Poulson-Bryant 77) – is read as conveying power, strength, and virility, this

³ While I do not have enough evidence to support the claim that tall men are automatically assumed to have large penises, a particular scene in the film *Bedazzled* (2000) does lend credence to this claim. When the main character, Elliot, is granted a wish from the devil and becomes an extremely tall basketball star, his wish is destroyed when he discovers horrifiedly that his penis is very small. The fact that the surprise twist is his small penis despite his large body points to the expectation that a large body accompanies a large penis.

does not translate into actual power: the black male is consistently “less than endowed on the economic, social, and political totem poles” (199). The tall man, on the other hand, is “well-hung” in all these areas; as I explained in Chapter One, power is inscribed onto the tall body from several institutional sources in all the arenas in which the black man is denied power. While the tall man and the black man are both hung in a metaphorical way, their bodies signifying in similar ways, the tall man wields the true power.

If the tall man is “mythically hung,” then the short man is “mythically un-hung.” “[T]he lack of masculinity that [comes] with a little dick” (Poulson-Bryant 12) is the same lack that comes with a small male body. Bordo is useful again here – she quotes a young man with whom she spoke who explains that

The big size thing develops in the school locker room when you’re a kid. The big-dicked guys send out signals that say “We’re better,” “We’re more masculine than you,” or “We deserve to be here, look at the size of our dicks.” (qtd. in Bordo 22)

In the young man’s quote, “big-dicked” could be replaced with tall and “dicks” with “bodies” and his quote would accurately describe how height functions for men. As a result of this, the short man is “small-dicked”; he does not signify all the attributes that the young man lists as belonging to “big-dicked guys.” Smaller penises and smaller bodies are both emasculating, both an indication of a phallus in dire need of enlargement.

The short man’s phallic lack and dearth of masculinity suggest that much of the anxiety surrounding the short man is actually a veiled fear of femininity itself. This anxiety is intensified by the existence of a man who is defying patriarchal gender roles by always performing femininity (albeit unintentionally) through his smaller bodily dimensions. The same anxiety can

be witnessed in situations where anger is caused by, for instance, a gay man deliberately putting on the tropes of femininity, such as wearing tight-fitting clothing or adopting mannerisms coded as feminine. Short men stir up patriarchal anxieties about femininity in males and the proper maintenance of gender roles.

The short man's unintentional gender transgression also allows a reading of his body as carnivalesque, again paralleling the tall woman who can be read similarly. Like her, the short man can potentially destabilize the gendered hierarchy of power, making men the less powerful (and feminine) and women more powerful (and masculine). As I have discussed in previous chapters, greater height signifies power, and thus the short man signifies a lack of this power, which is conceded to the taller woman. Thus, the short man enacts a "hierarchy inversion," creating a "world upside down" (Stallybrass and White 4).

In their discussion of carnival, Stallybrass and White explain that the "bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low' – as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating" (191). If we consider the "bourgeois subjects" to be men and masculinity, the low here would be femininity, which men are taught to stringently avoid and abjectify. Thus, when men are feminine – as the short man is – men no longer have something with which to define themselves against in order to place themselves in a hierarchical relationship in which they are superior; in other words, their status as "high" is troubled. A strict division must be maintained in terms of gender categories, and by transgressing them and becoming part of the "low," the short man puts the identity and superiority of all men (the "high") in danger. Disturbing the patriarchal beast, the short man, like the tall woman, invokes anxiety about women becoming more powerful and men being placed in the subordinate role traditionally meant for women.

It is precisely the short man's potential for carnival and his embodiment of femininity – as well as the anxiety both of these states provoke – that I propose instigates punishment of the short male from several different sources. Short males are looked down upon (both literally and metaphorically) by most other men, often being incessantly teased and taunted by peers both in childhood and adulthood (Hall 5). According to several first-hand accounts of adult men who were short children, short boys are bombarded by a myriad of derogatory nicknames, such as “shrimp, runt, peewee, pip-squeak, punk, peanut, bug, mouse, gnat, midget, Mr. Peabody” (Hall 5). Parents and doctors urge short boys to consider growth treatments so that they can be “normal,” an issue I will address in more detail later in this chapter. Often heterosexual women, who have internalized the pervasive myth of tallness, see tall men as more attractive, powerful, and masculine and on the flip side, short men as “less successful, less capable, less confident, less outgoing” (Rauch n.p.). These same women, taught to perform femininity, may feel discomfort in engaging in romantic entanglements with shorter men. Based on some of the comments of the tall women on the message board (see Chapter Two), a relationship in which the man is shorter may make women feel as if they are in a masculine (or more powerful) role and thus is experienced as uncomfortably defeminizing; this type of continuously carnivalesque relationship is not necessarily desirable, understandably so, as women are unaccustomed to being placed in dominant roles.

Interestingly, the short male is also punished for attempts to remasculinize himself. If a short man attempts to reclaim his masculinity, or is assertive on a regular basis, “he’s seen as having Napoleonic tendencies,” according to clinical psychologist David Weeks (qtd. in Rauch), and therefore has a “Napoleon Complex,” a term coined by researcher of psychology Alfred Adler in 1956 (Martel and Biller 12). On one hand, observing the existence of a “Napoleon

Complex” – a condition in which “short persons deliberately [establish] power, not through size but through styles of assertion” (Ihde 235) – underscores invisible height inequality that creates a need for short people to compensate for their stature. On the other hand, this term is likely yet another way to pathologize the short man, a weapon that can be thrown at him if he oversteps his boundaries: since he is feminine (and at a bodily level to boot), he is not entitled to male power (i.e. the phallus). To quote a colonel from Pat Conroy’s novel *The Great Santini* (1976) these short men “like to strut around and pretend their dicks are as long as anyone else’s” (qtd. in Martel and Biller 2). In other words, short men who are compensating are representing a phallus not afforded to them by their bodies, claiming power they were not given and are not intended to take.

The Napoleon Complex has been explained as the reason why many male actors are so short, in that, according to Ralph Keyes, author of *The Height of Your Life*, when short boys are growing up, they feel a “need to be forceful or expressive” (qtd. in Roth). While this in fact may be a positive outcome of having the “Complex,” attributing artistic expression and individual motivation to a mere compensation technique seems highly unfair to short persons, devaluing their efforts and accomplishments.

In noting the behavior of short men to be attributed to the Napoleon Complex, it becomes clear that phallic behavior from tall and short men is read very differently. “Tall men are seen as natural ‘leaders’; short ones are called ‘pushy’” (Rauch n.p.). This situation is remarkably similar to the double standard in the way men and women are perceived in terms of assertiveness, a masculine characteristic: if assertive, women are “bitchy” (they are not entitled to the phallus) while men are “confident.” This parallel corroborates my reading of the short man as culturally coded as feminine; he is assuming “unearned” phallic power when behaving as

“well-hung.” (The only acceptable route to remasculinization for the short man seems to be making the body literally larger through growth hormone therapy, which I discuss later on in the chapter.)

While I would not pathologize the masculine behavior of the short man by labeling it a Napoleon Complex, I would note that, according to anecdotal accounts and psychological studies, short boys do attempt to compensate for their height by remasculinizing themselves in various ways. Hall, given various nicknames as a short boy, clung to a particular one – “squirt” – because he “loved the short, explosive burst of energy the word captured” (5). At risk of imposing my own meaning onto Hall, I would venture that the reason for his appreciation of this particular nickname is its masculine undertone: a connotation of ejaculation and male virility is implicated within the “short, explosive burst.” The body that is virile is masculine, in that the virile body is one “that has the physical power to be courageous, the strength to impose justice” (Lingis 147). Author Don Ihde, in his “The Tall and the Short of It,” notes several strategies undertaken by his short son: these include attaining subcultural capital (what he terms “withdrawal into total geekhood”); succeeding in other areas, like music, computer skills, or intellect; mastery at computer games or designing “macho comic strips” (236-237). Psychologists have also documented that short boys and men often use humor as a tactic of ingratiating themselves with others, of making up in personality for what one lacks in stature (Martel and Biller 14). According to Ihde, “these strategies all help create a socially constructed aura which partially – but only partially – compensates for one’s ‘deficient’ embodiment” (237). In other words, these strategies are attempts to reinstate the lost phallus.

The Short Man, Representationally Speaking

Popular culture representations of short men often appear to be both responding to and reflecting the cultural perception of the short man. However, this reflection should not be dismissed as neutral simply because it “just” reflects cultural views; representation, however much it simply mirrors cultural perceptions, is not free of ideology or consequences. The short man’s role and representation within the popular culture world is remarkably similar to that of the tall woman. These representations, beyond imitating life, are manifestations of patriarchal anxiety the short man generates about his carnivalesque, feminine body – just as representations of the tall woman are also products of patriarchal unease surrounding her body. They also function to punish the short man for his inadvertent gender transgressions. One particular method of punishment is villainization, which comprises yet another representational similarity to the tall woman.

In order to illustrate the larger trend in representation, I examine two specific popular representations of short men: Lord Farquaad (voiced by John Lithgow) in the cinematic fairy tale *Shrek* (2001) and Vincent (Danny DeVito) in the comedy *Twins* (1988). An animated children’s film, *Shrek* is the story of a large green ogre named Shrek who ventures to a nearby kingdom with his companion Donkey in an attempt to persuade its ruler, the short-statured Lord Farquaad, to empty Shrek’s swamp of the fairy tale creatures he dumped there. Farquaad makes a deal with Shrek, agreeing to remove the swamp’s occupants if Shrek will go on a quest to save a princess, Fiona, locked in a high tower and bring her back to the kingdom so that she may become his wife. However, Princess Fiona – who turns out to also be an ogre – and Shrek fall in love, much to the dismay of Lord Farquaad, who ends up at the conclusion of the film as a snack for a dragon. *Twins* is the story of a man named Julius (Arnold Schwarzenegger) who is the result of

a scientific genetic engineering experiment to create the perfect human being. Upon discovering that he has a previously unknown twin brother named Vincent, he travels from the secluded island where he grew up to the United States to seek him out. The reunited brothers go on a journey to discover the truth of their origins, from which they learn that Vincent is the accident, the unexpected second baby of the experiment. Ideologically grounded in the myth of tallness, both *Shrek* and *Twins* represent shortness of the male body as a (feminine) lack – of power, of the phallus, and of other positive traits. Both films also vilify the short man as a way to punish him for falling outside the bounds of normativity.

The hegemonic strategy for dealing with the tall woman was, as I demonstrated, mainly a forceful replacing of her into a feminine embodiment, thus undercutting both her masculinity and power. Based on this observation, one might presume that the same happens with the short man, only in reverse; the short man is dragged from his femininity and masculinized. One instance of this textual remasculinization is located in the introduction to the television show *Miami Ink*, a program documenting the lives of the employees who run a tattoo shop in Miami, Florida. Ami James, both the intro's voice-over narrator and employee in the shop, provides a brief description of each employee as his or her picture appears on the screen. When James comes to one male employee, Darren Brass, he describes Brass as “the five foot wonder. He may be small, but he's got a lot of heart.” Since Brass is short and therefore lacks the phallus, his other virtuous qualities must be brought out in order to compensate for his femininity and thus lack of power. Although it is unclear what is meant by “a lot of heart,” presumably the show is referring to a brave or courageous spirit – perhaps virility? – or possibly a great deal of compassion. Through Ami's words, Brass symbolically becomes larger than five feet.

Aside from the *Miami Ink* example, however, rarely is there a representational attempt to reinscribe masculinity onto the body of the short man within popular culture (as opposed to short boys and men in real life, who often try to reclaim the phallus). The hegemonic strategy, rather than attempt to re- or hyper-masculinize (in the same way that the tall woman is overly feminized) the short male body, is that of punishment through textual degradation and vilification.

Textually, the short man becomes a target of mockery, a source of humor at his expense. In *Shrek*, Lord Farquaad's height is the cause of several supposedly comical moments in the movie. At one point, he strides confidently up to a table only to discover that he can just barely see over it, necessitating an ostensibly humorous lowering of the table. The short male character's own attempts to seem masculine are mocked and exploited for the sake of humor in a ridiculing of the assumed Napoleon Complex. For example, in *Shrek*, while astride his horse Lord Farquaad appears tall, but as his guards lift him off the saddle it becomes apparent that his legs are inserted into the metal legs of a coat of armor which reach down to the stirrups, creating the illusion of much longer legs. His attempt to look taller is meant to be viewed as absurd (but if one considers the lengths short men must go in order to seem "normal," it seems more tragic than comical). The viewer is meant to see Farquaad in the same way that the fictional colonel I spoke of earlier conceived of short men who attempt to compensate; we are intended to see him as an unworthy subject acting as if he "has a big dick."

The textual mockery of the short man is further evident in a conversation which takes place between Shrek and Donkey, who are joking back and forth about Lord Farquaad's short stature as they make their way to his castle. Shrek jokes, "Men of Farquaad's stature are in *short* supply," to which Donkey replies, "There are those who think *little* of him." Here, Farquaad's

height is a point of recrimination, a bodily characteristic worthy of derision. Shrek and Donkey's mockery leads to an interjection by Princess Fiona, who furiously exclaims, "Stop it. Stop it both of you. You know, you're just jealous that you can never measure up to a great ruler like Lord Farquaad." Fiona's defense is followed up by Shrek admitting that she may be right, but, he states, "I'll let you do the 'measuring' when you see him tomorrow." Shrek insinuates that because of his height, Farquaad, who lacks phallic power (he is the "mythically unhung" [Poulson-Bryant 77]), could never be a great ruler.

This particular perception is not merely a fictional invention: consider the recent "scandal" concerning North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. Reports show that he wears platform shoes (a fact which is kept confidential by North Korean media photographers) that add four to five inches to his original height, which is estimated to fall somewhere between 5'1" and 5'5" (Hyong-Min and Jung-A n.p.). These shoes, according to ABC News Online, are worn during Kim's meetings with other world leaders – he must appear to convey phallic power. A North Korean analyst justified Kim's action, posing the question: "What would North Koreans think if their leader was such a short man?" Kim is, on some level, aware of the implications his short stature will have; as a short person – and more importantly, *man* – he will be assumed to lack power, which is unacceptable in his present position of leadership. In reality and in the world of the film, the short man can never "measure up."

Returning to *Shrek*, the film further emphasizes Farquaad's feminine lack of the phallus in another important scene. As Shrek and his companion Donkey arrive at Farquaad's castle in the kingdom of DuLac, they gaze up at it, at which point the camera pans up the extremely tall, phallic castle. Aware that the castle belongs to Lord Farquaad, Shrek remarks, "Do you think maybe he's compensating for something?" with a smile and a chuckle. Although Shrek may be

referring to either Lord Farquaad's lack of height *or* his ostensibly small penis, the differentiation does not really matter. Either way, Farquaad clearly lacks the phallus, represented by either of these bodily dimensions; he is not seen as literally or metaphorically "big-dicked" (Poulson-Bryant). It is clear from Shrek's insulting double entendre that Farquaad is not seen as "hung" and he must therefore architecturally don a phallus. This action is one instance of a phenomenon known as "overcompensation" – the Napoleon Complex of penis size – indicating a man who supposedly attempts to make up for his small penis by devoting himself to various hypermasculine signifiers.

Consider the term "overcompensation" – and I'm not talking the extra overtime coins in the check you bring home from the job. Got a Porsche? Maybe you're showing off that you're a player making moves, but you're probably overcompensating for a small dick. Muscle-bound body in the insurance-office cubicle with no bodybuilding contests on the horizon? Maybe you're a gym rat of the highest proportions, disciplined and devoted to crafting the best pecs on the beach, but you're probably overcompensating for a little dick. Your paycheck, your girlfriend's bust size, the predicted over/under on that game bet, your dick size: it's all potentially measurable. Men measure. Bigger is better, whether it's that Hummer you drool over, that raise at the end of the fiscal year, or that dangling piece of flesh between your legs. (Poulson-Bryant 23-24)

Although the tone Poulson-Bryant adopts is a bit harsh, he makes a good point. In a culture that expects a thoroughly masculine performance of every man and has particular ways of measuring manliness (height, penis size) the pressure to "measure up" is presumably enormous and therefore anxiety-inducing. While I do not necessarily condone hypermasculine behavior, at the

same time I find it unfortunate that *Shrek* exploits the short man's lack by creating humor out of his attempts to compensate. The representation of Lord Farquaad – as well as the responses of the other characters to his body – further reifies the notion of the short man as emasculated and feminine; simultaneously, it punishes him for failing to embody masculinity and for threatening to create a carnivalesque world in which men are less powerful. In a patriarchal culture, feminizing a person or object is a strategy of devaluing it, of making something appear to be the inferior Other. I engage with this strategy further in the next chapter, in exploring how the West discursively constructs China as the lesser, barbaric Other by feminizing the nation and its practices.

The femininity embodied by the short man can also be seen through the short male character Vincent in *Twins*. Most noticeably, he *lacks* – the phallus, virility, and morals (as witnessed through his villainous behavior). Vince does not display common bodily markers of masculinity – namely, muscularity – which, in order to emphasize the contrast, are glaringly apparent on Julius's body. His behavior also falls on the nature (feminine) side of the binary opposition civilization/nature. He acts on desire and emotion – as women are expected to – rather than reason, in contrast to Julius's logical, rational mode of thinking. His affair, his scandalous sexual dealings with a nun at his orphanage, and his destructiveness, all underscore that Vince acts on impulse and emotion (thought to be part of nature and femaleness) while Julius cautiously thinks through his actions, as those who are “civilized” do.

Vince's shortness also signifies a lack of what ostensibly comprises the perfect human being and functions as a sign of his inferiority (This point is even more disturbing when juxtaposed with the fact that the Nazi's eugenics projects included the notion of “height as a particular physical – and moral – virtue” [Hall 14].) While his twin Julius (Arnold

Schwarzenegger) is very tall, intelligent, strong, educated, and skilled (he reads at an accelerated pace) – suggesting that tallness is a “philosophical good” (Hall 9) – Vincent embodies every behavior and trait that Western culture does not value, including shortness.

What is more troubling about the movie *Twins* is not that it simply reflects the cultural view of the short man, but its implication that the short man is inherently “genetic garbage.” The twins are told by a doctor involved in the experiment to “mak[e] the most fully developed human the world has ever seen” that Vincent was the unexpected and inferior extra which resulted from the pregnancy. According to the doctor, the embryo split unequally: “all the purity and strength went into Julius,” who was born first, while “all the crap that was leftover” became Vincent. Disagreeing with the doctor’s interpretation of the events, Julius, coming down on the nurture side of the well-known nature vs. nurture debate, claims that his own “perfection” is more a result of his privileged upbringing, which included nurturing and a great deal of education. Despite Julius’s perspective on the situation, the film never entirely debunks the idea that Vince is inferior – or that his height is an indication of this.

While Julius disagrees with the doctor’s view on the situation, one particular scene in the movie suggests the truth of the doctor’s claim (within the filmic reality). At the beginning of the film, when the twins have just been born and are lying alongside one another, the height difference between the two babies is foregrounded. A comparative shot of the legs of the two baby boys emphasizes Vince’s shortness relative to Julius. Even more significantly, immediately following this shot, Vince kicks Julius’s legs, which leaves Julius wailing beside him, suggesting Vince’s innate meanness (i.e. lack of goodness). Since Vince displays these “negative” behavioral characteristics shortly after his birth, prior to his difficult upbringing, they appear to be rooted in nature and exist before the influence of nurture. The film’s ideology, in keeping

with the myth of tallness, is that shortness *naturally* means inferiority and lack while tallness is *naturally* the moral good it has been constructed to be. After all, the “perfect” human is a tall man – while shortness signifies genetic inferiority. Like the evolutionary biological theory of height I argue against in the first chapter, the film completely naturalizes the mythology of tallness, which functions in keeping short people oppressed and taller people in power.⁴

As discussed earlier, in the case of the short man, feminizing him in representation is a way to punish and disparage him. An equally important punishment strategy is that of villainization – the role of villain is one commonly assigned to short men, as it is to tall women. Lord Farquaad is very obviously the villain, as he is a cheater, a swindler, and a torturer of innocent anthropomorphic gingerbread cookies. In *Twins*, Vincent – the shorter twin brother – while not the central villain of the film, has many villainous characteristics. He is involved in an affair with a married woman (the first thing the viewer finds out about him), he is a thief, he is involved in shady dealings with a pair of brothers to whom he owes a large sum of money, he is destructive (having started a fire at the orphanage where he grew up), and he parks his car in handicap spaces (clearly lacking compassion as well as an awareness of social rules). In yet another animated film, *Ratatouille* (2007), the villain – a short-statured chef who can peek through keyholes without having to bend down – is again a noticeably short man. While functioning as a way to punish the short man, his villainization may also unfortunately create better (more despicable) villains in that it taps into the cultural animosity for short men.

In addition to the role of villain, the short man often is assigned the role of the “wrong partner,” a common generic convention of romantic comedies of the last few decades (Neale

⁴ One may also note the racist implications in the notion of the “perfect” human as tall and white; it suggests that other cultures that are shorter on average are genetically inferior, and that whites are genetically superior as well. Also troublesome in its sexism is the fact that the “perfect” human is a man, a patriarchal cultural ideology that feminists have been attempting to debunk for decades.

289). The “wrong partner” character is “a would-be suitor or a possible but unsuitable partner for one or other of the members of the couple” (Neale 289), thus this role constitutes an extension of the short man’s lack. While *Shrek* is not strictly a romantic comedy *per se*, the romance component of the film does include a “wrong partner”: Lord Farquaad. Upon awareness of Lord Farquaad’s stature, the viewer immediately recognizes that Princess Fiona is not meant to be with him romantically, despite his intent to marry her. As if his unpleasant personality traits are not enough to persuade the viewer that he is not the right one for Fiona, the creators of the film must make him dislikable on a bodily level – what better way to accomplish this than by making him short? Additionally, the short man as “wrong partner” draws on the myth of the heterosexual “ideal couple” in which the man is the taller partner (Gieske). The audience is encouraged to buy into this myth and therefore condemn a partnership where the man must “look up.” In another example, in the film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), Mr. Collins, the man attempting to marry female protagonist Elizabeth Bennet, is obviously wrong for her, as illustrated in a scene which depicts him as significantly shorter than Mr. Darcy. As he stands behind Darcy repeating his name at increasingly louder volumes, he appears a great fool – one gets the sense that as such a short man, he is not truly entitled to speak to Darcy, much less marry Elizabeth. The short man as romantically undesirable or unsuitable has permeated Hollywood filmmaking, to the extent that short actors rarely are given the opportunity to play leads in romantic comedies (Roth n.p.). The fact that the short man automatically signifies wrongness is telling in terms of how the short man is perceived culturally.

In Chapter Two, I argued that popular culture texts depicting a giantess eating men reflect patriarchal fear of the carnivalesque tall woman, who reverses gender roles by taking on masculinity and being more powerful than men. The conclusion of *Shrek* provides a parallel

situation almost too fitting for my analysis. As the wedding between Farquaad and Fiona is objected to and stopped, the female (and very feminine) dragon that Donkey has befriended smashes through a window and, like the dinosaur in *Jurassic Park* who plucks the frightened lawyer off of the toilet, chomps and swallows Farquaad whole. Thus, while the giantess consumes masculinity, the short man *is consumed by* femininity. Taken together, these scenes emblemize patriarchal fear about the carnivalesque bodies of both the tall woman and the short man, each of which are thought to make women powerful/masculine and men powerless/feminine.

Growth Hormone Therapy and the Short Boy

A discussion of the short man, and the cultural meanings of shortness, necessitates inclusion of the issue of “treating” short children with human growth hormones (GH), or more recently, recombinant human growth hormone (rhGH) (Hardin et. al. 279). Literature on the topic, including scientific journals written for pediatric endocrinologists or growth researchers, guidebooks intended for parents of short children, and a book written by a short man (Stephen S. Hall) who explores the impact of small stature on boys, all indicate the pervasiveness and troubling increase in use of the treatment. I contend that the perception of the short body as inferior, and in particular, the short male body as feminine – and the subsequent need to normalize him – has led to the rise of a massive and profitable growth hormone industry.

Both short boys and short girls can be “treated” with GH in order to increase their final height. While this may seem to contradict my assertion in Chapter Two that tall girls are culturally expected to be shorter, this fact illustrates the double bind of height in which women are caught. If short, a woman is viewed as petite enough to be feminine but inferior in terms of

height; she faces height oppression, as well as being expected to be a bit taller, a little closer to average (shortness is not seen as “normal”). (For example, my femininity is never questioned, but my shortness is constantly mocked.) On the other hand, if tall, a woman is a female grotesque (i.e. non-normative), a freak, a monstrosity. Because she disturbs patriarchy with her stature, she faces hegemonic efforts to force her to be literally or symbolically shorter. Even women of average height are still “short” in comparison to male bodies – which are culturally understood as the normative human body – and thus fall victim to the cultural myth of tallness by not being afforded the same power inscribed onto the tall (man).

Although children of both genders undergo growth hormone therapy, short boys have a central place in the world of GH. The majority of scientific journal articles on the subject focus on short boys. In a study conducted in 1978 by a Yale graduate student examining clinical evaluation of short children, almost triple the number of short boys than girls were brought in by their parents for assessment (Martel and Biller 19). Pediatric endocrinologists Kaplowitz and Baron have dealt with many children unhappy about their shortness, but in particular “[b]oys are often more distressed than girls, perhaps because people tend to view large size and strength as masculine qualities” (113). Further, specific books have been written about short males and height – like Hall’s *Size Matters: How Height Affects the Health, Happiness, and Success of Boys – and the Men They Become* and Martel and Biller’s *Stature and Stigma: The Biopsychosocial Development of Short Males* – whereas the female equivalent of these texts does not exist to my knowledge.

I argue that at the heart of the matter – the urgency and focus on making short boys taller – lies the same patriarchal anxiety that creates such troubling representations of short men in popular culture. The short boy, who suggests femininity through a body occupying little space,

signifies a lack – of masculinity, virility, the phallus – and is also carnivalesque. Although unacknowledged, treating the short boy is an attempt (by patients, parents, and doctors) to remasculinize him, or at least ensure that he will grow up to be a masculine adult. Like products meant to enhance penis size which “[draw] on the equation ‘penis size = manliness’” (Bordo 23), growth hormones draw on the ideology that body size (height) = manliness. However, the ideological bent is not as obvious in medical literature about growth hormones as it is in penis enhancement advertisements.

The disciplinary apparatus of the medical institution enforces patriarchal standards of male bodies indirectly by pathologizing boys who are “abnormally” short. Doctors use growth charts – with their merciless percentiles and their constructed versions of “normal” height – to problematize the heights of particular children during a pediatric examination. According to Foucault, “The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 184). In the case of the short boy, the medical examination and the subsequent charting of height onto growth charts indeed constitutes the “normalizing gaze,” in that it constructs what is normal and pathological. “It wasn’t until the mid-eighteenth century that doctors felt any need at all to keep track of the height and weight of children” (Hall 52). This continuous recording of children’s bodily dimensions renders them capable “of being able always to be seen” by the invisible “disciplinary power” exercised by the medical institution (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 187). In an instance of the blatant medicalizing of the body, a parallel to the tall girl diagnosed with “excessive tall stature,” short children can be diagnosed with “idiopathic short stature.” Also termed normal-variant short stature or short stature of undefined cause, idiopathic short stature

means that a child is short – defined as a height at least 2.25 standard deviations under the mean, or less than the 1.2 percentile – for no known medical reason (for example, a deficiency in growth hormone) (Hardin et. al. 281). Implicit in this diagnosis is that shortness itself is the disease!

In actuality, the work of the doctors is nearly already done by the cultural panopticon. Socialized into gender roles and the proper performance of masculinity (or femininity), surrounded by the pervasive myth of tallness, parents and their children monitor their own bodies, attempting to make them adhere to normativity. A combination of their own panoptical vision with self-policing by others (children's taunts, for instance) and popular culture (villainous short men) is enough to make short males see their bodies as abnormal and thus requiring change or "treatment," to use the rhetoric of the medical community. Negative treatment from peers, adults, and the culture in general (as I described earlier as attributed to anxiety surrounding femininity and male power) has left frustrated short boys and their parents wishing something could be done about their (lack of) height.

To make matters of GH treatment worse, in 2003, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of recombinant growth hormone for "treatment" of idiopathic short stature. However, based on the medical literature, the possible side effects of administering growth hormones to children are unknown. One study revealed an increase in the risk of colorectal cancer and Hodgkin's disease, as well as raising concerns about the possibility of increased risk of neoplasia (Lee 2576). Not only is the short boy held responsible for "fixing" a body that is problematic only because culture makes it so, his decision to undergo treatment may jeopardize his (healthy) body.

Aside from the unethical “treating” of a “medical condition” constructed by regimes of power/knowledge, the further pathologizing of shortness within this treatment, and the risks posed to children undergoing years of unnecessary and potentially dangerous treatments, indicates a further layer of power which is fairly suspect. From a Marxist angle, pharmaceutical companies, with the cost of GH treatments at an astounding \$52,000(!) per inch of height (Lee 2577), have a great deal to gain monetarily from pathologizing shortness. These companies stand to profit by tapping into and exploiting the cultural myth of tallness. Even more disturbing, these companies can fund research into the efficacy and safety of GH; one medical journal article mentions such a study without addressing the obvious potential for bias in this situation. Researchers receiving money from these companies may be reluctant to (or more conspiratorially, pressured by the companies not to) release findings that present their product, the GH, in a negative light.

Happily, in my opinion, treatment of healthy children with “idiopathic short stature” with growth hormones is a very controversial practice (Kaplowitz and Baron 194). The practice is so hotly contested that Kaplowitz and Baron devote an entire chapter to the controversy. Like myself, many question the “ethical and economic ramifications” of treatment (Lee 2580). The debate over growth hormones directly confronts the issues about cultural perception of height I have raised in my thesis:

At the core of the controversy is the question about whether short stature is a disease state or a continuum of normal development and, therefore, whether growth hormone therapy is a therapeutic or a cosmetic intervention. (Lee n.p.)

While I agree that it is important to think – very critically, I might add – about the definition of shortness as a “disease state,” debating about GH therapy as either “therapeutic” or “cosmetic” is

an ineffective route which distracts from the true issues at hand. Further, the line between “medical” and “cosmetic,” as I will discuss in the following chapter, is a blurry one, defined and socially constructed by discourses of power/knowledge.

In thinking about the situation of the short man, while I am sympathetic towards the hardships that he may face, perhaps we can view his difficulties from an entirely different, and more optimistic, angle. Although the social construction of height works in the interest of male privilege, a disruption occurs at the site of the short male body. As victim of the very system meant to privilege him, the short male may offer a way in which “the male body might be construed as an agent in the struggle against masculine hegemony” (Zuern 56). Because the short man experiences patriarchy in an oppressive way, as well as being caught in the cruelty of the myth of tallness, theoretically his embodiment may be ideal for an alliance with feminist activists to combat oppressive systems, like heightism and patriarchy.

CHAPTER IV. DISCOURSES OF CHINESE LIMB-LENGTHENING SURGERY IN THE WESTERN MEDIA

Throughout the early 2000s, a flurry of news articles appeared in the Western media describing what was presented as the disturbing popularity in China of a procedure known as extended limb-lengthening, which was said to be “sweeping” the nation. As I will argue later, descriptions of this surgery are laden with biases, but I will attempt to describe the surgery as objectively as possible. A doctor cuts through the patient’s leg bone, then constructs a metal frame containing steel pins, which are placed through the separated bones, around the site. The patient gradually adjusts the frame over the course of several months, allowing new bone to grow between the separated bones (Landau 36). Despite the existence of the same surgery in other nations throughout the world, including Russia, several countries in Europe, and the U.S. (Landau 36-37), the focus of Western news sources was the practice in China. This type of news story became so ubiquitous that a blog entitled “Height extending surgery in the Western media, again” was written about it, in which the poster quotes a previous post whose author outlined all of the conventions of what seems to have become a genre of news story (Goldkorn n.p.). In this chapter, I examine the reasons for the West’s positioning of China as the discursive focal point, as well as the consequences of Western representations of limb-lengthening surgery in China.

In my exploration of discursive Western constructions of Chinese height surgery, I make several arguments. First, I argue that Western news discourses of limb-lengthening surgery reflect Western anxiety surrounding the increasing power of the Chinese nation-state. Through a process of Orientalism, China is constructed as brutal and premodern, positing it in a hierarchical relationship to the more modern, progressive West. I explore the strategic justification mobilized in order to render similar practices in the West necessary. I contend that case studies of Chinese

women who have undergone surgery to lengthen their legs become symbols of China itself. The construction of these women as frivolous, materialistic, and superficial becomes a commentary on the current state of China as perceived by the West. Lastly, I look at where Western blame for the surgery lies, and the implications of this specific accusation.

While I problematize the Western discursive emphasis on the fact that there are height requirements in China for particular jobs (which I explain in greater detail later on) in terms of the discrimination it effaces in Western culture, I do not wish to deny the apparent discrimination involved in setting arbitrary height minimums for specific jobs; as a feminist, I find any instances of inequality (whether on the basis of gender, height, race, or any other aspect of an individual) troubling. At the same time, many international feminist scholars warn against interpreting the practices of Others through a Western lens (Waller and Marcos, Naghibi). Thus, while I see height requirements for careers in China to be a contentious issue, I do not intend to pass judgment on the practice. Rather, it needs to be understood in a socio-political and historical context, beyond the simple link to the “booming economy” (Malkiel and Taylor 2008) that Western journalists have established. Fieldwork in China, including ethnographic research, would be necessary for a rich and fuller understanding of the employment process.

The same is true for the limb-lengthening surgery itself. In discussing what appear to be “oppressive practices” in the nations of Others, there is always a “struggle to name” them “without capitulating to neocolonial sensationalism” (O’Shea 138). I certainly do not wish to reproduce the hysteria of Western news articles about the procedure, nor find myself guilty of feminist imperialism. While the surgery could potentially be an important feminist issue, one must be careful not to hyperbolize or misunderstand it, or to see it solely through a Western feminist lens. As Shu-mei Shih argues, a look at China’s unique history – especially that of

women – reveals the many instances in which the application of Western feminism would simply be incompatible with the cultural situation (7-8). While feminist work on cosmetic surgery may be useful for interpretation, the cultural bias still remains a pertinent issue. On the other hand, women in China have been, since the mid-nineteenth century, engaged in a “struggle to reclaim their bodies” and “to reject mutilation on a gargantuan scale” (Hong 12). Could limb-lengthening surgery be a return to this widespread “mutilation” of women’s bodies, the modern-day extension of the historical Chinese practice of footbinding? While it may be tempting to answer affirmatively, such a claim would deny Chinese women’s role as “agential subject[s]” (Naghibi 38). Because of its complex nature and its position within a cultural context that I myself am not a part of, this particular surgery is extremely difficult to theorize about. Adding to the difficulty in creating an informed analysis of Chinese women’s choice to have height surgery, postcolonial theory is not applicable to Chinese women’s *postsocialist* situation, as postcolonialism deals with capitalist nations (Waller and Marcos xxii). Ultimately, I do not want to inadvertently be like the Western women Naghibi describes who posited themselves hierarchically as “epitome of modernity and progress” (Naghibi xviii) to Iranian woman by lamenting what appears to be her subjugation. Thus, rather than perpetuate the colonialist gaze of the West – which finds blame always with the Other – by problematizing the choice of Chinese individuals (especially women) who elected to have the surgery, I instead problematize the discourses of height in which these decisions are described and discussed.

China: Locus of Western Panic

The Western media’s specific focus on height surgery in *China*, despite the fact that the limb-lengthening surgery is performed in several other countries, points to Western anxiety

about China in recent years. Morley and Robins argue that in the 1980s and early 90s, Western anxiety was centered on Japan, whose technological developments and burgeoning economy caused it to “occupy ...a threatening position in the Western imagination” (147). Since the West constructs itself in opposition to the East, as its superior, any suggestion of modernism in the East creates unease:

If it is possible for modernity to find a home in the Orient, then any essential, and essentialising, distinction between East and West is problematised. Japan can no longer be stereotyped as the ‘Orient’; it is not possible to marginalise or dismiss Japanese modernity as some kind of anomaly (Morley and Robins 160).

The same argument can be made for China in the last decade or so. (One author of a book about China inadvertently demonstrates my point when he queries, “Is China a New Japan?” [Shenkar 43].) Concern about China as a potential “Superdragon” (Burstein and de Keijzer 1) – a highly modernized economic superpower – pervades the current Western cultural climate.

This climate of anxiety is both reflected and reinforced by a number of books written about the current state of China (Hom and Mosher 2007; Malkiel and Taylor 2008; Burstein and de Keijzer 1998; Shenkar 2006; Gittings 2005). In the book *Big Dragon* (1998), the authors project that in the early 2000s China will “increasingly emerge as a superpower in every sense – economically, politically, militarily, culturally, technologically” (Burstein and de Keijzer 1). Many of these texts speculate as to whether the relationship between China and the United States in the future is destined for that of bitter enemies or mutually beneficial collaboration (Burstein and de Keijzer, Gittings). The title of one particular book, *The Chinese Century: The Rising Chinese Economy and Its Impact on the Global Economy, the Balance of Power, and Your Job* (Shenkar 2006), is particularly worry-inducing with its direct correlation of the Chinese economy

with “your job.” The book hails readers, forcing them to be interpellated within this Western panic through a subtle hint that their career may be in jeopardy – because of China. The author of the book, Oded Shenkar, predicts in a chapter he entitles “China Rising” that “if current trends continue, China will surpass the U.S. to become the world’s largest economy ... in two decades – possibly sooner” (161). The imminence itself of this tremendous shift in power is enough to strike fear in the heart of a Western reader. Collectively, these texts contribute to the Western unease about China already floating in the cultural atmosphere.

Discourses of limb-lengthening surgery in China are used as a way to express this Western panic about China so evident in the books I described, but why the specific choice of this surgery? This question may be answered by examining the anxiety the surgery in itself is potentially able to cause. As I argue in Chapter One, tallness is socially constructed in such a way that the tall body is invested with power. Thus, taller cultures, such as the United States, have a racist claim to superiority on the basis of greater height; this is especially true in comparison to China, where the average woman is 5’ 2” and the average man 5’ 6” (Coonan n.p.), whereas the average American woman is 5’4” and the average man 5’9” (Roth n.p.). Additionally, average heights (or gradual change in height) of a nation can function as an indicator of the overall health and standard of living of a nation, according to some economists (Grabmeier n.p.). Since the West can claim greater power, progress, and better overall health through its comparatively higher average height, especially relative to the “petite Chinese” (Coonan n.p.), the increased height of the Chinese population (especially women) through limb-lengthening surgery poses an added threat to that created by China’s booming economy. This is compounded by the fact that the Chinese, who have increased in average height by .8 inches over

the last ten years, have one of the fastest rates of growth world-wide (Ching-Ching n.p.). Thus, the West has a personal stake in devaluing limb-lengthening surgery.

Yet another layer of anxiety generated by height surgery in China is one that is thoroughly gendered. Concern in this case results from the fact that a large number of those electing to have the surgery are *women*. In the West, as I note in the second chapter, women are expected to take up very little physical space with their bodies in order to perform patriarchal expectations of femininity properly. From a Western standpoint then, not only are the Chinese threatening to become taller and thus more powerful, Chinese women in particular are doing so. Through their own agency, they are subverting patriarchal standards of the female body, daring to take up more vertical space and to appear masculine in this claiming of space. Height surgery kicks up the dust of Western patriarchal fear – the short woman threatening to become tall and powerful is a formidable challenge to male dominance.

While discourses of limb-lengthening surgery in China function as outlets for release of Western anxiety about the country, they also provide an opportunity to ease that fear through Orientalist rhetoric. According to Edward Said, the West deals with the Orient “by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). The West (re)claims its authority over China through Western news sources which forcibly dislodge China’s position within modernity (the cause of the West’s anxiety) by suggesting that China exists in a pre-modern state of barbarity. These writers “[participate] in the denial of temporal coevalness to the Other typical of colonial discourse” (Naghibi 8). In other words, Chinese and Western modernity cannot be permitted to exist simultaneously.

This temporal disjuncture is accomplished through the construction of the Chinese as primitively barbaric (and thus existing in pre-modernity) by emphasizing the sheer brutality of the Chinese. This brutality is conjured through representations of the surgery that portray its supposed cruelty and horror, insinuating that the Chinese are as brutal as their practices. A common trope in the articles is a description of the procedure which likens it to a practice from the Middle Ages. In explaining how the frame around the leg works to extend bone length, one writer claimed that it will function “like a medieval torture device” (Watts n.p.), echoing another writer who mused on the Chinese willingness to undergo the surgery although it “may sound like medieval torture” (Ching-Ching n.p.). Likening the surgery specifically to the Middle Ages is a significant semiotic tactic. Also known as the “Dark Ages,” this era is conceived of as particularly vicious and backwards in the Western imaginary. The signification of the Medieval period of European history is easily transferred to China, which then appears to be lost and floundering in pre-modernity, maintaining its brutal ways in the “dark” of Asia.

When not directly stating this linkage to the Middle Ages, writers employ word choice meant to enhance the ostensible cruelty of the procedure. Jonathan Watts, writer for the *Guardian*, begins his article with the following:

Kong Jing-wen has paid £5,700 to *have both of her legs broken* and stretched on a rack. The pretty college graduate is now lying in bed, clearly still in considerable pain three days after a doctor *sawed through the flesh and bone* below her knee to insert what looks an *awful lot like knitting needles* through the length of her tibiae.
(emphasis mine)

In stating that Kong has had “her legs broken,” the procedure is taken out of medical discourse and reinserted into a discursive frame of forced injury, where the young woman appears to have

masochistically invited someone to destroy parts of her body. In the visceral and grisly depiction of the surgery, the doctor becomes a maniacal mad scientist, who gleefully “saw[s] through the flesh and bone,” much as a deranged killer would. Additionally, the doctor uses such unseemly tools as “knitting needles” to conduct his operation. Rather than a scientific explanation of a surgery, the account becomes a ghastly description more akin to an excerpt from a horror novel. More significantly, it is the Chinese Others who are both subjecting themselves to and carrying out such horrifying surgeries. This mythology is further embedded in other articles covering the surgery in China, even in titles, such as “Why little Miss Li paid a man £1,600 to break her legs” (Spencer n.p.). Again, the woman electing to have the surgery appears bizarrely masochistic, as the title suggests that perhaps she hired a hitman for the sheer joy of having her legs broken. (The condescending treatment of the women patients will be explored further later in this chapter.) Clearly, both the representation of the masochistic woman having the surgery and the crazed, sadistic doctor performing it point to the primevalness of Chinese people.

While these depictions may at first appear to be simply attempts to explain these surgeries in an interesting or colorful way, Western descriptions of the same surgery as performed *in the West* suggest otherwise. Note the extreme divergence from the previously discussed descriptions:

After applying an external fixator – a device placed outside of the leg that holds the bone in position with pins and wires – the bone is divided in a non-traumatic fashion to preserve the surrounding tissues and is gradually lengthened. As the bone lengthens, new bony tissue fills the gap. (Pearson n.p.)

The procedure – which one Western article deems “a rare wonder” (Positano n.p) – is described in scientific and medical terminology which neutralizes its horror, and perhaps even places a

positive spin on it. While one may argue that this discrepancy in representation could be due to differing procedures between the countries, this does not seem to be the case: according to the chairman of the department of orthopaedics at Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children, William G. Mackenzie, “Although different types of bone fixation are used today, the underlying method of limb lengthening and realignment is virtually the same throughout the world” (qtd. in Pearson n.p.).

Additionally, Western discourse on height surgery performed in the West becomes an opportunity to uphold the meta-narratives of modernity such as rationality and individual progress alongside myths like the American Dream. These myths are conveyed through the rhetorical device of the case study; individual height surgery patients are focused on in detail. According to these discourses, Western height surgery patients, rather than being motivated from a shallow desire to look better or to compete in an intensely competitive economy (as the articles suggest the Chinese patients are) are on a path to self-actualization. Their narratives are those of struggle, of overcoming difficult (and sometimes necessarily painful) obstacles to ultimately triumph.

One example of this type of narrative can be located in an article which describes how a woman in Ohio named Christy Ruhe, born with a type of dwarfism and standing at 4’ 10”, underwent limb-lengthening surgery so that she could add seven inches of height to her bowed legs. The title of the article itself, “Woman grows 7 inches in height after 2 years of surgery,” is a positively inflected but straightforward summation of what happened. While the article does stress the immense pain involved during and after the procedure, the description of the surgery itself offers a fairly simple step-by-step outline of what was done, in very neutral language: “As part of the procedure, when her leg was broken, the shin bones and femurs automatically

generated new bone. As they healed they were pulled apart to make them longer” (Medical News Today n.p.). The article concludes in implicit praise of Christy’s bravery, stating that despite pain and complications that “most of us would never be able to bear,” Christy “eventually...got there” and celebrated what is framed as a personal accomplishment during her twenty-fifth birthday party. Christy is represented as a woman with a “legitimate disability” (dwarfism) who valiantly endured tremendous pain in order to finally reach victory. Ultimately, Christy comes to signify the dominant ideologies of modernity – progress, rationality, and the Enlightenment goal of “the pursuit of individual excellence” (Harvey 13) – as well as the validity of the American Dream.

Another case study of limb-lengthening surgery in the West centers on a young man, Akash Shula, who elected to have the surgery to alter his 4’11” height, which he was extremely unhappy with. While the *New York Post* article begins with a paragraph summary by the author of Shula’s story, the rest of the article is Shula’s narrative as told by Shula himself (Straker n.p.). Importantly, the reader hears Shula’s voice – at length – in contrast to Chinese patients, who are granted only brief quotes by Western journalists. For example, an article about a young Chinese woman named Li Ping who decided to have the surgery offers only one quote from her – “I just felt too short” – which provides absolutely no context for her decision, making it appear entirely irrational (Spencer n.p.). (This type of framing of the young female Chinese patient will be addressed further later in this chapter). Hearing Shula’s own account of the pain caused by his short stature grants him a degree of rationality not afforded to Chinese patients undergoing the surgery. The Other is denied the opportunity to speak, while the Western subject has the right to tell his own story. And, of course, his story is that of individual achievement, overcoming great pain to attain success – the height-based American Dream. After describing the immense pain of

the months following the procedure, Shula states, “But today I feel great. I just came in ninth place in my dad’s 5K Corporate Challenge. This surgery has changed my life” (qtd. in Straker n.p.). The pain and suffering appears to merely be an obstacle on the way to Shula’s achievement of his goal of becoming taller and thereby faster as well.

Returning to the Western news stories on height surgery in China, journalists often mention that the practice also takes place in the West. What is notable here is that these references are consistently accompanied by reasons why the practice was entirely necessary in the Western situation, in a process of what I term “strategic justification.” If writers simply acknowledged the existence of the surgery in the West, the construction of the barbarous Chinese (meant to maintain Western superiority) would easily be in danger of transferring itself to the Western subject. Therefore, description of the procedure in the West must be supported by rhetoric assuring the reader that in this case, the surgery was medically *necessary* – the patient was treated for an “illness” of some sort.

This strategic justification is accomplished through the invocation of a false binary between the medical and cosmetic, which is contingent upon the pathologizing of certain bodily aspects (dwarfism, limbs of unequal length) as “abnormal” and thus in need of medical correction. As Susan Wendell has argued, disability is in itself a social construction; certain bodies are defined as “disabled” by medical discourses of power/knowledge. (Indeed, disability’s non-essential quality is supported by the fact that some individuals diagnosed with dwarfism refuse to consider their condition a disability [Landau 25].) In other words, bodies in “need of treatment” only “need” it because doctors diagnose them with “disorders” necessitating correction. Thus, the social constructedness of disabilities which need “medical treatment”

suggests that the simple opposition between medical and cosmetic is far more complex than it appears to be.

Despite the tenuousness of the medical/cosmetic binary, Western media relies on it nevertheless to perform its Orientalist function: to maintain the West as “rational.” This rationality can be maintained only if Western height surgery is justifiable. This justification can be witnessed in one journalist’s explanation: “Leg extension surgery is a recognised form of treatment for severe cases of orthopaedic disorder such as dwarfism, with a few operations every year in the West” (Spencer n.p.). Spencer’s description of the procedure as “treatment” for a “disorder” when performed in the West implicitly justifies its usage, distancing it from its “cosmetic” use in China. If a recognizable pathology is evident, the surgery becomes recontextualized, placed in the discourse of medical therapy. That the procedure is not justified for Chinese patients is a message couched within one article’s note that even the “not-so-short” undergo surgery; according to the author, of those who had surgery, about 80% “could be called short” while the remainder had the surgery for “purely cosmetic” reasons (Spencer n.p.). While already conveying the ridiculousness of the surgery for those who are “short,” Spencer belabors the point further by demonstrating how some have surgery for no reason other than vanity. Oddly, he never defines what he considers to be “short” – the point at which the procedure is supposedly medically justified – a vagueness which facilitates a condemnation of China on the basis of the needlessness of the surgery.

Justification based within the medical/cosmetic opposition can be further seen in this excerpt from another Western article:

Using surgery to boost the height of *otherwise healthy people* is a relatively new concept. The technology is based on the work of a Russian doctor and was

originally intended to *correct uneven limbs*. The surgery is offered in about a dozen countries, including the United States. Most doctors outside China are reluctant to do it for *purely cosmetic* reasons. (Ching-Ching n.p., emphasis mine)

There are several important points to make about this brief passage. First, the medical/cosmetic binary is used as a way to condemn China; the fact that Chinese are willing to operate on “otherwise healthy people” becomes a point of recrimination. The author effectively denigrates China by singling it out as the only nation among a dozen which will perform the surgery cosmetically. However, it is clear that what is considered “healthy” is a construction. In explaining the origins of the surgery to “correct” limbs of unequal length, there is an implicit assumption that a body with uneven limbs is unhealthy. In fact, the condition has been given a term: “leg-length discrepancy (LLD)” (Pearson n.p.). While this rhetoric assumes that the person with LLD lacks health, in fact, a person with the condition has no real risk to their well-being or survival. In the case that a person considers their “LLD” a problem, options other than surgery are available, including the use of a special elevated shoe, which makes the medical necessity of the surgery questionable. Despite this fact, the author insists that only the Chinese conduct surgery for “purely cosmetic” incentives.

Chinese doctors appear to have an awareness of the foundations on which Westerners are taking them to task. A limb-lengthening specialist who works at a clinic in Beijing, Xia Hetao, seems to be responding to the medical/cosmetic binary when he insists that those he operates on are “real patients,” despite what many people tell him, who do indeed “suffer” (qtd. in Ching-Ching n.p.). The term “real patient” here, in the sense that others are using it against Xia, implies that a “real” patient is having surgery for *medical* reasons, instead of cosmetic. Xia must navigate within this discursive frame imposed by the West to attempt to justify his practice.

As I have explained thus far, Chinese have come to be represented as primitive barbarians who are irrationally engaging in “cosmetic” surgeries, instead of using the surgery for “medical” reasons. This particular construction of China’s people has important consequences, in that it positions the West as the civilized savior of the East. To demonstrate this point, I turn to the work of Iranian feminist scholar Nima Naghibi. In her book *Rethinking Global Sisterhood*, she details the way in which early twentieth century Western female missionaries, as well as British and American women travelers, discursively constructed their own subjectivity as modern and enlightened through hierarchical opposition to what they saw as the subjugated Iranian woman Other. This construction of the Iranian woman then justified Western imperialist/colonialist intervention: “Western women located themselves within a particular position of authority initially by declaring the backwardness of their Eastern sisters and then by setting themselves the task of civilizing their inferiors” (Naghibi xx). The same process appears to be at work in the limb-lengthening articles, in that the journalists “declar[e] the backwardness” of the Chinese (especially the women) by emphasizing the horror and brutality of the surgery, and in turn the inferior actions of the barbaric Chinese necessitate Western intervention. However, rather than physical acts of imperialism, the West carries out its “civilizing mission” through discursive imperialism, in the form of providing “expert” knowledge from Western doctors who comment on the surgery in China.

Several articles offer quotes from Western “experts,” who discourage and condemn the surgery. These doctors, many of whom are employed at the International Center for Limb Lengthening in Baltimore, Maryland, provide a “voice of reason” on the subject that Chinese doctors presumably lack. One such doctor, Dr. Dror Paley, is often quoted. To underscore Dr. Paley’s rationality, one journalist notes that the doctor will perform the procedure in a cosmetic

context (which apparently only comprises five percent of the surgeries) only if extensive psychological testing is undergone by the potential patient prior to the surgery (Ching-Ching n.p.). This testing is meant to discover whether or not the individual wanting the surgery truly can be diagnosed with “short stature dysphoria,” a condition in which one is extremely unhappy with one’s height, but is otherwise well adjusted in every other aspect of life (Positano n.p.). From a Foucauldian perspective, this “disorder” is nothing more than power/knowledge constructing an individual’s subjectivity; however, this “diagnosis” is necessary in order to present a “rational” justification for the surgery. If one is being “treated” for “short stature dysphoria,” the procedure can be deemed medical.

The trope of “warnings from western [sic] doctors” (Martinsen, qtd. in Goldkorn n.p.) is evident in other articles as well. Another doctor at the International Center for Limb Lengthening condescendingly states in regards to Chinese height surgery, “You can’t just operate on every short person who walks in the door” (Beech n.p.), implicitly mobilizing the medical/cosmetic binary discussed earlier. Through this “expert” advice and words of caution from Western doctors, the superiority of the West can be reconstituted, at the same time that the backwardness of the Chinese can be highlighted.

Woman-as-Nation and Nation-As-Woman

The Western criticism of Chinese height surgery, specifically its cosmetic element and the supposed irrationality of those who choose to have it, contains a highly gendered component. That Chinese women comprise such a large portion of patients of the surgery – and that this fact is always directly or indirectly stated in the articles – is significant. Due to the articles’ convention of offering a case study of a young Chinese woman who decided to have the surgery,

I contend that the journalists mobilize the “cultural trope of woman-as-nation” (McGranahan 163) in order to make a larger critique of China itself. While the woman in nationalist discourses often functions as a sign of national identity, in this case she is used as a tool of imperial authority, a mechanism through which to denigrate a nation. These discourses utilize the woman-as-nation trope in order to comment on (i.e. criticize) the state of China as a whole.

The young woman who is meant to be representative of the Chinese nation is always vehemently feminized within the discourse (of which the implications will be discussed shortly). Quotes from Chinese women who have had the surgery always convey a feminine motivation or a newfound aspiration post-operation which is coded feminine. One 52-year-old woman allegedly had the surgery so that she could find an appropriate partner for ballroom dancing. Another woman is aggressively feminized in her description: she expresses excitement over the prospect of purchasing new clothes to fit her new body. She is employed as a beautician, doing skin and makeup treatments, and she queries, “If I don’t look good, how can I convince my customers I can make them prettier?” (Ching-Ching n.p.). She goes on to declare her love of song and dance and muses about possible opportunities for employment as a soap opera star (Ching-Ching n.p.).

Another young Chinese woman who had the surgery, Kong Jing-wen, is described as a “pretty college graduate” (Watts n.p.). Further, the author goes on to say that she is one of many Chinese (of both genders) who made the decision to “break a leg for beauty” (Watts n.p.). This description is so often used that it has become one of the conventions of the Western height surgery articles: “A pretty, college-educated 20-something woman goes under the knife” (Joel Martinsen, qtd. in Goldkorn n.p.). This unnecessary commentary on the physical attractiveness

of the woman appears to be a discursive trend that has the function of highlighting the feminine characteristics of the women.

One journalist begins his article with the following: “A year ago this month, Li Ping, an attractive 23-year-old from Beijing, split up with her boyfriend, checked into a clinic and paid doctors £1,600 to break her legs, *just* because she felt a little on the short side” (Spencer n.p., emphasis mine). Spencer’s use of the adjective “attractive” in describing Li functions to foreground her femininity. His highly simplistic explanation of her rationale for having surgery appears to be a swipe at female flightiness, exacerbated by the irrationality (a stereotypically feminine trait) of having surgery “just” because one feels a bit short.

In the discourse, description of the highly feminine woman shifts seamlessly into a comment on Chinese culture as a whole. For example, journalist Spencer, in his description of Li Ping’s surgery, expands it out to a national scale in describing it as “an extreme form of the current Asian fashion for cosmetic surgery,” which notably is framed in feminine language (Spencer n.p.). According to another journalist, the young woman Kong Jing-wen had surgery for beauty, but for the purpose of “ris[ing] up the ladder in height-conscious China” (Watts n.p.). The article again shifts from speaking specifically about Kong to the country in general, as Watts attributes the “popularity of such surgery” to

the surge of interest in fashion and beauty in a country where the rising middle classes are shaking off a dowdy Maoist cultural legacy and using the rewards of explosive economic growth to explore cosmetic possibilities. (Watts n.p.)

Thus, Kong acts as a sign for the nation, signifying its increased consumerism and interest in cosmetic modifications.

These discursive shifts reveal that the woman-as-nation trope in these discourses reverses itself to also convey the concept of nation-as-woman – specifically, the nation as embodiment of *feminine* womanliness. Offering a useful parallel to this situation, early cultural studies critics still set on maintaining the place of “high culture” feared the way in which “audiences are made passive, vulnerable and prone to consumerism by mass culture, [which] is equally a fear about how audiences are becoming feminine” (Strinati 173). Much like cultural theorists’ early critiques of mass culture, the Western assessment of height surgery in China, which is connected to cultural practices which are coded feminine – like consumption and cosmetic bodily modifications – is both a veiled criticism of the nation’s feminization and a means to devalue the nation by representing it as feminine. Like a woman, China has become consumption-obsessed, materialistic, frivolous, and prone to spending large amounts of money on needless trivialities. Thus, height-extending surgery in China is utilized as a vehicle through which the West can criticize China’s consumerist society, and more importantly, the *feminization* of the nation that this shift to consumerism connotes.

While critiquing the Chinese nation-state as feminine, hyperfeminization of the women the articles are centered around may also be a reaction to the threat to patriarchy these women pose by embodying more space, as I discussed earlier in the chapter. Like the derogatory term “yellow cab” used by Westerners and Japanese men against Japanese women who are sexually active with foreigners, the discourse of height surgery may be a “rhetorical weapon used ... to discredit a form of female behavior that they [Westerners] find threatening and disturbing” as well as a way for the West “to maintain hierarchies of power over Asian women” (Kelsky 175). The feminizing of women who threaten to be powerful reduces their threat. As I explain in

Chapter Two in regard to the tall woman and giantess, such a strategy reinscribes femininity, which translates into passivity and powerlessness.

The masculinist superiority of the West over the feminized East in Western discourse of height surgery is entrenched further in the presentation of the West as a meritocracy, a progressive society lacking inequality and oppression. I turn again to Naghibi's work on Iranian women in order to elaborate on this point. Naghibi argues that Western women's construction of the "subjugated" Iranian woman discursively erased patriarchal oppression and gender inequality in the Western women's own lives. By emphasizing what were presumably worse travesties of gender equality in Iran, Western women made their own situations appear far more favorable (10). Western discourses on height surgery function very similarly: by emphasizing overt instances of heightism in the East – height requirements for particular jobs – writers obfuscate the systemic heightism which exists in the West. While not as explicit as in China, inequality and oppression on the basis of height is no less present in Western nations. As I outline in the first chapter, in these nations, heightism is systemic, operating in much the same invisible fashion as systemic racism. That "height has emerged as one of the most visible criteria for upward mobility" (Ching-Ching n.p.) may be true in China, but it is no less true in the United States. Even American CEOs recognize the significance of height in attaining corporate success; when asked if they would prefer to lose two inches of height or be bald, nearly all said they would choose to be bald (Jones n.p.). Indeed, height has been found to be positively correlated with economic prosperity; researchers discovered that one inch of height was worth \$789 extra income per year (Gladwell 88). Additionally, it is interesting that the distress over alteration of height in China coincides temporally with the rise of the use of growth hormones in the West on increasing numbers of short, healthy children in order to "correct" their "idiopathic short stature"

(see Chapter Three). Why is the administering of growth hormones that alter body chemistry – in children no less, who presumably have little agency in the decision – somehow more acceptable than making physical, cosmetic changes to increase height by adults who are able to give informed consent to the procedure, as is the case in China? While there is no clear answer to this question, clearly, the United States is as guilty as China of height prejudice, albeit primarily in less overt ways, a fact that height surgery discourses conceal.

Ironically, as the Western media ponders China's ostensibly unique "obsession with height" (Ching-Ching n.p.), it may be the West itself that has led to this cultural situation. Many of the articles do insightfully point out that Western cultural standards of height have led to the drive in China for increased height. The tall body in China is a "sign of wealth and Westernisation" (Spencer n.p.), a point which attests to the influence of Western cultural imperialism. Several articles explain that the Chinese Foreign Ministry has height requirements for potential employees (Spencer, Watts, Beech, Ching-Ching). In fact, these standards exceed the average height of men and women in China, set at 5'7" for men and 5'3" for women (Watts n.p.). The reason provided for this policy is that the Foreign Ministry is attempting to avoid a situation in which its diplomats would have "to be looked down upon in negotiations" with foreign diplomats (Spencer n.p.). In an interesting slippage of the phrase "looked down upon," the author seems to mean this both literally and metaphorically. While the phrase "to look down" on someone means to feel more powerful than him/her, the physical act of looking down upon an Other does produce a particular power relationship in which the one who looks up is subordinate. (See my explanation of the role of language in constructing heightism in Chapter One). Since tallness is synonymous with power in Western culture, the Chinese Foreign

Ministry is therefore attempting to contend with hegemonic, Western heightist standards as best it can. Consequently, the West may be responsible for the very Chinese practices that it decries.

It is significant to examine where Western journalists place blame for the popularity of the surgery. The guilty party is, interestingly, the very source of Western anxiety – China’s prosperous economic situation. According to Western news articles, the Chinese economy has led its citizens to undergo the surgery for two reasons, both of which are frequently mentioned in the articles. First, the heightened economy has led to an increase in competitiveness for jobs. Since many Chinese are equally qualified, the only factor left on which to make hiring decisions is the height of the applicant. As one journalist put it, “In a country that has hundreds of qualified applicants for every job, height minimums are one way to whittle down the competition” (Beech n.p.). Second, excess wealth generated by the fruitful economy can be spent on unnecessary extravagancies like height surgery. According to one journalist, height was insignificant in China until “the market-oriented reforms of the 1980s” when “Chinese began to face an explosion of lifestyle choices.” In turn, “cosmetic surgery and other appearance-related industries became big business” (Ching-Ching n.p.).

Since China’s economy, as stated previously, is the origin of Western panic about the nation, it is telling that Western journalists hold it accountable for the “height craze” in China. The underlying message seems to be that although China’s economy is booming, its people are suffering the consequences. The bustling job market is far too competitive, leaving people no other option but to surgically alter their bodies. Presented with too much excess wealth, the only choice is to become hopelessly narcissistic; as Western journalists would have it, surplus money automatically translates into uncontrolled vanity. One writer chooses to quote a spokesperson of a Beijing height consulting business, who states, “Before the economic reforms that changed

China, we weren't getting enough food to eat, so we paid little attention to how we looked.

Today we have enough to eat and we care a lot about how we look" (Ching-Ching n.p.). The journalist's choice of quote to include in his article presents a one-sided story: Chinese with extra money have become superficial and incredibly vain – and thus feminine, as discussed earlier.

Further, the discursive suggestion is that although China has become modern, the Chinese are unable to adequately handle this new condition – they are running rampant, fixated on their looks, allowing excess wealth to be squandered on highly dangerous, barbaric, needless surgeries. The message being articulated is that while China may have the trappings of modernity, its people are not ready to be modern themselves; they are still pre-modern, as is shown by their propensity for brutal surgeries. The constant mention of the exorbitant cost of the surgeries reifies the irrationality (and femininity) of the choice to have one. Additionally, the absurdity of hiring policies on the basis of “seemingly irrelevant factors such as height” is underscored in the articles (Ching-Ching n.p.). Ultimately, Western journalists, forced to acknowledge the modernity of China, must problematize it. They must represent it in such a way that it appears not to be working, hinting that a primeval people cannot coexist peacefully with modernity. Or, perhaps the message is that Chinese barbarity is exacerbated by the rapidly growing economy, providing them with an outlet to carry out their worst savage desires.

As Western articles about height surgery started to dwindle, the Chinese situation shifted mid-way through the first decade of the 2000s. In November of 2006, the leg-lengthening surgery was banned by China's health ministry, which permits the practice only in clinics performing at least four hundred orthopaedic operations per year and solely for *medical* purposes. Of course, this change triggered another flood of Western articles about the surgery and China's decision to put it to an end. According to Western reports, the reason for the ban

was that many Chinese citizens had become disfigured or disabled as a result of “a spate of botched operations” (Xinhua news, qtd. in Coonan n.p.).

While this very well could be the reason, I have to wonder if there may not be more to the story. Perhaps the Chinese nation simply became fed up with the West exploiting the surgery for the Orientalist purpose of granting itself a superior position over China. Perhaps they tired of the Western media utilizing the existence of the practice as a way to construct China as brutal and primitive and as a means to criticize and demean its culture. That the surgery can now only be conducted for “medical” reasons may simply be an instance of American cultural imperialism; it is possible Chinese were forced to adopt the rhetoric and ideology of the dominant voice in order to survive the brunt of Western attacks against them. What remains clear from the Orientalist representation of limb-lengthening surgery is that discourses about height, as well as height itself, are sites for the play of power.

CONCLUSION: PRAXIS

Throughout the process of writing my thesis, as I shared my research and ideas with friends, colleagues, and professors, I was regaled time after time with stories related to height. I was told of a father-in-law who was constantly ridiculed by his entire family for his shortness. I heard about a grandmother who, despite her seventh grade grandson's numerous accomplishments and awards in various activities, worried about his less than average height. A woman at a conference told me that her fiancée, who is her height and has long hair, is constantly mistaken for a woman. I heard about a friend, an intelligent and progressive professional woman, who expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the man she had gone on a date with was shorter than she is. One short man commiserated with me about the humiliation involved in being lined up by height in the school choir, having shared the same experience.

Clearly, my research resonated with people – they recognized the phenomenon I was talking about and wanted to share their own and others' stories. In hearing anecdote after anecdote, and in the course of researching all the various issues related to height, like estrogen treatments and human growth hormone treatments, it became clear to me that everyone is affected by heightism. It can be experienced more directly (the traumatic experiences of the short man or tall woman) or indirectly, in less visible ways (the unnoticed privilege of the tall man, the shorter job candidate who is passed over, the magnifying of patriarchy through the added level of height oppression). Although heightism in the United States may not always appear in as obvious forms as, say, arbitrary height requirements for jobs in China, its invisible, systemic quality demands that it be addressed rather than overlooked.

My thesis paints a rather grim, disheartening portrait of height relations in the U.S. However, like other forms of oppression, it is not all-encompassing or all powerful: it can be

resisted and countered. While theorizing about the functioning of heightism and its connection to gender, as I have done in my thesis, is important, praxis is also necessary. In these concluding pages, I present a number of strategies, many drawn from various feminisms, for struggling against and working to eventually end heightism.

In the original version of the paper I wrote for the Theories of Othered Bodies course presenting an overview of height politics, I suggested that perhaps refusing to move on the sidewalk (if you will recall my anecdote from the introduction) may be a way to fight heightism. One day, I decided to put this theory to the test. In a particularly brazen mood, I marched defiantly down the center of the sidewalk in downtown Bowling Green, Ohio, heading straight towards a group of taller men. I stood my ground. They swerved slightly; one slammed into my shoulder, shoving my body sideways. As I continued to walk, they turned around, shouting obscenities at me and expressing confusion over what had just happened. Disappointed in the outcome of the experiment and feeling terribly rude, my confidence quickly deflated. While trying the experiment again could possibly yield different results, a few general lessons can be drawn from the incident. Taller people are, as it seems to me, generally unaware of their control of more space. As they are accustomed to others moving, tall people seem to read refusal to move as simply discourteous. Perhaps short people in large numbers individually refusing to move may eventually have an impact, but judging from my incident, this tactic seems ineffectual. Deeper, and perhaps more obvious, change is necessary.

Doing ethnographic research with groups most affected by heightism (short people, tall women) may be the first step to making effective, useful change. While an ethnographic component was unfortunately not feasible given the time constraints of my thesis project, ethnography would greatly facilitate an understanding of heightism and how it truly affects

people and would thus be an excellent new avenue for research. According to global feminists, speaking to/with the particular community or group one is researching and writing about is essential. First, this activity reveals what issues are relevant *to the members of the group*, not what the feminist assumes are relevant. For example, the Muslim women that Azizah Yahia Al-Hibri spoke with identified family and Islamic law as significant issues, in contrast to the Western feminist concentration on the wearing of the veil and gender inequality in inheritance laws (2). One can also ascertain how the group members themselves perceive a certain issue, instead of imposing the one's own (feminist) viewpoint upon them. For example, postcolonial feminist Lama Abu Odeh was tempted to condemn the veil as disempowering, but Arab women's opinions about it led her to argue nearly the opposite; she realized that her original thought arose from her feminist "normative assumptions of how the world should be" (30). Similarly, we must be careful not to simply impose our own viewpoint and in effect silence the voices of the subjugated. Making their voices heard – allowing them to speak their bodily experiences – is crucial. Talking to people about the role of height in their lives, how it has impacted them, and what changes *they* would like to see would be an enlightening first step in the battle against heightism.

Another strategy is to advocate for discontinuing the use of estrogen to shorten tall girls and growth hormone to "treat" idiopathic short stature. We should, with recognition of disciplinary power structures that are attempting to normalize, urge the medical institution to stop medically altering non-normative bodies. Rather than "treating the victims of social prejudice with pharmaceuticals" (Hall 17), we need to change the oppressive system itself.

Working within institutions to change policies and laws is another productive route for change. For example, attaining protections for short people in the workplace may be a good

place to begin. Also, attempting to change biased hiring policies that give preference to taller candidates could be a way to alter the flow of power and distribute it more equally. However, this strategy requires negotiating within systems, working with the oppressors themselves. Also, while laws can be altered, the myths that resulted in the problematic laws themselves will not simply disappear. At the same time, if heightist hiring policies change, we may eventually see short people in more powerful positions, which could cause a disruption and possibly alteration in the myth of tallness.

Given the feminist recognition of the incredible power of language in constructing reality, changing the language we use could also shift flows of power. In regards to heightism, this would involve carefully monitoring one's speech and eliminating such phrases as "I look up to him/her" or refusing to say that someone has a "shortcoming" or does not "measure up," or any of the other words/phrases I mention in the first chapter that confer power on the tall. These alterations in language are comparable to the feminist tactic of rejecting the Standard English rule of using "him" or "he" as the gender-neutral pronoun.

As a rule, we should also be prepared to stand up in defense of an individual who is being harassed due to her/his height and to call the harasser out on her/his behavior. One queer theorist claims that feminists should be willing to intervene if a transgendered person is being harassed or treated unfairly (Feinberg 522). The same principle applies to anyone being discriminated against or mocked because of their height – it may constitute a micro level, but still important, resistance to heightism.

Channeling the power of collective action by creating organizations or spaces which establish "permanent alliances with others who are hurt by the same system" (Feinberg 523) is a beneficial strategy as well. Furthermore, beyond gathering collectively with others who share the

same oppression, coalition-building with other movements may also prove effective. Those working to combat heightism could form strong alliances with feminists, as the gendered nature of heightism makes such a partnership ideal.

Reclaiming and celebrating devalued height identities could prove useful, especially for re-empowering the short man (or short woman) and tall woman who have been made to feel like “freaks.” However, celebration of identity does not effect systemic change – tall people will still be granted more power, still make more money, still have privilege. But, on the other hand, this could provide significant individual empowerment for those most victimized by heightism.

Raising awareness about the existence of heightism and sharing research which demonstrates tall privilege (such as the studies which show taller people make more money) and short oppression should also be a goal in the struggle against heightism. The website www.shortsupport.org is an example of an (online) space that brings together people with a shared oppression as well as giving them an outlet to speak and therefore raise consciousness. According to the website, the facets of the website’s “mission” are:

1. Support and provide reference material to persons of short stature.
2. Raise awareness of the social and economic issues facing short people.
3. Provide inspiration to short people to help better their lives and attitudes.

(Shortsupport.org)

The website may be a useful tool for changing people’s attitudes about height and encouraging them to take heightism seriously. For the most privileged body – that of the tall man – the site may allow him a glimpse into his “invisible knapsack” (to borrow Peggy McIntosh’s term) of tall privilege, and perhaps raise his awareness about the issues that short people face.

While Short Support is for the most part a positive resource as well as tool for change, some contributors to the site fail to avoid the trap of internalizing and reproducing oppressive discourses. For example, one short man's article posted on Short Support argued against the unfair treatment of short men, at the same time claiming that they were indeed "naturally" inferior and weaker. As Frye has argued, "one of the most efficient ways to secure acquiescence is to convince the people that their subordination is inevitable" (Frye 33). While seeming to resist heightist ideology, this short man has internalized oppressive hegemonic ideologies and thereby presents his situation as natural and "inevitable." To effect real change, we must be cautious not to justify the very myths that oppress us, but rather navigate outside the discursive boundaries of oppressive ideologies.

I have realized, at the end of all this, that I too have internalized the myth of tallness. I have festered with hatred of my shortness, wished I could be taller, envied my younger but taller sister. If I am ever to engage in the strategies I have outlined, I first need to change my attitude about myself. Ending the hatred of my stature, revaluing my own body and thereby defying the myth of tallness, may be a necessary prerequisite to joining the battle for systemic change.

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