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## **“You Should Wear High Heels”: an Autoethnographic Account of Gendered Body Height Ideals**

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**“You Should Wear High Heels”:**

**An Autoethnographic Account of Gendered Body Height Ideals**

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## “You Should Wear High Heels”:

### An Autoethnographic Account of Gendered Body Height Ideals

This study addresses the topic of height that has invited little interest in earlier debates on body. It takes the view that categories of height and gender find their powerful articulations through one another, and that only certain of these articulations are considered “normal”. In particular, drawing on Goffman and Butler, the study focuses on the repertoire of repeating practices through which female shortness is stigmatized. It relies on the autoethnographic method and uses the writer’s lived experiences to make visible the ways in which the stigma of female shortness become produced, and managed, in the midst of social life.

## INTRODUCTION

“You should wear high heels.” The surrounding world keeps telling me this normative message in a variety of ways. It means: my 152 cm (5’ 3”) does not meet cultural standards of appropriate height and I am expected to correct this deficiency by some means, like wearing high heels. They would make me appear taller, more normal. In this context, therefore, high heels do not merely represent a symbol of femininity, but also a symbol of normal height. If I were a man, though, I should wear platforms.

In this article I am concerned with the ways in which the cultural message of shortness as deviance is enacted and replicated in the midst of everyday life. The question of height is thoroughly gendered. Therefore, I address the constitution of body height ideals within the dominant system of meanings that presupposes the dual sex/gender domain. Within that system “short woman” differs from “short man”, and “tall woman” from “tall man”, and each of them is valued and treated differently. This is illustrated, for instance, in the context of employment. People may be discriminated against because of their height. As a recent report states: “Short people may be short-changed when it comes to salary, status and respect, according to a University of Florida study that found tall people earn considerably more money throughout their lives” (UF News Oct. 16, 2003, [www.ufl.edu](http://www.ufl.edu)). If time is money, so is height.

Earlier literature has well illustrated the importance of the body as a basis of subjectivity and agency. Sociologists (Featherstone 1999; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 1991; Shilling 1993), feminists (Bordo 1993, 2000; Butler 1993, 1999; Witz 2000), and consumer researchers (Banister and Hogg 2002; Patterson and Elliott 2003; Thompson and Hirschmann 1995) have established that the body has become a central field of political, economic, and cultural activity in post-industrial societies. It

is also shown that bodies that cannot be identified in terms of the ideal standards tend to be pushed to the margins of the society (Hughes 2000; Shildrick 1997).

However, in these earlier debates the topic of body height has received little attention. Consequently, there is little knowledge of how body height ideals become produced and sustained, and how even small deviances from these ideals may make a difference. Also consumer researchers have little understanding of the ways in which consumption and marketing practices are involved in the processes of othering and normalizing people because of their height. Or, what kinds of “body work” strategies are available in the market to produce height. As discussed, in current societies, the marketplace constitutes an important field for negotiating cultural meanings (e.g. Penaloza 2000, 2001). This also concerns height. The outlets specialized in serving short or tall people, for instance, take part in the constitution of the meanings of body height. Moreover, as Bordo (1993), Thompson and Hirschman (1995), Ellis (1998) and Dotter (2002) propose, mass media and advertising play a significant role in establishing normative bodily standards.

However, reflecting on my own experiences, the constitution of gendered height norms cannot be reduced merely to “mediated society” or to “market”. Rather, the constitution takes place constantly around me in my everyday life; through people I meet; through the material world I confront; through the measurement practices of health clinics and schools; through friendly comments to avoid certain types of clothes; through gestures of patting the head and emphatic tones of voices; through fairy tales and literature; as well as through advertisements and media. They are all promoting and reinforcing the message: I am short.

I argue in this article that autoethnography provides a fruitful method for gaining an insight into the multiplicity of ways in which gendered height norms become enacted and negotiated throughout the

social life. Autoethnography refers to a study where the researcher observes and interprets culture through reflecting on his or her experiences (Coffey 1999; Ellis 1998; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Reed-Danahay 1997; Richardson 2000). Having roots in ethnographical tradition it focuses primarily on elaborating the complex relation between “self” and “culture”. In this regard, autoethnography differs from the psychologically and/or phenomenologically inspired introspective tradition that considers personal introspection as an access to inner thoughts and feelings otherwise inaccessible (Gould 1991, 1995; Holbrook 1986; see also Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Accordingly, although I use my own bodily experiences as primary data, the focus is not on my body as such, nor on my inner experiences, but on the ways in which cultural practices define and label certain bodies as short. This story is, therefore, not about my feelings of being short, but the ways in which I am made short.

Theoretically, this autoethnographical reflection is inspired by sociological and feminist authors. To capture the deficient nature of shortness I draw on the classic notion of *stigma* as presented by Goffman (1963). Yet, while Goffman uses the notion of stigma - a mark of imperfection - in the context of serious physical deformities, such as handicapping, my case represents a minor bodily stigma. These minor stigmas may, despite their seemingly insignificant nature, rule the life of the bearer, and force him or her to develop strategies on how to cope with, manage, or correct them in social encounters (Ellis 1998). To capture the gendered nature of stigmatization, as well as its constant replication, I draw on the work of Butler (1993, 1999). The stigmatized practices may appear insignificant when considered separately, but once repeated day after day, year after year, they acquire their specific force. Her work also enables one to fully highlight the thoroughly arbitrary nature of gendered height ideals: shortness is not an essential attribute, but it is given existence through a set of repetitive acts. It also directs one towards examining the ways and difficulties of resisting and reframing stigmas.

From this theoretical position, the autoethnographic narrative that I shall present has two specific aims. First, by taking the perspective of the stigmatized holder it attempts to demonstrate the ways in which female shortness becomes stigmatized; how the meanings of deficiency and deviance – that can be summarized by the word *little* - become reproduced and sustained in day-to-day life. Second, it attempts to show what cultural “body work” strategies are available to manage and/or get rid of the stigma and so become “normal”.

I start by briefly discussing the theoretical and methodological starting points of the study. The analytical narrative of shortness is provided in two subsequent chapters. To conclude, I elaborate on the ways in which the autoethnographic method may contribute to the stream of culturally inspired consumer research.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### Theorizing about the body

The body constitutes one of the most important components of behavior in public allowing people to make strong statements about who they are. No wonder, therefore, that the body has been theorized in a variety of ways in social sciences. Yet, it remains a deeply contested category, in particular in modern feminism (see e.g. Witz 2000), inviting debates on attendant dualisms such as body/mind and sex/gender. Without immersing deeply into these debates I take the view that the body, the way it is represented, interpreted, shaped, and reshaped is socially and culturally conditioned. The meanings attached to particular body forms are given in and through language, and become reflected in normative categories. These constitute cultural beliefs of “proper” and “improper” body forms. Being internalized they exert a profound influence over the ways in which individuals seek to manage and present their bodies (Butler 1993, 1999; Goffman 1963; Thompson and Hirschman 1995). I also take

the view that categories of gender and height “work as background for another and find their powerful articulation through one another” (Butler 1999, xvi).

With this line of thinking, shortness is not an essential attribute, but a construction manufactured and sustained through various acts. The question is not one of individual acts but rather of a tacit collective agreement to perform and, in particular, to *repeat* these acts (Butler 1999, p. 178). The agreement conditions and sets limits to the understanding and production of gendered heights. As a result, we have a peculiar knowledge of the “proper height for each gender”. If people fail to perform their part in accordance with this knowledge they are punished, that is, stigmatized (Goffman 1963).

Although both Goffman and Butler are concerned with the question of normative bodily standards, and specifically, in failures to meet them, they take a somewhat different view when examining these failures. Goffman is primarily interested in elaborating the ways in which people cope with, manage, and correct bodily stigmas in day-to-day social situations. He also directs attention to the ways in which the stigma is confronted by both sides; how all those involved are likely to experience uneasiness, uncertainty, and discomfort in an immediate physical presence of stigmatized people (see also Ellis 1998). In these encounters it is crucial whether the stigma is visible or not. In my case, the stigma is conveyed through the mere presence of my body; it is always there. Butler, in turn, adopts a wider and more political standpoint. For her, the major question is: is it possible to contest the language through which the stigma is given? That is, she is concerned with whether it is possible to rethink categories through which we think and talk. In this case, therefore, the task would be to rethink the language in which shortness is given.

In my elaboration both the above considerations are present: the narrative deals with day-to-day social encounters while in the concluding section I elaborate on the (im)possibility of reframing the

stigma. At this point, it is important to stress that stigmas are neither creditable nor discreditable in themselves. As Goffman remarks, whether some attribute becomes stigmatized or not depends on the social and cultural context. For me, for instance, a visit to Guatemala created a new way of looking at height: there, I could feel myself tall. The context of the present story is, however, Finland. There the average height for women is 164 cm (5'4½") and for men 177 cm (5'9"). In other words, this is a story of 12 cm (4.8"): how they become defined as deviant, and what meanings they carry when associated with a female body. I do acknowledge the existence of cultural and personal variations of meanings related to shortness, but this variation is beyond the scope of the present study.

#### Data and method

In elaborating the production of shortness my lived experiences constitute the primary data. Such an autoethnographical method derives from the ethnographic tradition. Simply put, the autoethnographer, who is simultaneously researcher and researched, interprets a certain cultural topic from a particular position, through reflecting on his/her own life experiences (Coffey 1999; Ellis and Bochner 2000; Reed-Danahay 1997). However, the themes of the researcher's self, reflexivity, and positioned subjects are not the private property of autoethnographers. They have been widely discussed within feminist (Hartsock 1998; Harding 1991; Katila and Meriläinen 1999), anthropological or ethnographic (Coffey 1999; Rosaldo 1989), and consumer literature (Penaloza 2000, 2001). What is particular in the autoethnographic tradition is that it completely values the power of *personal* and *closeness* in doing academic research (Richardson 2000). In so doing the tradition openly works against the ideology of detachment that has dominated the field of social sciences, including consumer research (Hirschman 1993).

The tradition also places particular emphasis on how to *represent* the world being studied. One may present the study in the form of a poem (Brady 2000), performance (Spry 2001), or as a narrative, as I shall do. My study relates to the narrative tradition (e.g. Riessman 1993), but as an autoethnographic narrative it invites the reader, in particular, to know the world from the position of the writer: what it is to *live* with cultural beliefs concerning smallness.

This personal position also inhibits particular kinds of insight. My story does not aim to describe or deconstruct all the meanings of shortness, or to claim that all experiences of all short women are similar. Analyses are always incomplete, as Rosaldo remarks “all interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others” (Rosaldo 1989, p. 8). Neither does the story provide any ready or definitive facts; rather, it aims to inspire new ways to see the bodies, open up room for self-reflection, further interpretations, and discussions. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 44) define an autoethnographic story in the following way: “They long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversations rather than un-debatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts.”

One further particularity inscribed in the autoethnographic tradition comes from its *political* nature. It attempts to find new positions from which to voice thoughts, positions that commonly go unnoticed in mainstream studies. Therefore, an autoethnography does not typically tell success stories; instead, it gives voice to the hidden, forbidden, or silenced stories. It highlights ruptures, unattended happenings, inconsistencies of life, those things that matter to people but, for some reason or another, remain invisible in academic discourses (Ellis and Bochner 2000). This openly vulnerable, moral, ethical, and political standpoint also differentiates an autoethnography from more “traditional” biographies and introspections.

The story that follows has emerged from the process of attending the feminist reading group at my business academy. In reading and debating on various bases for subjectivity, such as sex, gender, age, ethnicity, race, class, outlook, education, etc., etc., I had a vague feeling that something is missing. Why does no one talk about the dimension that has ruled my entire life, height? In trying to understand this silence, I started to remember my life, to identify instances in and through which I had been made to feel short. I also started to keep a diary of my daily life, to observe and make notes of social situations in which height was mentioned; in classes, in the corridor, seminars, talks over coffee, family meetings, when meeting with friends etc. I also came to notice the ways in which height is referred to and produced in the books I read, films I see, and newspapers I scan. Therefore, I did not “go to the field” but lived in the field.

A common critique of autoethnography is that it peeps into the sacred realm of the writer’s private life. But what is private? Although I use my body as a starting point, cultural meanings attached to it are not the property of me or any other individual. They are shared, as cultural knowledge always is. Also those instances I describe in my story are public. They have occurred in shops, workplaces, in classes; they are well illustrated in the literature, on the Internet and in the media. I just collect them and present them in a story. Therefore, the question is one of staging the cultural production of shortness rather than of being introspective about my private and inner life. I am not going to tell about my feelings of being short, nor tell the heights of my family members, or their feelings. That is the line of privacy.

## STIGMA OF SHORTNESS

To be *little* – all life long

### Births

A little princess  
05.03.1965  
3500 g, 52 cm

Since the day of my birth my body – as all the bodies in this culture - has been an object of measurement and cultural definition. The length of my body was mentioned in the announcement of my birth, but it will not be mentioned in the announcement of my death. Still, it is remarked on constantly and has carried meanings my whole life. Some years ago, I visited my goddaughter who was under ten at that time. We were out together, playing in the garden, and suddenly she asked:

- Anu, are you really an adult?
- Yes, of course, why do you ask?
- Because you are so small.

This snippet of conversation is not merely a random occurrence. Instead, it summarizes perfectly the cultural belief related to a short woman<sup>1</sup>: she is likened to a child. The idea that small size challenges adulthood is repeated through various cultural sources. The following headline from a major Finnish newspaper, for instance, replicates the same message (Pulliainen 2002, p. 53). The article that deals with small women is titled:

Little woman. Marianna Simo height 153.5 cm.  
‘She is small, she is a child’ people think.

Let us consider the way in which shortness and childhood become related. If I think of my own memories of childhood, my shortness was remarked on repeatedly in various contexts, by people close to me, and by cultural institutions. For instance, every time I met my admired father-in-law he said: “Well, Anu still hasn’t grown up!” He always laughed after saying this. The school system, in particular, included various practices that kept pointing out my shortness. The system of lining up according to height told me every single day that I was the shortest in the class. Also the medical

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘short’ and ‘small’ are often used as synonyms. ‘Small’, however, is also a weight-related term while ‘short’ relates more directly to the height, as opposite of ‘tall’.

system told me clearly that I was small. At school heights were measured every year. The practical experience confirmed this: I found it uncomfortable to sit in the desk, hard to reach things.

Shortness belongs to the category of childhood in our culture: children are categorically short. The point is, however, that I was defined as *too* short even as a child. Too short compared to the golden mean. Besides, the very aim of childhood is to get rid of shortness - to grow up.

The aim of growing up becomes visible in various everyday sayings, practices, and cultural texts. Think of parents who motivate their children to eat: “You must eat in order to grow up.” Or, they might say: “You are big enough to get dressed yourself now.” The process of children growing up is also tracked through growth curves, made in the name of medical science and statistics. These curves serve as a forceful normalizing practice: through showing the averages they determine what is normal and what is deviant (Hughes 2000). Indeed, the process of growing up is of such importance that the expectation of height is calculated and, based on these expectations, decisions are made whether hormonal treatment is “needed” (Koskeniemi 2002, p. 42-43). Such treatment seems to concern especially those expected not to reach the average: “nowadays they are used mostly for small-sized children”, since “tallness is an asset in today’s market”, says a professor of pediatrics in a web page dealing with the topic of height (Kajoniemi 2002). Obviously, this is all gendered: “Boys are freely allowed to grow up as tall as they do”.

Growing up is therefore an important cultural process. It is this process that I have failed and, therefore, I am still treated as a child. My failure is expressed to me through a set of repetitive practices in day-to-day social encounters. The set consists of gestures, glances, tone of voice, smiles, public questions concerning height, nicknames, and laughs that suggest patronizing and subjugation. They all strengthen the link between “not-really-an-adult” and smallness. As it is common to talk to

children in public, assuming that they have no need for private matters, people tend to ask me publicly: 'What's your height?' If there are two people named "Anu" at work, I am the one who is named "little Anu", and people tend to find this very funny expressing it by laughing or alternatively by tone of voice indicating affection and tenderness – *poor you!* One extreme gesture that conveys the message such-a-poor-little-child is the gesture of patting the head.

I face the same message as a consumer. In visiting museums, exhibitions, or when taking public vehicles like buses or trams I am often sold a children's ticket, which seems to be very funny to people accompanying me. When I go shopping for some clothes or shoes and ask about small sizes, the typical answer is: "Well, you should look in the children's section." This is often stated with a slightly astonished tone of voice and accompanied with an embarrassed smile. Yet, at this age, I would rather buy some clothes and shoes other than those emblazoned with Barbie, Pocahontas, or Winnie the Pooh.

Moreover, my daily contact with the material world keeps emphasizing my failure in the process of growing up. The world seems to be made for the people of average height and, therefore, I confront the problem of reaching things, as many children do. Every single morning, I have to climb on to a stool in order to switch on the hairdryer in my own bathroom, and every day, I feel uncomfortable with the bus seats, since my legs do not reach the floor. At shops, I have to ask people to help me to get goods of the shelves. That is, I am not able to cope by myself.

The cultural failure appears to carry an implicit assumption of incompetence and also a lack of intellectual qualities. As a researcher, I feel somewhat confused when I see studies that take this cultural assumption as a starting point. Studies may evaluate whether it is "really true" that short

people are, for instance, poorer managers than tall ones. The following extract exemplifies such a study.

The tall are perceived as managers

The research I conducted in a large Finnish company showed that there are no grounds for perceiving tall women as better managers than short women. There cannot be identified differences in their talents, neither in their suitability as managers (Sundvik 2001).

## TOWARDS NORMALCY

Are there any options for a short woman to become defined and treated as normal, as an adult? Yes, there seem to be available at least three cultural strategies that I present in this section. They are behavior, clothing and dating.

Behaving: be small and spunky

The way short people are expected to behave may be summarized by the saying: small and spunky. In Finnish, the saying is “small but peppery” that nicely underlines the implicit message in it. It admits that smallness represents a lack that may be compensated by being spunky or peppery. The insidious saying is widely used, in newspapers (in particular in the context of sports news), in advertisements, and it is commonly understood as positive, as praise. The saying becomes familiar already in early childhood through fairy tales. Think, for example, of the fairy tale called “Small and spunky princess” that is a story of a little princess, who proves that courage is not related to size (Masini 1999). In the Finnish context, in particular, the idea of small and spunky is represented through the famous Moomi stories written by Tove Jansson; the short girl called “Little My” is “petite but peppery”, that is, a strong and determined character despite her size.

What is small and spunky behavior like? Let us think of the question I am regularly asked in social situations: “What’s your height?” The proper way to answer that question is to state in a brave and brisk way: “Oh, only 152 cm but that’s enough for me!” This is in line with the idea of “small and spunky”. The “right” answer is rewarded by nods and sounds expressing acceptance – good girl! Furthermore, the “right” answer often generates a sympathetic story of somebody else who is also short, but who, despite this deficiency has done quite well in life.

The strength of the expectation to behave in a small and spunky way becomes visible in the ways in which deviations from it are punished. Likely alternative answers to that common “what’s your height” question, such as a non-answer, for instance, is likely to cause confusing or even insulting feelings to people present in the situation. Last winter I gave a class in qualitative methodology for post-doctoral students. In the beginning of the class, one student from the back row asked: “Are all qualitative researchers so small?” I did not know what to answer, and just observed the general confusion spreading round the class. In the same vein, behaving in *too* spunky a manner is likely to cause confusion. For instance, for men who ask about my height, a public counter question, “How long is yours, by the way?” would immediately put me in the questionable position of being small and a bastard. All in all, practical social situations are typically structured by a number of social norms and rules that provide me with one option, to be small and spunky, in a decent way.

Clothing: use high heels

Clothing provides another common strategy to manage and correct the stigma of shortness. By avoiding large figures or using high heels, for instance, one is able to disguise it. Simultaneously, however, the same field forcefully produces the stigma by defining it as a problem. Let us take a look at the following extract taken from a reader’s column in a family magazine (Peltonen 2002, p. 115):

Q: *Why can't I get clothes?*

I am a short, slim woman with a short upper body. Why can't I find clothes of this size?

A: Unfortunately, the clothing industry is not able to cater to all problem bodies.

Generally, the contemporary field of fashion and outlook seems to idealize tallness instead of smallness. Top models are tall and slim<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly, women's magazines deal with small bodies as being a problem and give hints on how to look taller, that is how to get rid of this problem by wearing high heels, avoiding large figures and lengthy jackets. Also my work mates and friends keep giving me hints on how to look like taller. For me, therefore, clothing is given the function of correcting my failure.

Yet, there is also an underlying understanding that female smallness is a positive thing. A small body represents elegance and femininity, I am told. In particular, it is associated with the representation of "Italian women", and interestingly, the only shop in Helsinki specializes in serving small-sized women is called "Piccola Donna". This strategy, to turn the stigma into a strength, to take advantage of it, represents one way to manage the stigma (Goffman 1963; Ellis 1998). For small women it means that one has the "advantage" of becoming *piccola donna*.

Let us consider further the shop specializing in serving small-sized women. On the one hand, just being a *special* shop it conveys and strengthens the message that smallness is not completely normal and therefore stigmatizes it. Namely, if we think of the other extreme, "great girls", those sections are nowadays quite common in *normal* stores. On the other, it also provides a means for managing the stigma. It not only offers a practical means to solve the problems caused by having a problem body, but it also provides some sort of mental support group for its customers (Goffman 1963). It serves

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<sup>2</sup> Yet, in the everyday context also a tall woman may easily become defined as *too* tall, as a deviant. One colleague of mine gave this story to his wife who happens to be relatively tall. She said that actually she hates short women, because it is us that make her feel too tall.

people who *share* the same stigma and, therefore, have a mutual understanding of problems involved.

Dating: choose a tall man

One further option for becoming normal relates to the sphere of intimate relations. In the prevailing frame of understanding the question of the proper height of women is determined in relation to men. Our culture states that a man should be taller than a woman. This strong cultural assumption becomes visible in various ways. A woman states in an interview in a newspaper article dealing with the topic of height: “The man should be taller than me, that’s the number one criterion” (Lehto 2002, p. 15). It becomes visible also in personal columns: the heights are explicitly noted in order not to break the strong norm. Accordingly, even I could be *too* tall, if my male partner were to be smaller than me.

All in all, in the dominant understanding the notion of “short man” seems to be filled with even stronger meanings than that of “short woman”. A classic example is Napoleon, and in particular, the *complex* of Napoleon. The idea of a complex is constantly present in the male context and implies that male shortness is interpreted as a severe problem. In line with lacking height a short man seems to be lacking the important attributes of manhood: power and sexuality. They are reserved for the tall man as Bordo (2000) points out. Accordingly, “short man” becomes a deviant representative of his sex, comparable to a representative of the “wrong” race or religion. He is not represented as the ideal partner. This was highlighted in an article that describes a situation when a daughter brought a short boy friend to visit her parents for the first time. When the mother and daughter went to the kitchen, the disappointed mother asked: “Why did you take such a short one?” (Räty 2002, p. 53).

Does the idea of “short and spunky” relate to short men? Yes, it does. This comes out in the following extract taken from a Finnish novel “Uncle Joe”, that is an ironic book about Stalin, written by Veikko Huovinen. In the following scene, that also repeats the likely lack of intelligence of short people, Stalin has met Lenin for the first time, and Stalin thinks:

That’s Lenin, he muttered to himself. – He wasn’t too big, for a man. Well, perhaps he is even more peppery. Is he intelligent? (Huovinen 1994)

However, in regard to other “body work” strategies there appears to be a difference between genders. Namely, in order to be a “real” man, it is not enough for a short man to disguise the failure with clothing, but he must compensate for his deficiency also physically, to modify his body in order to meet the standards of masculinity. Let us take a look at the following extract from Reidar Palmgren’s novel (a Finnish novelist).

Short men are similar, Risto knew. They feel they are not accepted, and therefore, they must compensate for the fact that they are short. They develop muscles and then they walk high and mighty, so that if somebody even glances at them ‘oh, how short’, they’ll hit immediately (Palmgren 2001, p. 63).

This assumption of physical body modification (muscles) is not present for short women. For me, it is enough to behave in a small and spunky way, wear appropriate clothes, and to be shorter than my male partner.

## CONCLUSION

This autoethnographic story has brought to the fore the dimension of height that has not received much attention in earlier debates on the body. It has elaborated on the ways in which gendered body height ideals become produced and reproduced in day-to-day life, and shown how height, just like weight, may be interpreted to symbolize qualities of character. In particular, the article has

highlighted how female shortness becomes stigmatized and how that stigma carries the meaning of childhood and attendant attributes (cf. strategies of “infantilization” discussed by Hall 1997, p. 262). The stigma gets its particular force through being continually repeated throughout the social life. The article has also discussed the strategies that are available to correct that stigma, and how it is managed and produced in the arena of consumption. All the ideas presented require, obviously, further research in different cultural contexts and with different methods. Moreover, a more profound elaboration of the interplay between height and other body-related categories, such as age, gender, weight, is needed.

Recently, the field of consumer research has witnessed an increase in studies applying a critical cultural approach (e.g. Moisander 2000; Penaloza 2000, 2001; Thompson and Haytko 1997). The autoethnographic method applied here may possibly enrich this stream of research in three ways. Firstly, the close combination of personal experiences and the knowledge of the academic literature may enable one to notice topics that have remained invisible in earlier debates. In this regard, the method may serve as a fruitful stimulant for opening new theoretical and empirical perspectives for the field. Through the political spirit inscribed in it, it may, in particular, have the potential to turn our attention from monopolized marginal positions to less-obvious ways through which marginalizing subject positions are created. As Ellis discusses (1998), the mere tone of voice or simply being “too” silent by prevailing standards may have the potential to serve as a sufficient basis for becoming defined as “deviant”.

Secondly, while introspective traditions take advantage of one’s dual consumer-researcher role (e.g. Gould 1995) the autoethnographic tradition emphasizes the dual cultural member-researcher role. This has the important advantage of directing attention to the pervasive nature of cultural assumptions and practices through which they are reproduced. It forces one to ask, whether one gets

a representative picture of the production of cultural meanings if one concentrates on elaborating them through advertising and media as seems to be suggested by our disciplinary agenda. The method also directs attention to everyday life as an important site where culture is reproduced. While feasts such as Thanksgiving or Christmas are obviously crucial in the reproduction of cultural meanings, the culture also reproduces itself during ordinary days. Thirdly, the autoethnographic method provides an efficient, educative, and embodied hands-on course on cultural theories. For me, at least, this project has clearly taught how silently, yet forcefully, the culture works around us, and through us, and poses strict standards of normality for our bodies.

All in all, the method – used as such or in line with other methods - may enable one to fully acknowledge the powerful grip culture has on all of us. While in the present case, for instance, Goffman considers that “the whole problem of managing stigma is influenced by the issue of whether or not the stigmatized person is known to us personally” (1963, p. 73), I propose that there is not much difference whether people know me or not. This is because they necessarily refer to and reproduce the same cultural stock of meanings related to shortness. Making the production of stigmas visible may open up an opportunity to think a bit differently, but it does not offer concrete tools for it. We are bound to our cultural framework and attendant language that provides the means to understand and talk about size in a certain way. Not even academic people are above these constraints of culture.

When drafting the first version of this topic, I wrote it in a light and humorous manner in order to say that shortness is not, after all, such a big thing. I needed an outsider to say that I am reproducing the master narrative of small but peppery, and even by the key practice through which the stigma of shortness is constituted: by being laughed at. That outsider, a distinguished professor with a background in cultural studies suggested that I should submit the story to the journal “*Deviant*

*Behavior*". However, feeling a bit angry by the suggestion, I ended up submitting it in to a journal of women's studies. The article was rejected, because "it was not properly connected to the vast of body of literature on disability". To close, I quote the title of Nick Watson's (2002) paper: "Well, I know this is going to sound very strange to you, but I don't see myself as a disabled person."

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