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### Height matters

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#### Publication date

2017

#### Document Version

Final published version

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#### Citation for published version (APA):

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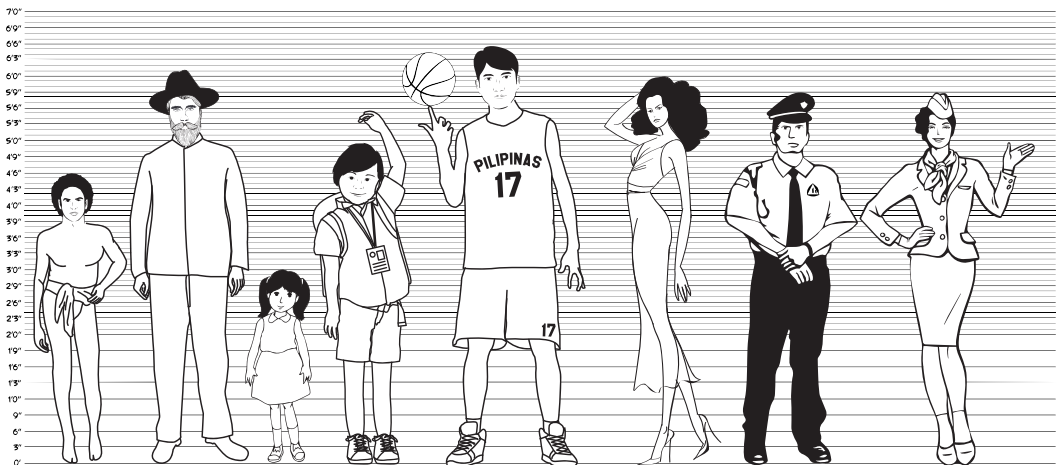
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# Height matters

The making, meanings, and materialities  
of human stature in the Philippines

Gideon Lasco



# Height matters

The making, meanings and materialities  
of human stature in the Philippines

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam  
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus  
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,  
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel

op 23 mei 2017, te 14.00 uur

door PAUL GIDEON DIONELA LASCO  
geboren te San Pablo, Filippijnen

Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: prof. dr. A.P. Hardon

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## SUMMARY

My research project looks at the making, the meanings and materialities of height in the Philippines, using a cultural history of height in the country and an ethnography among young people in the tourist city of Puerto Princesa in Palawan Island, Western Philippines. By “materialities”, I refer to situations where height matters—from basketball games that privilege tall bodies to nutrition programs where children’s heights are measured. While the existence of a ‘height premium’ has been proposed by psychologists and economic historians, I argue that the value of height can be best understood and properly contextualized by looking at how it figures in the everyday lives of people. While height is a biological and physical property, I argue it is also always social—and therefore *relational*—in its making, meanings, and measurings.

In my first chapter, “**Little Brown Brothers**”, I present an “episodic history” of the American colonial period (1898-1946) to show how scientific racism, biomedicine, public health, sports, and a nascent bureaucracy intersected in the making of height as an important attribute of individuals and populations. In relation to the “tall” Americans, Filipinos were depicted as “short”, and the attention to children’s growth, the rise of sports, and the establishment of a bureaucracy all contributed to making height a measure of health and as a parameter of inclusion (and exclusion) in various domains of society.

In my second chapter, “**The Making of Height**”, I present the different ways of “height-making”, that is, the different practices that are done to make children grow taller. Breastfeeding, nutrition, circumcision, and the use of growth supplements emerge as common practices. I pay special attention to the latter, given its recent emergence and amenability to further analysis as a product that has a ‘social life’.

In my third chapter “**Stature and Schooling**”, inspired by Bourdieu’s reminder of the importance of pedagogy in social reproduction, I illustrate how the meanings of height are “learned” in schools and consequently embodied by children as habitus. In conceptualising the school as a ‘field’, I demonstrate how height is a form of capital, appropriated not just by the young people but the schools themselves—without them necessarily reflecting on the role of height and its ramifications.

In my and fourth and final chapter, “**Height and Employment**”, I show the pervasiveness of height requirements—both explicit and implicit—in various jobs and employment opportunities, and how young people confront and negotiate these requirements. These forms of institutionalisations structure young people’s aspirations and further reinforce the convertibility of height as an ‘economic capital’.

In my conclusion, I bring together some of the themes that I have raised in the chapters, and reflect on what these themes can offer in terms of explaining the meanings and

materialities of height in the lives of young people, and more theoretically, the role of the body in society. I end by reflecting on the ways in which the vertical dimension has structured human experience and sketching how it can offer new insights for anthropology.

## SAMENVATTING

Mijn onderzoeksproject kijkt naar de constructie, betekenissen en materiele cultuur van hoogte in de Filippijnen, zowel middels een studie van de culturele geschiedenis van lengte in dit land als een etnografie van jonge mensen in de toeristische stad Puerto Princesa in het westelijk gelegen eiland Palawan. Met materiele cultuur verwijs ik naar sociale situaties waarbij lengte belangrijk wordt, bijvoorbeeld bij de populaire sport basketbal waar lange mensen de voorkeur krijgen, of voedingsprogramma's waar de lengte van kinderen worden gemeten. Hoewel door psychologen en economische historici het bestaan van een "height premium" wordt gesuggereerd, betoog ik dat hoe lengte wordt gewaardeerd het best kan worden begrepen en gecontextualiseerd door te kijken naar de manier waarop deze concepten in het dagelijks leven van mensen figureren. Hoewel lengte een biologische en fysische eigenschap is, beargumenteer ik dat het ook altijd een sociaal concept is—en dus relationeel—in haar constructie, betekenissen, en toepassingen.

In mijn eerste hoofdstuk, "**Little Brown Brothers**", presenteer ik een gefragmenteerde geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse koloniale periode (1898-1946) in de Filippijnen. Hier leg ik uiteen hoe wetenschappelijk racisme, biomedische wetenschappen, volksgezondheid, sport, en een opkomende bureaucratie van invloed waren op de constructie van lengte als belangrijke eigenschap van individuen en populaties. Met betrekking tot de 'lange' Amerikanen, werden Filippino's afgeschilderd als 'klein'. De aandacht voor de groeicurve van kinderen, de opkomst en populariteit van sport, en de ontwikkeling van de bureaucratie hebben allen bijgedragen aan de ontwikkeling van het belang van lengte als graadmeter van gezondheid en van processen van in- en uitsluiting in verschillende domeinen van de samenleving.

In mijn tweede hoofdstuk, "**The Making of Height**", presenteer ik de verschillende manieren van "height-making". Dat wil zeggen, de verschillende praktijken die worden aangedaan om het groeiproces van kinderen te bevorderen. (Borst)voeding, besnijdenis, en het gebruik van groei supplementen komen onder andere aan bod als groei-bevorderende praktijken. In het bijzonder besteed ik aandacht aan het gebruik van supplementen. Als producten die een 'sociaal leven' leiden, is het toepassen van verdere analyse op de recente opkomst van het gebruik van supplementen in de Filippijnen van belang.

Het derde hoofdstuk, "**Stature and Schooling**", is geïnspireerd door Bourdieu die wijst op het belang van pedagogiek in sociale reproductie. Ik illustreer hoe het belang van lengte wordt 'aangeleerd' op scholen en hierdoor belichaamd wordt door kinderen als "habitus". Door de school als 'veld' te conceptualiseren, laat ik zien hoe lengte een vorm van kapitaal is, en niet alleen wordt toegepast door kinderen, maar ook door scholen zelf – vaak zonder de rol van lengte aandacht te geven of de gevolgen hiervan

te overzien.

In het vierde en laatste hoofdstuk, “**Height and Employment**”, laat ik de alomtegenwoordigheid van lengte-eisen—zowel expliciete en impliciete—in verschillende banen en werkgelegenheid zien, en hoe jongeren omgaan met deze eisen. Dergelijke vormen van institutionalisering zijn van invloed op de manier waarop jongeren hun aspiraties vormgeven en aanpassen, en versterkt het idee van lengte als ‘economisch kapitaal’.

In mijn conclusie breng ik een aantal van de thema’s die ik in de hoofdstukken heb geanalyseerd samen, om te reflecteren op wat deze thema’s laten zien over de betekenissen en materiele cultuur van lengte in de levens van jonge mensen, en meer theoretisch, de rol van het lichaam in de samenleving. Ik sluit af door te reflecteren op de manier waarop de verticale dimensie de menselijke ervaring vormgeeft en hoe deze invalshoek nieuwe inzichten kan geven voor antropologie.

\*\*\*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is one of the most difficult parts of the dissertation to write, not just because there are too many people to thank, but also because words can never do justice to the impact they have had—not just on my work but on my life.

My family—my father **Rodel**, my mother **Haydee**, my sister **Christine**, her husband Neal, and my brother **Jonathan**—were all very supportive of my decision to pursue Medical Anthropology after Medicine, waiving the weight of expectations that doctors in the Philippines usually have to bear. This freedom allowed me to broaden my academic horizons and discover the exciting field of Malinowski. Filipino families extend throughout the globe, and in Europe I found a home in Genoa thanks to my relatives, the Massone family: **Juliana**, **Fabrizio**, **Alex**, and **Elisa**—a big hug to all of you. My friend **Leo Oracion** likewise provided me company in Switzerland, and in Netherlands, my visits to **Bong Hardillo** in Rotterdam and Judge **Raul Pangalangan** in the Hague were refreshing.

My journey in anthropology began under the guidance and tutelage of **Michael Tan**, my local supervisor and mentor and I am very grateful for his continued encouragement and inspiration throughout the course of working on my PhD.

I am greatly indebted to **Anita Hardon** for being *mas que un* supervisor from the moment I met her in Nieuwmarkt as she was riding her bike on that winter morning in 2012. It was she who created the opportunity for me to come to Amsterdam, first as a AISSR Winter School attendee, and then as a PhD researcher. I will always cherish her academic and moral support as well as her repeated visits to my fieldsite.

**Rene Gerrets**, for his part, came during the time I needed him the most: in the final stretch of my writing period. Without his crucial role as co-supervisor, this dissertation wouldn't be possible.

Puerto Princesa, my fieldsite, became like a second home to me, and I am thankful to **Arnaldo Favila** for hosting me, and for other medical doctors there that kept me company. I also thank my research assistant **Julius de Vera** for the invaluable help. Credit also goes to the **barangay officials of Brgy. Sicsican** for welcoming me as a volunteer doctor, as well as our research colleagues from the **Palawan State University** who offered feedback and connected me with useful information.

Back in Amsterdam, I cannot fail to mention the kindness of **Janus Oomen**, who I had the privilege of welcoming to Manila. The insights of **Emily Yates-Doerr**, **Adnan Hossein**, **Filippo Bertoni**, **Tanja Ahlin**, **Justine Laurent** were precious gems. **Annemarie Mol** was, and always is, an inspiration.

It was during a writing workshop in Bergen aan Zee that **Vinh Kim-Nguyen** suggested that I pursue height as a topic. I am thankful to Vinh-Kim for being one of my early inspirations, along with **Eileen Moyer**, **Ria Reis**, **Anja Hiddinga**, **Jeanete Pols**, and **Amade M'charek** all figure in various stages of my PhD as welcome sources of strength and insight.

Thanks to Anita's support, my PhD experience extended beyond Amsterdam and Puerto Princesa, and I had to chance to spend a few months in Washington University of St. Louis. I thank **John Bowen** for this opportunity; my housemate **Guillermo Martin-Saiz** and hiking buddy **Carolyn Powers**, for being such good friends to me in Wash U; and STS scholar **Talia Dan-Cohen** for the inspiration. I also had the opportunity to finish my dissertation at the Asian Research Institute at the National University in Singapore, and I would like to thank **Lou Antilihao** for being there to exchange ideas with me.

Finally, I am thankful to my colleagues at the Chemical Youth Project: my compatriot **Mai Taqueban**; **Nastasja Roels** (who tried hard not to laugh when I ended up wearing two different shoes at the height of my writing phase), **Mariana Rios** (who tolerated my broken Spanish), **Lisanne Claessens**, **Daan Kamps**, and **Diana Pakasi**. A particularly great source of encouragement was **Swasti Mishra**. **Hayley Murray** likewise deserves special mention for being my advocate in Amsterdam when I was in Manila. For being my paranymphs, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Swasti and Nas.

To everyone who, in one way or another, became part of my research: may this work do justice to all the help you've given me! You've all lifted me up, making me feel *tall*, proud, and most importantly, thrilled to be an anthropologist in our fascinating world.







## INTRODUCTION

### **Height matters**

*“My life would have been very different if I were a few inches shorter.”*

We were inside Robinsons Mall when Tiffany (19, 5’8)<sup>1</sup> told me her story. A first-year college student in Hotel and Restaurant Management at the Palawan State University, she was a local beauty queen who had won last year’s *Mutya ng Palawan*, a beauty pageant that coincided with the *Baragatan*—a week-long festival for the entire island province of Palawan, located in the Western Philippines.

As we walked around the mall—a popular hangout among young people since it opened in 2013—the gazes of other youths confirmed her popularity and attractiveness in Puerto Princesa, the city where I had been doing my fieldwork. You could sense that she was aware of their gaze: she walked in a careful manner, as though she were on the pageant stage. Yet, even without this effort, she still “stood out” from the crowd with her flowing black hair, dark skin, large eyes, and a slender frame. Moreover, at 5’8, she was taller than the average girl in the city, which statistics place at 5’2 [157 cms].

Palawan island, which has Puerto Princesa as its capital and only city, is one of the country’s major tourist attractions, famous for its beaches, coral reefs (including Tubbataha, a UNESCO World Heritage Site), limestone formations, and the Puerto Princesa Underground River that was also declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. In 2014 and 2015, the two years during which I did much of my fieldwork, Palawan was named “world’s best island” by an American travel magazine—the latest in many accolades. Puerto Princesa is the gateway to all these destinations, and is a bustling city in its own right: from a population of just 90,000 in 1990, it now has over 250,000 inhabitants (City Government of Puerto Princesa, 2014). Aside from natural population growth, there has also been a lot of migration, with people from poorer towns in Palawan and elsewhere in the Philippines coming to the city in search of better opportunities. The universities of Puerto Princesa also attract students from all over the province: the government-run Palawan State University alone has an enrolment of 8,000 students, and besides two other universities, there are other colleges and vocational schools (ibid).

Tiffany would be one of those migrants — and also one of those students. Orphaned at a young age in a village in Northern Palawan, she was left in the care of her uncle, who, instead of adopting her, arranged for her to work as a housemaid in the service of

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, whenever possible I indicate the ages and heights of my interlocutors as a semantic device to remind my readers of the biological/physical reality of height which shaped my interactions with them. The use of the English system of measuring height is in keeping with what is customary in the Philippines. Centimeter equivalents are occasionally provided, and readers may also refer to Appendix B for a conversion table. All names are fictitious.

a schoolteacher in Puerto Princesa.

“Thanks to the teacher, I was able to study in elementary and high school. But she was very demanding. She made me skip the last class so I could do the laundry. And I was never part of any extra-curricular activities because I was a maid,” she recalls. Just as she was about to graduate in high school, she met a talent scout named Voltaire, who, upon seeing her, was impressed by her physical appearance and invited her to join a “modelling search”, where she emerged as the winner. After graduating from high school, she returned to her uncle, hoping that he would help her go through college. Instead, he wanted to marry her off to a foreign husband. When she told them of her “model search” success, her uncle and aunt were scandalized, and threatened to cut off her hair so that she could not compete.



Fig. 1 - Puerto Princesa lies at the Western Philippine island of Palawan, 600 kms away from the Philippine capital of Manila,.

Dreading the prospect of marrying an “dirty old man” and resentful of her uncle’s vehement opposition to her pageant aspirations, Tiffany fled back to Puerto Princesa, seeking the help of Voltaire, who offered her lodging and part-time work in a small bed-and-breakfast establishment he manages. Since then, under Voltaire’s aegis, she has joined various beauty pageants, and even became a finalist for a national swimwear competition. Her pageant successes earned for her the support of a former beauty queen, who, upon hearing her story, offered to support her through college, which was why, after being delayed for two years, she was wearing the prescribed white uniform and heels of a Tourism student.

And that’s when she mused: *“Ibang-iba siguro ang buhay ko ngayon kung mas mababa ako ng ilang inches!”* (“My life would have very different if I were a few inches shorter!”)

### **Thinking with the vertical**

To make sense of Tiffany’s remark, we must look at the ways in which height<sup>2</sup> figures

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation I will be using “height” to refer to three related things: an absolute physical measurement, an advantage or an attribute with value (i.e. tallness), and a “height culture” that encapsulates various practices that surround making people grow or look taller. I will try to be precise in my use of “height”, but I ask my readers to be mindful of these very related - but distinct - meanings.

in the everyday lives of young people, and in society at large. How—and in what ways—can a few inches matter? What does being tall—or being short—signify in a country where the average height is 5'4 (163 cm) for males, and 5'0 (151.4 cm) for females? (Food and Nutrition Research Institute, 2014). In my project, this is what I set out to do: take a special interest in the topic of height or human stature by looking at the different situations where it figures, using ethnographic methods such as participant-observation (i.e. volunteering as a doctor in a village clinic), interviews, and “deep hanging out” Gusterson (2008:93) with young people.

Thinking about society with an attention to the vertical can lead one to notice things that are normally taken for granted. My height is 5'9, and in the Philippines I am generally regarded as tall or at least above average. On the other hand, when I'm in Amsterdam, where the average height of males is 5'11 (NCD Risk Factor Collaboration, 2016), I am short—and the tables, gym equipment, and even urinals in public toilets all *feel* taller and bigger. Conversely, Jan (23, 6'2), a Dutch tourist I met in Puerto Princesa, lamented that he keeps bumping into door headers and has a hard time squeezing into the *jeepneys*, *multicabs* and *tricycles* that are Puerto Princesa's main modes of public transport. He exclaims: “The Philippines is not built for tall people!” In these quotidian ways, we experience the world differently depending on our heights, and we are reminded that words like “tall” and “short” are only meaningful in relation to other people and the environment. This brings me to one of the key premises of my thesis: ***Height may be a physical attribute, but the ways in which it is measured in everyday life are always relational.*** Thinking with the vertical, in light of this relationality, is therefore a way of reflecting on the relationship between bodies and the social and physical world.

Heading from my apartment near the University of the Philippines in Quezon City to the airport in Manila to catch the one-hour flight to Puerto Princesa, I saw a huge billboard advertising Cherifer, a “growth supplement”. Alongside a picture of a Kobe Paras (18, 6'5)—a Filipino-American basketball star—slamming the ball into the basketball ring are the words



Fig. 2 - A typical jeepney. I was in Puerto Princesa when the news came that the Philippines' 100 millionth citizen was born, and I felt that this photo of an overcrowded jeepney is highly illustrative. Photo by the author.

“Height is might” and “Reach your growth potential!”. In barely legible letters, it adds that this is “Achievable with adequate sleep, proper diet, and avoidance of drinking and smoking”. While the biomedical sciences talk about height in physiologic terms, its “making” is informed by various practices, and in a literal sense, **height is both biological and social in its making**—the second key premise of my thesis. Thus one must look at both the biology of height and various practices of “height-making” not as distinct entities, but as interrelated, and co-productive.

Aboard the plane from Manila to Puerto Princesa, while reading the inflight magazine, I noticed an advertisement for men’s shoes that offer to “instantly” give a four-inch height boost. “Be Taller than Her. Be Confident. Get that Job,” the ad read. The need for men to be taller than women connects to the notion of relationality in terms of gender, but along with the two other appeals (being confident and getting that job), it also speaks of height as an enabler of various possibilities. Height has *value* if indeed one can get a job because of it, and if it can make you feel more confident about yourself. This brings me to my third and final premise: **height has value and it can take on various forms of capitals depending on the different contexts where it is situated.**

These premises were my starting point in performing a ‘focused ethnography’ on height, but given their emphasis on *relations* and *contexts*, it was necessary for me to have a broader feel of the city and its people, particularly the youth—for whom height is still an “unfinished”<sup>3</sup> attribute—and to learn about what is at stake for them in the various activities they engage in. This is why I ended up meeting Tiffany: I was closely following the beauty pageants and “model searches”, which I found to be an important activity for many youth. In this introduction, one of my goals is also to acquaint the reader to these various activities, and to my fieldsite itself: The city of Puerto Princesa, Philippines.

### **Puerto Princesa: A city in transition**

Puerto Princesa—literally “Port of the Princess” after a nineteenth century Spanish princess, also goes by its two other nicknames: “The City in a Forest”, and “The City of the Living God”. These two appellations, as I have found, are truly apt monickers, for they speak of the character of the city and its people. Puerto Princesa is literally a city in the forest; stately acacia and colorful fire trees (*Delonix regia*) line the streets, and within the city limits are many forested mountains—a welcome sight in a country which has lost 90% of its forest cover in the last 100 years. The “city in the forest” nickname also relates to a heightened sense of environmental awareness, and pride in the natural heritage that is inculcated to students in the form of annual tree-planting activities such as the midyear *Pista i Kagueban* or “Feast of the Forests”.

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3 Chris Shilling (2012:138) wrote that the bodies are “unfinished” as they are “formed through their participation in social life and imprinted with the marks of social class”. I agree, but add that for children, bodies are also unfinished in the physical, developmental sense.

As for the ‘City of the Living God’, the people of Puerto Princesa are religious, just like most Filipinos: the Philippines is at least 90% Christian (80% Catholic, 10% other denominations) and 5.5% Muslim (National Statistics Office, 2014). A cursory walk along the city’s major thoroughfares, most of which are named after national heroes (i.e. Rizal Avenue, Malvar Road, Mabini Street), passes a number of churches: Catholic, Adventist, Mormon, Baptist, Charismatic Christian, and other Protestant denominations, including the popular “Life Church”, which holds its Sunday Services at the City Coliseum. There are also some Muslim communities, especially in the outskirts. On Sundays when it is not raining, you can see many people wearing church clothes—long-sleeved polos and slacks for men and dresses for women—walking their way to church or more commonly, riding the jeepneys, multicabs and tricycles. Though the Catholic Church remains the biggest religious group, others have a significant and growing presence, operating schools and in the case of the Adventists, the largest private hospital in the province—the Palawan Adventist Hospital.

My interlocutors describe Puerto Princesa as “traditional” and “conservative” but they also note that the city is undergoing rapid change. “Until several years ago, it was unthinkable for college girls to wear mini-skirts,” says Yasmin (24, 4’11), an environmentalist, as we walked inside the Robinson’s Mall, adding: “But now, as you can see, all the girls are wearing them.” Her eyes point to the young people we come across the mall. She further cites the examples of beauty pageants and swimwear competitions as a sign of the changing times. Chard (21, 6’0), a college student who describes himself as “traditional”—eschewing computer games popular around the world like *DoTA (Defense of the Ancients)* in favour of basketball and traditional Filipino games like *syato*—also comments that young people now are more “liberated”. Both of them correlate these changes with the influence of mass media, as well as the coming of Robinsons Place Palawan, the first major shopping mall in the island province.

Spurred by tourism, development has accelerated in the past two decades. Though this has not necessarily translated to ‘inclusive growth’ (Usui 2012)—many young people remain out-of-school or unemployed—there are physical signs of urbanization, such as the traffic lights symptomatic of burgeoning traffic that make some locals look back at the past with professed nostalgia. When Unitop mall opened in Puerto Princesa in 2010, it was the escalator that drew the most attention. Many Palaweños had never tried using an escalator before, and the first few months of the mall’s opening gave rise to numerous anecdotes involving the escalator. Some of my informants recall people ‘getting out of balance’ and even ‘falling from the elevator’. Others had their pictures taken before riding it, while there were also reports of people taking off their footwear, out of reverence to the technological marvel. Two years later, at the opening of Robinsons Palawan, the mayor declared it as a “very memorable day for our city” (Jaucian, 2012), hailing it as the culmination of all the development that has taken





Fig. 3 - Robinsons Place Palawan - the first major mall in Puerto Princesa and a favourite hangout of young people. Photo by the author.

place in his protracted term in office. This mall, to date the only major one in Palawan, became my favoured site for observation, as it is where many young people like Jessica and her friends hang out.

In Puerto Princesa, then, we see a city teeming with young people: part urban, part rural; part traditional, part modern. As a tourist hub, it also has a cosmopolitanism that is not found in similar provincial capitals: students who hang out in the Tiki Bar on Friday and Saturday nights often encounter and interact with tourists who come from all over the world—and all over the Philippines.

### **Height in young people's activities**

Early on, I was struck by the frequency of 'model searches' and 'beauty pageants' for young people, males and females alike. For boys, there's *Ginoong Puerto Princesa* and *Mr. Puerto Princesa* (Ginoos is just the Tagalog term for 'mister'). For girls, there's *Mutya ng Puerto Princesa*, *Mutya ng Palawan*, *Ms. Puerto Princesa*, and even *Miss Silka Palawan*—Silka being a brand of whitening soap. Model searches include "Fashionista Circle" "Palawan Fashion Icon", "Fashion Royale", and many others (it seems that there



is a ‘model search’ every other week). And for the *bakla*<sup>4</sup>, there is also a Miss Gay Puerto Princesa. This roster does not count the village beauty pageants held during their respective fiestas.

On the week I arrived in Puerto Princesa, I saw posters promoting the *Ginoong Puerto Princesa*. Held in three parts: a casual wear competition, a swimwear and underwear competition and talent night,



Fig. 4 - Male youths compete in the ‘Ginoong Puerto Princesa’ by walking on stage in various clothes. Photo by the author.

as well as the final formal wear and question and answer, this pageant featured 11 boys, ages 18-20. The winner is promised a cash prize of P10,000 (\$240), a scholarship, as well as gift certificates from various establishments—from fitness centres to hair salons. Tarpaulins promoting the *Ginoong Puerto Princesa*—or GPP as its contestants abbreviate it—found their way in prominent spots across town, displaying the faces of each of the contestants. When I finally saw the contestants parading themselves in Robinsons Mall, I was struck by the fact that they were all tall by Puerto Princesa standards. As each of them were called to the stage to introduce themselves, their names flashed on big screens alongside only two other details: their names and their heights. Later, I would find out that their tallness was not accidental: you have to be at least 5’7 (170cm) to be a candidate in the first place.

A few weeks later, I attended the *Mutya ng Palawan*, and once again, I saw height requirements flashed alongside the contestants’ names, ages and the towns they represented. These ladies actually appeared taller than their male counterparts, because of the high heels they were wearing. Some of those “platform heels” reached up to six or seven inches, making them even taller than Mikael Daez (27, 5’10), an actor from Manila that they brought in just to host the occasion. Says Tiffany of the heels: “It’s takes a while to get used to wearing them. You have to practice, and pay attention to the steps. If you trip it will be *nakakahiya* (embarrassing)!”

*Why do the young people join beauty pageants?* “It was just for fun,” Terence (18, 5’8) told me as we kayaked across Kamia Bay, a resort some 25 kilometres from the city proper, the venue of a free trip that counted among the contestants’ consolation prizes; they invited me to tag along. He told me: “I had nothing to do this summer and I

4 Bakla is a Tagalog term that is often translated as ‘homosexual’, but refers more particularly to gay men who are effeminate, or identify as female (see Tan, 1995).

thought it was cool to join. The pictures would also be great on Facebook!” The son of a Navy officer stationed in the nearby base of the Philippine Armed Forces’ Western Command<sup>5</sup>, Terence was pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Accounting at the Palawan State University. “My girlfriend didn’t want me to join [the pageant], but I told her not to worry, she had nothing to be jealous about. Besides, it’s not a big deal. I know a lot of people who also join those pageants. Here in Puerto Princesa, it’s either you’re a model or an MLM networker,” he adds, referencing the multi-level marketing schemes involving products such as herbal supplements, cosmetics, or clothing that many young people participate in. Amina (18, 5’7), a friend of Tiffany’s save for those brief periods of *tampuhan* (quarrelling) that seemed very common among young people, says that she welcomes the pageants because it teaches her confidence and communication skills that she can use later in her career.

For others, however, there is more at stake in those beauty contests. Like Tiffany, they find not only enjoyment, but a pathway for a better future. Eugene (20, 5’7) comes from what he describes as a “broken family” and had to quit college on his final year because he couldn’t pay the P5,000 (\$110) tuition fee. Having already won a pageant in his hometown of Taytay and buoyed by the singing talent that has allowed him to sing in bars as an occasional sideline, he had hoped that the P10,000 (\$220) cash prize could be the answer to all his problems. After the GPP, he also joined the Palawan Pop Idol—a singing contest that mimics the US TV show American Idol and its many spin-offs. Although he also failed to win in this contest, he received a consolation prize of P5,000 (\$110)—which to him meant a lot.

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Sport is another important activity among the youths, especially the males. Basketball is the *de facto* national sport in the Philippines (Antolihao, 2015), and there are basketball courts in every *barangay*<sup>6</sup> and every school. Most of the boys play the game after school hours, or during weekends. Ligas (“leagues”) pitting one barangay against the other would be formed during the summer months of April to June, and barangay fiestas are another reason to hold games. The attention to basketball is not confined to actually participating in the games—but in being spectators of them: National and international tournaments are closely watched on television, from Manila’s University Athletic Association of the Philippines (UAAP) to the US’ National Basketball Association (NBA). Consequently, many boys look up to players from these tournaments,

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5 With the ongoing maritime dispute in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) among Southeast Asian countries, Taiwan, and China, the military presence in Puerto Princesa has taken considerable significance, and it is also a frequent site of the annual military exercises with the United States, with whom the Philippines has a “Mutual Defense Treaty”.

6 The barangay (village) is the smallest political unit in the Philippines, and often they also constitute a community that is perhaps similar to the ancient Filipino unit of social organization where the term comes from (Jocano, 1975). Many barangays are named after their Catholic patron saints, which are honoured during annual fiestas or festivals. Among the activities of these fiestas are basketball tournaments and beauty pageants.



Fig. 5 - Boys start playing basketball at a very young age, usually in makeshift courts like this one in Brgy. Tinguiban. Photo by the author.

education. As for the tuition fee of P5000 (\$110), that has been waived thanks to an athletic scholarship—once again due to his basketball prowess.

What makes Eric exceptional is his ability to thrive in basketball despite his relatively short stature. The basketball hoop is 10 feet high, and tallness confers a big advantage in basketball, which is why it is dubbed as the “tall man’s game”. Thus many boys aspire to become “six-footers” (183 cms and taller): such a height, exceptional in Puerto Princesa, is a virtual guarantee for inclusion in school teams and potentially, even a collegiate athletic career in Manila. As one coach explained to me: “You can teach skills, but you cannot teach height.” Eric, even with his ability, is thus confined to Puerto Princesa: No talent scout will even consider anyone shorter than 5’8 (172cm). In an ironic parallel with Tiffany’s comment, Eric says with some dejection: “If only I were taller, I would have been in Manila”. Levi (18, 5’11), Eric’s teammate in the college varsity team, has better luck and says he has already been recruited by a college in Manila. For Puerto Princesa youth, an education in Manila is sought-after as a mark of prestige and a guarantee for better jobs, but the costs are prohibitive for many of them.

Height strongly influences young people’s careers, as well. In the Provincial Capitol, which I visit regularly to work out in the government-run fitness centre, I would pass by the bulletin board of the “Public Employment Services Office”. There, I would

including Kobe Paras—who once played for the UAAP, but had recently moved to California to be groomed for the NBA.

For many boys, basketball is just part of their social life, but for some it can be the door to many opportunities. Eric (18, 5’4) has been a member of the basketball varsity team since he was in elementary school and he credits membership to this team for his being able to travel outside Palawan: “I went to all kinds of athletic meets, and thus I’ve been to different corners of the Philippines, from Cebu and Mindoro to Manila!” he enthused. He adds that although he receives nothing from his parents, he earns some money by playing for various teams. “We get a share of the cash prize if we win, but nothing if we lose. We usually win, so it’s not a bad arrangements,” he explains. He uses his winnings to pay for his own

find height requirements for all kinds of jobs, from serving as a cook in one of the city's restaurants and fast-food chains to being a bellboy in the Middle East. These requirements weigh heavily in the minds of young people, especially the older ones. Rose (16, 5'0), a tenth grade student in a public high school, says: "*Gusto ko sanang maging flight attendant, pero hindi kakayanin ng height ko.*" (I would have wanted to be a flight attendant, but my height can't make it). The idea that height itself is an *ability* that can make certain *futures* possible is a theme I would encounter over and over in the field.

But it is not just in domains like sports or labor sectors (i.e. tourism) that height figures, but also in the mundane details of young people's everyday lives. For instance, children in schools are arranged according to height in weekly flag ceremonies and in other school activities. Once, as I was hanging out in the Robinsons Mall, I heard teenagers comparing their heights, eventually pointing to the shortest, who defends himself, saying: "*Maliit nga cute naman!*" (I may be small but at least I'm cute!). Riding the jeepney—the most common form of transportation where people sit in two rows opposite each other—I would sometimes encounter students being bullied by their peers for their height, including one who they labelled a "bonsai", apparently suggesting that he is a stunted version of a normal boy. Looking at young people's interactions with each other, I also noticed that among couples, boys were taller their girlfriends, and friends who walk together were generally of a similar height. These, again, may be taken for granted—and indeed men are generally taller than women—but if we are think with the vertical, we must embark on a deeper reexamine these seemingly-natural features of everyday life.

Sometimes, the materiality of height is felt most acutely by youths who have had the chance to inhabit a different lifeworld. "I cannot wear heels here," lamented Marie (23, 5'10), the daughter of a restaurant owner who describes herself "100% French, 100% Filipina". At 5'10 (178 cm) the only female I interviewed who was actually taller than me, she told me that she feels a bit "awkward" to be in the Philippines, and confessed that it was difficult for her to date local guys not just because she would feel strange to date a smaller guy, but also because very few approached her to begin with. Claire (25, 5'2), a Filipino-Australian from Sydney who volunteered in an environmental conversation group, told me: "When I'm here, It feels different. For the first time, I'm actually not craning my head and looking up to people. I'm actually looking down on some of them." Laughing, she adds: "And for the first time in my life, somebody actually said I'm a tall girl!"

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Finally, I see height as it is being "made", that is, young people are actually trying to get taller—sometimes by themselves especially when they are older, but oftentimes with their

parents. Marvin (16, 5'7) uses his own allowance to buy Cherifer in a local drugstore, hoping to be taller, saying that he wants to be better basketball player. Kurt (15, 5'6) is the leader of a local boy band and he too wants to be taller so he has a better chance to be a celebrity in Manila. Mothers, like Ellen (49, 5'1) buys fresh milk and Cherifer for her three boys, and keeps prodding them to sleep early. "My husband and I are already short; we don't want our children to suffer the same fate!" she explains. Though many practices related to height—such as breastfeeding and preparing nutritious meals—are often embedded in the more urgent demands of satisfying children's appetites, the fact that these connections to height exist, even with practices like circumcision and masturbation, speaks of a long-term, pervasive concern for the heights of children.

This concern, moreover, is not from the parents alone—or the children themselves. In the village health clinic where I volunteered, barangay nutrition scholars painstakingly monitor the height of children every quarter, reporting their findings to the City Nutrition Office, who then reports to the national Department of Health, and these figures get averaged, analyzed, compared with different areas, and when necessary, intervened upon through the food and vitamin supplementations that the barangay nutrition scholars themselves implement.

These "body projects" reveal that what is at stake in young people's growing up is not just their own desires and interests, but also that of their parents, families, schools, and various levels of government.

### **Perspectives from other fields**

Since ancient times, thinkers and scholars from various disciplines have posited various hypotheses about height and studied its *making*, *meanings*, and *measuring*. The *very verticality* of human beings, for instance, has been seen as a uniquely human characteristic. For Aristotle, the "unique stature of human beings" was both as mark of divinity and a "byproduct of the mechanical workings of the elements" (Tipton, 2013:97). Much later, twentieth century sociobiologists and biomedical scientists will explain this verticality (i.e. our standing position and bipedalism) from an evolutionary perspective, proposing dozens of explanations for the adaptive value of stature: from the ability to pick fruits in flexible branches and freeing of hands to use tools to more efficient traveling in the savannahs (Niemitz, 2010).

Two questions that these disciplines have sought to answer are of particular relevance to my study: First, the question of the mechanism of growth (i.e. what determines the height of individuals?) and second, making sense of the 'height premium' (i.e. why does height confer advantages?).

### Explaining human growth and height differences

Throughout history, various thinkers have held that height is a product of race, heredity,



and the environment—or a combination of these. Impelled by the idea that there exists an “average” height for every population, eighteenth century French polymath Adolph Quetelet made use of the emerging techniques of statistics and epidemiology to chart the growth of children (Tanner, 1981). According to this thinking, height differences are inherent properties of various “races”. Later scholars would disprove this by imputing socio-economic conditions, nutritional status, and childhood illnesses in the determination of height. Height differences, according to their view, result from unequal access to these factors (ibid).

The elucidation of the endocrine system would lead to the isolation of the growth hormone in the 1950s and the identification of other hormones such as estrogen and testosterone that influence growth, further opening up the idea of height augmentation (or suppression) through hormonal therapy, and adding hormones as another variable in the determination of height and height differences (Allen and Fost, 1990). Science writers Susan Cohen and Christine Cosgrove (2009), documenting how the “medical-pharmaceutical complex” has sought to control growth for half a century, wrote of estrogen being used to suppress girls’ growth in the 1950s, and expensive growth hormone shots being administered in the United States and France from the 1960s to the 1980s, initially to boys with “growth hormone deficiency” but also to those with parents concerned about their sons’ short stature.

Heredity, however, continues to be seen as the major factor in determining height: the current consensus among geneticists is that that “heritability” of height is 80% (Silventoinen and others, 2003; Yang and others, 2010); the rest can be attributed to nutrition and environmental factors. When I was in medical school, we were taught a simple formula for estimating a child’s final height based on the height of his or her parents, a formula known as ‘mid-parental height’:

Boys:

$$\underline{\text{Final height} = \frac{\text{Father's height} + \text{Mother's height} + 13}{2}}$$

2

Girls:

$$\underline{\text{Final height} = \frac{\text{Father's height} + \text{Mother's height} + 5}{2}}$$

2

Even the geneticists, however, acknowledge the decisive influence of environmental factors, and one consequence of the biomedical understanding of height as something that is *malleable* is the pathologization of short stature and its correlation with poor health outcomes. The strong correlation between height and nutritional and health

status of children is such that the UNICEF has called it ‘the indicator of choice for measuring progress towards reducing undernutrition’ (UNICEF, 2013). This, in turn, has informed the global public health concern for “stunting” or “underheight”<sup>7</sup>, which I saw in my fieldsite in the form of nutrition officials measuring children regularly and giving them food and vitamin supplements.

Economic historians, concerned with the height of populations—and not individuals—have also pointed out that more than specific factors (i.e. nutrition), it is the overall socioeconomic milieu that leads to taller stature (Steckel, 1995). The economic historian John Komlos has written numerous works comparing different populations in different times, and found a near-universal pattern of wealthier countries having taller people, and within countries, the rich being taller than the poor (Komlos and Snowdon, 2005); this analysis has also extended to people of different occupations (see Komlos, 1994). Provocatively, some economists also suggest that the elites of Asia, Europe, and Africa now have the same height, suggesting that as nations reach the same standard of living, differences in height disappear (Martorell and Habicht, 1986).

Importantly for my study, however, Steckel (1996:157) makes a caveat that “Far-Eastern children and adults are an exception that may have a substantial genetic basis”, which means that even when standards of living have increased, there is a plateau – a ceiling as it were – in height potential dictated by genetics in places like Japan (Tanner and others, 1982) and arguably, the Philippines.

To date, the relative contributions of these various factors on an individual’s height remain a subject of debate (McEvoy and Visscher, 2009), but what is clear is there exists height differences among individuals and populations by virtue of different socio-economic and genetic factors, which influence, but do not fully determine, height.

### Making sense of the ‘height premium’

The ‘height premium’ is the notion that tallness confers various social and economic advantages (Komlos, 1996; Case and others, 2009). Various studies have correlated tallness with better education, higher income (Heineck, 2005; Case and Paxson, 2008; Sohn, 2015), workplace success (Judge and Cable, 2004; Case and Paxson, 2006), and leadership positions (Lindqvist, 2012). For men, additional benefits include longevity<sup>8</sup> (Davey Smith and others, 2000; Deaton, 2007), attractiveness (Shepperd and Strathman, 1989), mating success (Pawlowski and others, 2003), and better quality of life in general (Komlos, 1994).

Since ancient times, notions of physiognomy, which was grounded on the central

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7 The National Statistics Coordinating Board (NSCB) defines both terms as “[referring] to the child’s height is (sic) less than that of normal children of the same age.” (NSCB, 2008)

8 Although for this last association evidenced is mixed, with shortness also posited to be associated with long life (see Samaras and Storms, 1992; Samaras and others, 2003).

premise that mental and emotional characteristics can be derived from external appearances (Twine, 2002), ascribed superior virtues to tall men, and undesirable ones to those of short stature. The cultural historian Tamsyn Barton (1994) writes of how short stature, among other physical features, were used by the Roman *rhetors* to denigrate political opponents. Biblical scholar Mikael Parsons (2001) cites Greco-Roman ‘physiognomic consciousness’ in explaining the depiction of Biblical character Zaccheus as “small in stature”, adding that in the ancient world, “smallness in physical stature was generally seen in physiognomic terms as reflective of ‘smallness in spirit’” (ibid: 53). In the late nineteenth century, these ideas persisted in Western thought. British polymath Francis Galton for instance claimed that criminals were typically of short stature (Cowan, 1972). Coeval with, and related to, this thinking, physical anthropologists saw stature as a mark of racial difference, and by implication, tallness as a sign of racial superiority. These fields, though largely discredited today, would thus explain the advantages of tallness as a function of one’s *intrinsic* superiority by virtue of race or personality.

Building on evolutionary theory and in studies that show that taller men have greater reproductive success and a higher chance of having (more) partners, evolutionary psychologists have proposed that the ‘height premium’ is a result of sexual selection (Nettle, 2002; Pavolvski and others, 2003).

Finally, in an attempt to make sense of “heightism” other than on strictly evolutionary terms, social psychologists have advanced various explanations including the *interpersonal dominance theory* or the idea that tall people project “dominance” and are thus more likely to win confrontations with competitors (Stulp and others, 2015). Persico and others (2004), using childhood longitudinal surveys in the US and UK, suggested that tallness led to “social capital” during adolescence and greater participation in activities, resulting in “*non-cognitive*” (*i.e. social*) skills that are behind the “height premium” in employment. Case and Paxson (2008), using similar data, on the other hand posit that it is *cognitive factors* that play a larger role in the height premium, proposing that the insulin-like growth factors that stimulate neural growth alongside physical growth.

Meanwhile, data from Indonesia (Sohn, 2015) and the Philippines (Haddad and Bouis, 1991) suggest that for developing countries, *greater physical capacity* that results from greater height explains the premium, particularly for jobs that require physical labor.

The above are just some of the explanations. Case and Paxson (2008) though leaning more towards cognitive factors, acknowledge that other explanations may be at work, especially in different settings like labor markets for manual work in developing countries. Summing up the various research on the topic, Lundborg and others (2009:1) conclude that “there is to date no consensus on which factors that fully explain the



height premium.”

### Height and the social sciences

Although they are few and far between, there have also been sociological studies on height. In 1971, the sociologist Saul Feldman called for a “sociology of stature” (Feldman, 1971), and pointed out how height is valorized in American society, and consequently, shortness is problematized independent of other forms of discrimination (“Behavior: Heightism”, 1971: par. 1):

No matter what his race, creed or financial status, the American male under 5 ft. 8 in.—the height of the average American man—is a victim of discrimination.

Feldman pointed out that these valuations of height are learned in school, as when shorter boys learn that they have more difficulty in courtship compared to their shorter counterparts (Feldman, 1975). Sociologists have since charted the extent of this “heightism”: Cameron (2012) looked at the depictions of (relatively) short athletes like Lionel Messi (5’7), concluding that the hypermasculinist nature of sports has led to the marginalization and problematization of short athletes. Butera (2008) interviewed short males and tall females, seeking to “politicize height by critically exploring its place within gendered networks of power”. In her analysis, she concluded, like Cameron, that height is a hegemonic, gender-based structure. She called for an ethnography of height, saying that it would “greatly facilitate an understanding of heightism and how it truly affects people” (ibid: 98).

Her call is timely. While sociology has established the existence of a “heightist” premise, and has advanced some explanations—anthropology has, for the most part, neglected this topic, and thus, we lack a grounded understanding of how exactly “heightism” operates in the everyday lives of people in various contexts. In what can be a forerunner to this kind of study, anthropologist Thomas Gregor (1979), in a magazine article based on his ethnography of the Mehinaku of central Brazil, noted that stature is closely associated to status: taller men have more privileges (he demonstrated that every inch increase in male height is associated with increased number of girlfriends) while very short men are pejoratively called *peritsi* and were widely ridiculed by the community members. He showed that while height is believed to be inherited, sexual abstinence and discipline during adolescence are also seen as decisive factors in determining one’s adult height. Overall, Gregor’s work shows how height can be a pervasive motif in a society<sup>9</sup>, but rather than search for a basis for this bias ethnographically, he confines himself to speculating that the advantages of height may be explained by the ‘tendency to value large things’ and the ‘political advantages’ of being tall, implying that the ‘height premium’ draws from an inherent advantage. Unfortunately, Gregor did not pursue the topic and I have not been able to find ethnographic work on height since.

<sup>9</sup> Gregor also noted that his own height (6’0) worked to his advantage while doing fieldwork.

Joan Ablon's study of families with dwarf children in the United States (Ablon, 1990) is a notable exception, and her reflection of shortness as being a different category of difference is insightful:

“...dwarfs are usually not physically disabled or handicapped in the general sense of these terms. As one parent said: ‘Their bodies are just packaged a little differently’ The difference of smallness is, however, a crucial symbolic difference in a society where tall stature is prized.”(1990:880).

Dwarfism, however, is a ‘dramatic’ condition, as Ablon herself calls it. In my thesis, my argument is that *even just a few inches can make a difference*, and thus I am concerned not just about dramatic differences in height but also marginal ones. Why wear a shoe that confers an additional four inches of height? Why drink a growth supplement in the hope of one or two inches more?

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An anthropological approach to height can dialogue with the various disciplines that have studied it by offering historical and ethnographic insights that, as I argue, have been largely overlooked. While biology has sought to explain the physiology and mechanisms of growth through nutrition and genetics (among others), anthropology can furnish us with the necessary corrective of factoring in the role of cultural practices in structuring — and being structured by — these mechanisms.

While evolutionary psychology may consider tallness as an inherent advantage of members of the human species, an anthropological approach does not take the height premium as a given, but instead looks at the historical and social contingency of present-day meanings and materialities of height. Even if it emerges that a regard for tallness is a cultural universal, as Thomas Gregor (1979) suggested in his informal survey of the Human Resources Area Files, the specificities of this “regard” would vary from one place to another, and the fact that growth supplements are popular in the Philippines, but not in Indonesia (the only growth supplement in the Indonesian MIMS drug listing is Growee, a Philippine product) should lead us to interrogate the specific conditions of possibility for the ways in which height is viewed in the field.

While psychologists and economic historians alike have viewed height—of individuals and populations—as a measure or indicator of success, health, income equity, and overall development, these studies omit the possibility that height itself can generate advantages for its bearer, and is at least co-productive of the “height premium”. They also generalize height’s advantages without critically examining such claims, much less fleshing out the kinds of tensions, contradictions, or contestations which social anthropology thrives on. Surely, not all tall men have benefited from the “height premium”, and we cannot conflate their experiences with that of their more fortunate

counterparts. In fact, an anthropological study should not start from the assumption there is such a singular thing as a 'height premium': perhaps height confers multiple benefits that vary with different factors, including the nature of the jobs and the socio-economic context of the populations studied.

In sum, an ethnography of height can refine our understanding of the role(s) height plays in a given society. But an ethnography of height does not just contribute to studies on height, but to anthropological theory. In its attempt to transcend the borders of the "physical" and the "social", an anthropology of human stature can also attend the question of the role of the body in modernity: how the it can be a bearer of value; a marker of identity and difference; and even a source of 'capital'.

### **Research framework: height as body capital**

I seek to locate my study on height within the corpus of work known as the anthropology of the body, which has in the past three decades opened up the body as a valid and vital object of study in anthropology. In a departure from "black boxing" the body as a province of the biological sciences, social scientists have moved from recognizing the existence of a "social body" (Douglas, 2004[1970]) and a "body politic" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) to rejecting these distinctions as analytically unhelpful, as, by demarcating a "physical body" from a "social body", they foreclose the possibilities inherent in letting go of these untenable divisions. Many anthropologists now view bodies as "assemblages of practices, discourses, images, institutional arrangements, and specific places and projects" (Lock and Farquar, 2007). This perspective allows us to attend to the physical and biological reality of bodies, and at the same time, their contingency in the practices and discourses that surround them, without privileging one or the other.

Thus, rather than striving to define what the body is, it would suffice, for the purposes of the study, to recognise the body as both signifying and acting, signified and acted upon, *meaningful* in different ways to different people, but also material in both a *physical* and *biological* sense.

Earlier, I laid out three of my central premises: namely, height is relational, height is a biological and social construction, and that it can be a form of "body capital". In developing these premises, I engage with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly with his notion of the "forms of capital". Bourdieu, inspired by Marxist theory (see Beasley-Murray, 2000), identified forms of capital alongside the economic: social, symbolic, cultural, and physical. In his various formulations of this notion, two forms of capital relate to the body: the physical, that is, the performance of labor; and 'embodied cultural capital', which he defines in these terms:

Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that,

in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, Bildung, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand (so that all effects of delegation are ruled out) (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-244).

Thus, for Bourdieu, the body is a source of capital in terms of its ability to perform manual labor (i.e. physical capital), and in terms of what it can symbolise or project (symbolic capital), and also through the mannerisms, postures, and behaviours that are done with it (i.e. cultural capital). Applying this conceptual apparatus, Wacquant (1995) saw boxers' bodies as a form of 'bodily capital': one that boxers see as an investment and develop through training, care, and discipline. Hutson (2013) wrote that for health authorities in the fitness industry, "your body is your business card", and the capital of having a good body can enable forms of authority in itself. Diphoorn (2015) documents how private security guards in Durban, South Africa possessed "masculinized bodily capital" that allowed them to project sovereign power.

Alex Edmonds (2010), writing about plastic surgery in Brazil also saw beauty as a form of capital, suggesting that the body's very appearance can have value. He writes:

...attractiveness becomes an exchangeable form of physical capital. Beauty work can be embraced as a means to compete in "markets" of sexual-affective relationships or in uncertain service economies. The value of attractiveness—and the beauty work that maintains it—thus reflects larger economic regimes in consumer capitalism." (Edmonds 2010: 32)

What all these studies show, ethnographically, is that people find value in *certain* bodies, and towards this end, they engage in various practices — 'body work' or 'beauty work' — to make these bodies conform to these regimes of value.

In my study, I propose to look at height in terms of bodily capital as a way of making sense of how people try to "accumulate" it through "body projects" (Shilling, 2012), and at the same time, in the ways it is converted to other forms of capital. One does not "train" like a boxer to be tall, and height is not as amenable to modification as compared to the shape of one's nose, or the size of one's breasts. But perhaps we are making an assumption that does not hold up under close examination: from the salt-feeding of Navajo children (Gregor, 1979) to the modern day surgical practice of leg-lengthening in China (Qiu, 2009), the height of human beings has always been a subject of tinkering and (attempted) modification, with parents going to great lengths to achieve tallness for their children (growth hormone therapy in the US was estimated by Lee and others [2006] to cost \$52,634 per inch increase). And in my fieldsite, people

are trying to make children grow taller by giving them vitamins, feeding them with certain foods, and encouraging them to do various practices, from stretching their spine in the morning to jumping on New Year's Eve.

The sociologist Chris Shilling (2012) pointed out that the body has become the site of identity and value in late modernity and thus people are working on their bodies as "projects". His perspective is useful in helping us look at the body as a source of value, particularly in late modernity which has furnished conditions (i.e. globalization, mass mediatization) for the commodification of bodies. Building on this approach, however, I also look at the historical contingency of these "body projects", and consider their *sociality* instead of constituting them as practices done by individuals with and for their own bodies. In Puerto Princesa, young people and their parents and the health workers seek to make taller bodies.

Looking at "height-making" as a "body project" brings in the additional element of uncertainty. How does this element of uncertainty inform the efficacies that result from these practices? How do actors negotiate the contradictions in height being a biological given and its being a modifiable attribute? These very uncertainties and contradictions, I argue, make height an even more important source of capital. For height is very much like beauty in the way it relates to other hierarchies of value, as Alex Edmonds puts it so concisely:

Beauty hierarchies do not simply mirror other hierarchies of wealth or status. Rather, it is precisely the gap between aesthetic and other scales of social position that makes attractiveness such an essential form of value and all-too-often imaginary vehicle of ascent for those blocked from more formal routes of social mobility. While beauty is unfair in that it appears to be "awarded" to the morally undeserving, it can also grant power to those excluded from other systems of privilege based in wealth, pedigree, or education (2010:20).

Arguably, height is less "random" than beauty, given its associations with good nutrition and better quality of life. But even if we take these biomedical studies at face value, there are too many variables, and height remains an attribute that defies prediction. Children of poor families can become tall, and there are many short "rich kids", just as "the elite are not always good looking" (Edmonds, 2010:20). This element of uncertainty animates height as a form of capital that is *seemingly* within reach of even poor families and further impels the pursuit of "body projects".

There are a number of further analytic benefits of looking at height as a form of capital. First, by being counted as *one among different* forms of capital, it allows us to moderate our claims of height's significance. Height matters, but it is not all that matters. Even within the body itself, a normative breadth and width are capital for those who belong to the fitness industry, as Hutson (2013) would certainly note. Paying attention to the

vertical is not to detract from these other dimensions, but to help fill its void in the anthropological literature.

Secondly, looking at height as capital allows us to make sense of contestations and resistance, as when Jasper (19, 5'4) claims that it is okay for him not to be tall, because he speaks English well and can charm the ladies just as effectively, or when Lizette (19, 4'5) says that her being a member of their student council — and her leadership skills — have earned for her the respect of her classmates and thus she does not get bullied.

Finally, looking at height as capital allows us to disentangle it with the individuals themselves. Just as security guards are a “bodily capital” for security agencies, young people’s heights can also signify various “goods” or “values” for their parents. Rather than view body capital of height as bounded to individuals, we can see it as located in a *field* of social and institutional relations. This notion of the ‘field’ is another of Bourdieu’s concepts that I invoke throughout this work, as it underscores the relationality of capital. For Bourdieu, the field is the ‘space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy dominant positions in the different fields’ (Bourdieu, 1996:215). If the body is capital, then we must also see this field as corporeal, mindful of the relations between bodies as the source of their value in a given space, and material, mindful of the relations between bodies and the physical environment.

Looking at height as body capital, as with other studies that make use of capital as framework for human action, risks creating the impression of a mechanistic or strictly calculating view of people. I want to be clear: taking this view does not mean that height is *solely* capital, nor does it imply that actors necessarily see it as such. As Reischer and Koo (2004:308) put it: “Social actors appropriate and manipulate the body’s symbolic capacities for their own ends, though this project is not necessarily a conscious endeavour.”

Moreover, even as aspects of the body, like height, may be seen as a form of capital and is thus “worked on” through various height-making practices, it is also ‘lived’ and ‘experienced’ by young people in their everyday lives, its materiality inexorable in situations where it distinguishes and defines relationalities, as when schoolchildren are made to fall in line according to height during Monday flag ceremonies. Parents readily associate being tall as an advantage in finding jobs, but for the young people, being tall means feeling confident in front of their teachers, feeling ‘cool’ in front of their peers, and feeling good in front of the mirror. In this research, I recognize this *phenomenology* of height: that is, the fact that it is a *material* experience; valuable not just as an asset for the future, but also an *embodied* attribute for the present.



## Plan of the dissertation

Premised on the notion that colonial encounters are both cultural and bodily encounters that shape the meanings and materialities of height in the country, Chapter 1, “**Little Brown Brothers**”, presents the American period (1898-1946) as a significant moment when scientific racism, biomedicine, public health, sports, and a nascent bureaucracy intersected in the construction of height as an important attribute of individuals and populations. In relation to the “tall” Americans, Filipinos were depicted as “short”, and the attention to children’s growth, the rise of sports, and the establishment of a bureaucracy all contributed to height as a mark of health and as a parameter of inclusion (and exclusion) in certain roles in society that persist to the present day.

In Chapter 2 “**The Making of Height**”, I present height as a “body project”, seeking to illuminate the different practices are done to make children grow taller, as well as the logics behind them. Breastfeeding, nutrition, circumcision, and the use of growth supplements emerge as common practices. I pay special attention to the latter, given its recent emergence and amenability to further analysis as a product that has a ‘social life’. I end by making sense of the logic and beliefs behind these practices, but at the same time ascribing an ‘efficacy’ on these practices that rests on the hope they provide amid the uncertainty.

Inspired by Bourdieu’s reminder of the importance of pedagogy in social reproduction, Chapter 3, “**Stature and Schooling**”, illustrates how the meanings of height are “learned” in schools and consequently embodied by children as habitus. My survey reveals that this acculturation is pervasive, structuring the very social topography of events like flag ceremonies, determining who gets bullied, who gets to become part of the basketball team, and who gets to participate in beauty pageants. At the same time, textbooks themselves reflect societal views on height in different ways. In conceptualizing the school as a ‘field’, I demonstrate how height is a form of capital, appropriated not just by the young people but the schools themselves, without them necessarily reflecting on the role of height and its ramifications.

In Chapter 4, “**Height and Employment**”, I show the pervasiveness of height requirements — both explicit and implicit — in various jobs, using both textual and ethnographic material. I also show how young people confront and negotiate these requirements. These forms of institutionalizations structure young people’s aspirations and further reinforce the convertibility of height as ‘economic capital’.

In my conclusion, I bring together some of the themes that I have raised in the chapters, and reflect on what these themes can offer in terms of explaining the meanings and materialities of height in the lives of young people, and more theoretically, the role of the body in society. Finally, I end with a consideration of the ways in which the vertical dimension has structured human experience and offers new insights for anthropology.

## Coda

Every beauty pageant ends with a Q&A (“Question and Answer”) portion, which is highly anticipated by the audience as it creates many opportunities for the contestants to make mistakes — whether by not knowing what to answer, or how to say it in English — the preferred language of the stage. Grammatical errors, although common in everyday speech, are fair game in the pageant, betraying a high regard for the English language that is at odds with the inability of most of the youths to converse in it fluently despite many years of formal language instruction in school. To go about this language problem, handlers like Voltaire make their contestants memorize all kinds of flowery answers to common questions, such as “What is the role of education in nation-building?” and “How can the youth make a difference?”

Though more of an entertainment for the audience, the questions and the contestants’ answers do reflect some of the realities in the city. Asked what they would do if they were elected as *Mutya ng Palawan*, one contestant replied that she will keep Palawan “clean and green”, an innocent answer but one that is meaningful in light of attempts by politicians to water down environmental laws and build coal-fired power plants. Another said that she will promote scholarships, saying that there are many out-of-school youths in her barangay, and for good measure, she threw in national hero Jose Rizal’s much-quoted saying: “Education is the hope of the nation.”

The Q&A portion is meant to show that the pageants are not just about physical appearances—and is meant to celebrate “model youths” not just “models”. In some pageants, the contestants’ scores are reset and thus the Q&A will determine who among the finalists will be the winner. Left unsaid, however, is the fact that to get to that stage to begin with, one must meet certain physical criteria, including a height requirement of 5’4 (163 cm). The “beauty of the mind” (as one pageant put it) may be worth 30%, but you have to fulfill the beauty of the face (40%) and the body (30%) to get there.

This brings me to the final theme I wish to name in this introduction: the *unarticulated embeddedness of height in society*. Like the high heels of beauty queens that are often hidden by long gowns or distracted from view by the young ladies’ gorgeous faces or stunning swimwear, the inequalities brought about by height are an issue that is obscured by many that may at first glance seem more salient for the youth in Puerto Princesa: the lack of economic and educational opportunities; high-risk behaviors; the inequities between urban and rural areas, the disparities between the rich and the poor; or other phenomenon that relate to the body such as dieting, skin whitening, and cosmetic surgery. Yet, in the context of a city where young people and their parents alike perceive possibilities as limited, especially for those whose educational and social backgrounds do not live up to what is required of their dreamed-of futures, *height matters*, and the extra few inches conferred (or promised) — by good genes, proper



diet, enough sleep, high heels, growth supplements, or plain good fortune — can make a big difference.



Fig. 6 - Contestants pose in the stage in a modelling search called “Fashionista King and Queen in the City Coliseum. Photo by the author.



## CHAPTER 1

### Little brown brothers: Height and the Philippine-American colonial encounter (1898-1946)

In 1936, American writer William Saroyan (1908-1981) published a short story about a 6-foot tall, 250-pound Filipino wrestler named ‘Ramon Internationale’ who fights a Russian opponent (Saroyan, 1936). In the story, Ramon was instructed by his coach to lose, but he did not want to disappoint his countrymen — “all the little Filipinos, not one of them more than a hundred and ten pounds in weight” — who had bet heavily on him. In the end, he refuses to leave the wrestling ring until declared the victor, fending off ‘a hundred policemen’ in his brave, intransigent stand.

Set in San Francisco at a time when the Philippines was a colony of the United States, and when Filipino men had begun to migrate to the US West Coast in search of employment, the work would be appreciated by literary critics for its sense of humour that “bordered on the absurd” and a sympathy for the underdog (Balakian, 1998). Far more interesting for me, however, were the repeated descriptions of the Filipinos in the story as short of size, starting from the very first sentence. How did being “little” become their defining characteristic? How come the spectators in the wrestling match “couldn’t understand how a Filipino could grow” to be as big as the protagonist when they saw him for the first time? And what led the author to entitle the story “Our little brown brothers the Filipinos”?

In this “episodic history”<sup>10</sup>, I demonstrate how the American colonial period in the Philippines (1898-1946) became a turning point in the way height was viewed — and how it materialised — in the country, by presenting the different, interrelated domains in which this turn was accomplished. Philippine history has traditionally been cast as a succession of precolonial and colonial encounters that ultimately led to the “invention of the Filipino” (Kramer, 2006), i.e. the formation of a national identity. My approach is to look at one such encounter — that between the Filipinos and Americans — not just as a cultural but also as a *bodily* encounter (cf. Ballantyne and Burton, 2005). Or, in the language of David Arnold who called for a more corporeal account of colonialism, this approach entails looking at the body as ‘a site of colonizing power’ (Arnold, 1993:8). With Ann Stoler, whose works stressed the “relational terms” between colony and metropole (Stoler, 1995), I hold that one underlying logic of these corporeal encounters is a *comparative paradigm*, one which saw Filipino bodies against those of Americans, and one which imposed a normativity against which the former were measured.

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10 This approach is inspired by Philippine historian Vicente Rafael, who explains: “Where the epic, with its concern for the heroic, seeks to form the very consciousness of the people whom it speaks to and about, the episodic digresses, circling around recurring motifs and recalcitrant obsessions... Dwelling in the shadow of details, they convey the eventhood of events, that is, the conditions of possibility and impossibility for the historical emergence of the nation and its various states (Rafael, 2000:4).”

This is not to make the presumption that height did not matter before the American colonial period. In epics and old dictionaries that Filipino scholars have used to draw inferences about pre-Hispanic culture (Scott, 1994), tallness was seen as a mark of distinction, associated with a good, well-proportioned body (as gleaned from terms like *mahawas* that subsumed both attributes) and heroic beauty (Eugenio, 2007). However, the Spanish, who ruled much of the country from 1565-1898, never saw or generalized the Filipinos as a short people (they reserved that description to indigenous peoples which they called '*negritos*'—literally 'little blacks'). Up to the late nineteenth century, at the twilight of their empire, Spanish descriptions of Filipinos' heights were unremarkable: '*de estatura regular*'; of average height (de Moya, 1882), and this was despite the existence of colonial hierarchy based on race and one's degree of affinity to Spain. Height may have been a mark of distinction of individuals (the national hero Jose Rizal was said to have been insecure about his short stature<sup>11</sup>) before the American period, but my argument is that its materiality was *heightened* in the new colonial (bodily) encounter.

My approach is not intended to deny relevance to other spatial dimensions of the human body such as breadth and width; to height's companion parameter, weight; or to other physical attributes like skin color and facial characteristics. Height, however, was often the first among these dimensions to be described and highlighted in colonial texts, and the one that had particular resonances in the various aspects of American rule. As I present these domains and elaborate on these resonances, I hope that the rationales for my particular focus on height would become more compelling.

In various representational practices, from scientific works to popular discourses, height became a marker of difference between Americans and Filipinos, serving to legitimize the former's vision of a benevolent colonialism that would "civilize" what they termed their



Fig. 1 - Note the depiction of height differences in this juxtaposition of a Philippine scout and an American officer in 1904. (Fritz Kredel, Canvas Giclée)

11 See "The First Filipino" by Leon Ma. Guerrero (2010: 34)

“little brown brothers”. Physical anthropology, through anthropometry, gave quantitative form to these differences, and photography allowed their visual representation to be transported to the West. Together, these representational practices led to the (exaggerated) view of Filipinos’ being “short” and “little”, even as this view was also made possible by actual height differences between the colonizer and colonized.<sup>12</sup>

In the emerging field of public health, informed by new understandings of biomedicine and underpinned by modernist, eugenicist ideas of progress (cf. Petersen and Lupton, 1996), shortness was problematized and height was treated as something that could be modified and improved through scientific approaches such as better nutrition and physical education. Consequently, height became a measure of individual and population growth. Here, too, anthropometry figured as the means to quantify progress, and although it was not intended for the typologization of races, the idea of an “average height” was sustained for epidemiological and clinical purposes. As product and fulfillment of the colonial government’s mission of civilizing the ‘natives’, at stake in these growth measurements and public health programs was the Americans’ legitimacy — and Filipinos’ claims to autonomy and independence.

The rise of physical education and athletics created new *utilities* and advantages for tallness. Informed by “muscular Christianity” (Putney, 2009; Macleod, 2004) and pedagogical ideals that saw physical education as just as important as (and required for) academic and mental development, physical education and athletics played a prominent role in the public school system. This move furthered the importance of height in the everyday lives of children, an importance that only grew through the years as sports, initially baseball and later basketball, gained traction both nationally and globally.

Finally, height figured in the establishment of the uniformed services, following the custom of the US and other Western countries of imposing height requirements for soldiers, policemen, firemen, and prison guards.<sup>13</sup> From the 1930s onwards, as the Philippines prepared for the threat of a Japanese invasion, the (relatively) tall soldiers were valorized as ideal Filipinos to gain more support for the military attract more applicants. Through these processes, tallness became associated with military and state power, job security, prestige, and attractiveness.

These emergent notions of height were reflected, refracted, and negotiated in Filipinos’ own discourses, whether in the novel genre of Philippine literature in English or in the

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12 The average height of Filipino males in the early 1900s ranged from 161-163 cm (Murray, 2002), while the average American male was 171 cm. (Steckel, 1995). In contrast, Carrion and Castejon (1998) reported that the heights of Spanish army conscripts in 1900 were around 161 cms - there would have been little or no difference with Filipinos.

13 My use of gendered masculine terms for these occupations is deliberate, as these professions were virtually entirely masculine at the time, and the texts I analysed make this implicit assumption.

more traditional rubric of newspaper commentaries and essays. While some of these texts challenged the ways Filipinos were represented by the colonial regime, most of them reinforced the notions about height espoused in American and previous periods: as a marker of difference and distinction, and as an obstacle to overcome.

Taken together, all these domains made height a visible, *material* aspect of Filipino bodies—both as individuals and as a population — one that located them in a racial hierarchy, classified them as *stunted* or *normal* in public health parlance, and included or excluded them in school activities and employment opportunities. In what follows, I will elaborate on these different domains.

### **Height in American representations of their new subjects**

Whether in the journalistic coverage of the Philippine-American War, scientific papers that described Filipinos in taxonomic, anthropometric terms, in official statements from the colonial government, or in works of fiction and non-fiction about the Philippines, shortness figured as one of the identifying marks of Filipinos in colonial discourses, and the term “little brown brother” that the Americans used for their colonial subjects spoke of a brotherhood that was grounded on this physical inequality. Alongside these discursive ways of representation, the identification of Filipinos as short was also made possible by the novel medium of photography and exhibits like the St. Louis Fair of 1904, where Filipinos were exhibited in American soil like zoo animals, seen by the millions who visited the fair and millions more who saw photographs and news stories from this months-long exhibition. Despite the diversity of ethnicities within the Philippines, it is the more ‘primitive’ tribes who were typically shorter than the lowland Filipinos that were often measured, presented, or exhibited in these practices. This selective representation further dramatized the height differences between Filipinos and Americans.

All these representational techniques and practices helped construct a typological Filipino body—one that is diminutive, furnishing the physical basis for Americans to conceive of Filipinos as their “little brown brothers”, helping assert their legitimacy as a civilizing mission.

### Height in colonial discourses

During the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, Americans were divided between those who subscribed to the idea of a “Manifest Destiny” that entitled them to expand their borders to the other side of the Pacific (Kramer, 2006), and those who were fiercely opposed to the idea of colonialism, saying that it would be antithetical to America’s own anti-colonial beginnings. In 1898, as the Americans were contemplating the annexation of the Philippines, an “American Anti-Imperialist League” was formed, counting among its members Mark Twain, who judged his government’s intentions



in the Philippines with these words: “we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines” (Zwick, 2007:5).

Regardless of their stand, however, many Americans were interested to know more about the Philippines. Intrepid journalists traveled to Manila to cover the Spanish-American War (1898) and the ensuing Philippine-American War (1899-1902)<sup>14</sup> and those few who happened to have lived in the Philippines became in demand for their privileged insights. Their accounts are a rich material from which we can uncover bodily representations of Filipinos and how height figured in them.

For instance, writing about his “yesterdays in the Philippines” from 1894-95, Joseph Stevens in 1899 published an account which described Filipinos in these terms:

The houses, as well as the people, are very low of stature, and as we walked along the narrow, almost cunning streets, our shoulders level with the eaves of many of the shanties, and above the heads of many of the people, we felt indeed like giants.<sup>15</sup>

A similar trope of “feeling like giants” was used the year before by journalist Murat Halstead in describing Filipino soldiers:

The men are of small stature, from 5 feet to 5 feet 6 inches in height, and weigh from 110 to 130 pounds. Compared with them our men from Colorado and California seemed like a race of giants.<sup>16</sup>

Another passage from the same work reads:

The natives (Tagalos) are of small stature, averaging probably 5 feet 4 inches in height, and 120 pounds in weight for the men, and 5 feet in height, and 100 pounds in weight for the women. Their skin is coppery brown, somewhat darker than that of the mulatto.<sup>17</sup>

Just a few years later, when America’s foothold in the country has been secured, these



Fig. 2 - As the US contemplated annexing the Philippines, depictions of Filipinos in newspapers greatly exaggerated their short statures vis-a-vis ‘Uncle Sam’, who symbolised the American body politic. (Minneapolis Journal, July 30, 1898)

14 The Americans called it the “Philippine Insurrection” or the “Tagalog Insurgency” so as not to legitimize the pre-existence of a Philippine republic prior to its colonial rule (Kramer, 1996).

15 Stevens, Joseph (1899). “Yesterdays in the Philippines”. NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons. p. 33

16 Halstead, Murat (1898). “The Story of the Philippines”. Our Possessions Publishing Co. p. 124

17 Ibid, p. 101

depictions would be taken up by professional anthropologists who saw the Philippines, with its various “wild tribes”, as a fertile ground for research, their interests coinciding with a nascent colonial bureaucracy eager to know more about its new possessions. Pels (1997) reminds us that anthropology in the colonial encounter must be “conceptualized in terms of governmentality”: as it was “at the juncture of... technologies of domination and self-control”. Perhaps cognizant of this role, Daniel Brinton, ethnologist, wrote in the *American Anthropologist* (Brinton, 1899:122): “Now that the Philippine islands are definitely ours it behooves us to give them that scientific investigation which alone can afford a true guide to their proper management. ... [A] thorough acquaintance with the diverse inhabitants of the archipelago should be sought by everyone interested in its development.”

Daniel Folkmar, another anthropologist, measured all the inmates in New Bilibid Prison in 1903, hoping to come up with a catalogue of “Philippine types”. He called the prison an “anthropological laboratory” (Kramer, 2006:331). Prisoners were “disrobed” and their heads were plaster-cast for the purposes of both scientific publication and exhibition, in what Kramer (2006) described as “intersections of colonial state, racial knowledge, and exposition culture.” Bodily descriptions from efforts such as Folkmar’s are revealing for which particular parts of the body the Americans used as bases for comparison, hence rendering them visible (i.e. identifying, defining, and emphasizing them for these purposes). This sample passage is emblematic:

Ethnologically, the typical Filipino is described as of small stature, slender frame, brownish-yellow colour, symmetrical skull, prominent cheek-bones, nasal bridge low, nostrils prominent, eyes narrow, mouth large, with lips full but not thick, chin short, and round hair, smooth, straight, and thick.<sup>18</sup>

Comparing these passages with similar accounts during the Spanish period, what is notable is how descriptions became even more detailed, with more body parts and features described, and also laden with numbers, in keeping with the rise of “numerical thinking” in scientific and popular discourses from the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>19</sup> Arguably, it is also during this time when scientific racism reached its height in the Philippines and in the world, fuelling an interest in physical anthropology that was grounded in part by these racialized ideals.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Robinson, Albert Gr. *The Philippines: The War and the People; A Record of Personal Observations and Experiences*. 1901. Reprint. London: Forgotten Books, 2013. 176-7. Print.

19 Useful texts that detail this rise in quantification include “The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900” (1986) by Theodore Porter, and, in relation to governance, “The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning” (2002) by Alain Desrosières.

20 It was only in 1912 that Franz Boas debunked the idea of fixed characteristics by demonstrating, most dramatically for the biological thinking at the time, that head shape actually changed with the environment. Equally indicting to this idea was his finding that children of immigrants in the US are significantly taller than their parents (Boas, 1912).



Another notable point in these discourses is the use of American bodies as reference: *Compared with them our men are like giants*. Relationality, as I mentioned earlier, is a key logic in colonial encounters, and in these discourses we see how the body itself — i.e. bodily differences — set the terms for these relations.

This relationality has physical basis: in 1900, the height of men in the United States was 170 cm (5'7), compared to 160-163 cm (5'3-5'4) among men in the Philippines (Murray, 2002). In contrast, the average Spanish man in the same point in time was 164 cm (5'5): the difference between them and the Filipinos would not have been pronounced. Even so, the few inches of difference between the average Filipino and the average American would hardly suffice to make one a dwarf, and the other a giant.

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Alongside wartime accounts and scientific reports, we can also see Filipino bodily representations in public discourses, finding expression in the phrase “little brown brothers”. Attributed to William H. Taft, the first civil governor-general and later U.S. president (Wolff, 1991), this phrase encapsulated the dominant American view of the Filipino throughout the colonial encounter—and arguably beyond. The “brother” at the end of the phrase signifies familial affinity but one that has already been preceded by asymmetry: More than a description of color, “brown” was a classificatory gesture that located the Filipinos in a racial hierarchy that placed “whites” on top and “coloured people” underneath them. As for “little”, aside from plotting the Filipino in another axis of evolutionary/racial hierarchy, it had an “infantilizing effect”, which further justified and shaped the ideology of American colonialism: not just as a civilizing project, but as an act of paternal benevolence (cf. Kramer, 2006; Gems, 2002).<sup>21</sup> As Adas (1989) notes: “The attribution of childlike qualities to Africans and Asians served to bolster the civilizing-mission ideology” that justified the Western powers’ “dominance over colonized peoples.”<sup>22</sup>

The trope of the “little brown brother” gained traction in American popular discourse. In August 10, 1905, the *New York Times* carried a news story titled “Little brown brother accuses Mrs. Taggart” (1905), referring to the Filipino valet of an army officer as such. Three years later, a novel by writer Stanley Portal Hyatt was entitled “Little Brown Brother”<sup>23</sup>, in which Americans were routinely described as tall, and their Filipino counterparts, protagonists and antagonists alike, were often “short” and “little”.

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21 The “infantilization” of Filipinos has been well-documented by postcolonial Filipino scholars. Halili (2003:39-40) linked it to the process of racialization, pointing out the “child-like” representations of Filipinos in American cartoons posited their political immaturity. My reading of these representations, on the other hand, looks at the necessary physical preconditions - i.e. shortness - for this in-fantilization.

22 Adas also pointed out that there was a “pervasive nineteenth century belief that Africans and Asians thought and behaved like children”, attributing this view to technological superiority. I argue that the height differences furnished a physical basis for this belief.

23 Hyatt, Stanley (1908). “Little Brown Brother”

Caroline Shunk (2013:172), writing about her experiences in the Philippines in 1909, also lavishly attached the term “little brown” to various descriptions of the Filipinos:

Manila looked positively American after China; even clean and sweet- smelling by comparison. I felt almost affectionate toward our little brown Filipinos, comparing them with the Cantonese Chinese.

Similarly, on the social status of women, she comments (Ibid: 73):

The “little brown sister” occupies a higher position in the Philippines than do the women of China or Japan.

One 1917 short story for children tells of the visit of a young American to the Philippines. Written as a first-person narrative, the young protagonist says (Thomson, 1917: 1):

I found also my new and kind young friends: Fil; his sister Filippa; Fil’s boy playmate named Moro, who came from the large southern island; their parents and friends; and the good Padre. Each one of them was shorter and darker than I. Yet they said to me: “The Stars and Stripes, now our flag also, makes us all American brothers, which we will be always.”

Note the necessity of stipulating the “shortness” and “darkness” before acknowledging the “brother”; the disclaimers of difference before the recognition of unity. While Americans readily agreed to view Filipinos as “little” and “brown”, the brotherhood was faced with reluctance—if not outright disavowal, as this 1900s Army song (Hurley, 2011: 35) shows:

I’m only a common soldier man in the blasted Philippines  
They say I’ve brown brothers here but I don’t know what it means.  
I like the word fraternity, but I still draw the line -  
He may be a brother of William Howard Taft, but he ain’t no brother of mine.

### Photography and height representations

Filipinos were not just depicted in text, but, apart from and alongside them, in the newly-influential genre of photography. In photographs that circulated in magazines,



Fig. 3 - American writing about Filipinos emphasised their being “little”. (from Project Gutenberg; [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org))

newspapers, and scientific reports in the United States, Filipinos were presented as short, and this was dramatized by the selective use of indigenous peoples, and their juxtaposition with much taller Americans. By privileging certain bodies to represent the 'Filipino', photography flattened the diversity of bodies in the Philippines, reinforcing the idea that Filipinos were 'little'.

Photography has always been ascribed a representational power that was of particular importance in mediating colonial encounters. As Scroggins (2009: 3-4) writes:

Images from the colonies provided visual evidence for categorization, affirmation of previous notions and beliefs of the "Other", and were crucial for the "expansion and maintenance of European colonial power." The way in which photography became a tool for colonial control and power was that it allowed previous stereotypes to be fulfilled as visual representations. Therefore through photography, stereotypical beliefs influenced the representation of subjects within the photographs; photography enabled the transformation of a subject into what was perceived by Europeans as an object; an object to be categorized, defined and in essence dominated by the European powers.

Chief among the early photographers of Filipino bodies was Dean Worcester, the zoologist and amateur ethnologist who would become a prominent figure in the American colonial government in the Philippines. His use of photography is worth discussing, in relation to our approach of looking at colonial encounters as "bodily encounters":

Dean Worcester does not appear to have engaged in the formal anthropometric measurement that many professional ethnographers used. Instead, Worcester and his fellow photographers used juxtaposition in their photographs in order to convey size, and sometimes even used their own bodies as yardsticks. Such depictions of scale can be found throughout the Worcester archive. (Capozzola, n.d.)

In his ethnologic surveys around the Philippines, Dean Worcester gave disproportionate attention to the shorter indigenous peoples, much more than the urban, educated—and relatively taller—Christian Filipinos he encountered in Manila and in the lowlands. As Capozzola (n.d.) writes: "Images of urban, Westernized Filipinos were rare in Worcester's collection, which focused on the rural and tribal Filipinos of the country's more remote regions." Moreover, his technique of juxtaposition—using himself as a measuring stick alongside these Filipinos "to show relative size"—further dramatized the physical characteristics of Filipinos and how different they were from the Americans.

Photography was also a key component in physical anthropology. Daniel Folkmar's survey of prisons involved disrobing Filipino inmates in the Bilibid Prison and making them pose for photographs (Mallari, 2012), in what sociologist Resil Mojares

(1997) decried as “photography as rape”. This was a ‘rape’ not only in the act of being photographed against one’s will, but in the transformation of a human being into an object of research, something to be examined, organized into racial classificatory schemes, and decontextualized in the popular media. By serving as a visual representation that preserved and transported the visual bodily differences, photography played an important role in the (mis)representation of the Filipino bodies in the Western imaginary.

### The 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis

A pivotal moment in representation is the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, where actual Filipinos were “presented” to the American public in a “Philippine Exhibition” that became the most popular part of the entire fair. Though it was seen as an unintended consequence of what was ostensibly an attempt to portray the potentiality of the Filipinos for civilization and self-government, the the deliberate choice of the colonial officials (incidentally upon the advice of Dean Worcester) to bring the shorter, more “primitive” Negritos, Ifugaos, and Badjaos to represent the Philippines had the effect of reaffirming American notions of an uncivilized archipelago, and was detrimental to the image and reputation of Filipinos, as Jose Fermin (2004: xiii) writes: “Filipino tribes, passed on as representatives of the whole Filipino people, were exhibited as savages, headhunters, and dog eaters, a name that has stuck even today.” Visited by almost 20 million people (Gilbert, 2009), the cultural impact of this fair cannot be understated.

Moreover, both through the “living exhibits” of the villages and in an anthropological exhibition in which Folkmar’s and Worcester’s photographs, among others, were exhibited, a certain kind of Filipino body identity was presented: one that dramatized the physical differences between Americans and Filipinos, as Grindstaff (1999: 256-257) notes:

Differences to be observed by the Fairgoing lay scientist were presented first here as scientific indices of the ‘comparative and special anatomy of races and peoples,’ and



Fig. 4 - Dean Worcester poses with a Negrito man in Bataan, Luzon island. He himself captioned the photo: “Negrito man, type 1, and myself, to show relative size” (Univ. of Michigan)

included ‘measurements, charts, and diagrams, to show the methods and results of comparative studies in the physical structures of living races. Also [included are] instruments and appliances used in anthropometric investigations... The filtering mechanism of this mediating somatology introduced the Philippine people solely as scientific objects, items to be measured, quantified and compared to the normative body of the Fairgoer.

In the assemblage of peoples exhibited in the fair, the different ‘specimens’ of the tribes in the Philippines were also held up as objects of scientific study. Prof. R.S. Woodsworth was one of the physical anthropologists who conducted measurements and experiments of these peoples, and his findings were reported by the *New York Times* in these terms (“Primitive Races of Mankind and the Average American”, 1905):

Fifteen members of this tribe were measured, and the average height reached was 163 centimetres, or about five feet five inches. The Visayans were the second tallest group, averaging 161.9 centimetres [5’4]. The Filipinos proper, Tagalogs, Pampangas, Bicolos and Moros ranged in height from 161 [5’4], in the case of the last, to 161.6 [5’4] in that of the first named groups. Forty-one Pampasinans averaged 160.3 [5’3], and seventy-two Ilocanos, 160.6 [5’3] centimetres. The Tinguians dropped to 155 [5’0], just below the Bogobos, at 156.7 [5’1], and the Agorotes to 154 centimetres [5’0].

The Negritos were by far the smallest of the tribesmen. Thirteen specimens averaged scarcely 143.8 centimetres, or approximately four feet ten inches...

On the whole, the Philippine race which most nearly approached the standard set by the Americans in physical development were the Filipinos proper, although this does not hold true in stature and quickness...

Note, in the presentation of the data, the objectification accomplished by words like “specimens”, and the taxonomic register with which the data was presented. While acknowledging that there are different Filipino groups, they are seen as “tribesmen”. Moreover, as with other discursive and representational practices, the summary of the findings was presented in relation to “the standard set by the Americans”. Indeed, St. Louis was one more site where Filipino bodies were decontextualized, objectified, and in this intersection of science and colonialism, height again emerged as a key measure of difference between them and the normative bodies of the colonizers.

### Counter-discourses

Still, there were, to use Scott’s term, “cracks in the parchment”. While much of the colonial discourses typologized Filipinos into one body described in unflattering terms, other accounts portrayed certain Filipino groups or individuals differently. Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, an American woman describes “some” Filipinos in a



positive light. Note her ‘confessional’ tone, likely in response to a pre-existing prejudice about the physical appearance of Filipinos:

Some of them, it *must be confessed* (italics mine), are remarkably handsome. They inherit the oval face and regular features of the Spaniards, the magnificent eyes, smooth velvety skin, and the supple grace of the Malay. They have the courtesy of the one, the sweetness and kindness of the other.

In the St. Louis Fair itself, the response the Philippine Scouts elicited among the women threatened to undermine the colonial order that underwrote the Philippine Exhibition:

Toward the end of June 1904, certain Philippine Scouts had been observed strolling around the fairgrounds in the intimate company of young, white, female admirers and accepting their invitations to social gatherings. As the Post-Dispatch noted with some horror, this meant that Filipino troops at St. Louis were “now accepted as . . . social equal[s] in a widening circle” and considered “superior in attraction to the other uniformed men at the Fair.” (Kramer, 2006:276).

Height is not mentioned in these passages, but this very omission of height—first among the descriptors of the human body in dominant racial narratives—is in itself a pertinent negative that shows how bodily representations are arbitrary; there are other ways to talk about Filipinos other than as objects with measurements and anatomic descriptions. Outside the colonialist and racialized discourses, it was still possible to speak of some Filipinos as “remarkably handsome” and “superior in attraction”. These counter-discourses, understandably, provoked “horror” among the residents of St. Louis who could not accept Filipinos in such aesthetic esteem.

They were not alone. Throughout America, the dominant colonial discourse was that of a condescending kind, and while the “brotherhood” between the Americans and Filipino was tenuous and oftentimes contested, “littleness” became an uncontested part of Filipinos’ identity.

### **Height and the ‘birth of the clinic’**

The turn of the twentieth century was a revolutionary period in biomedical thinking. Germ theory had nullified long-held beliefs on pathophysiology, such as the humoral medicine that dated back to Galen (Anderson, 2006). As medicine became more specialized, pediatrics began to be conceptualized as a distinct branch of medicine, starting in Europe and later taken up by American physicians.<sup>24</sup> Informed by new scientific understandings and underpinned by modernist, eugenicist view of progress<sup>25</sup>,

<sup>24</sup> The first lectures on the diseases of childhood in the US were delivered by physician Abraham Jacobi in 1861; in 1888 he and collaborators formed the American Pediatric Society, and by 1900, there were full-time paediatricians in medical schools (Brodie, 1998)

<sup>25</sup> Sir Francis Galton, widely regarded as the founder of the eugenics movement, devoted considerable research in explaining how stature is inherited, and he believed that there was a strong connection between physical char-

governments involved themselves in health interventions, measuring health outcomes at the level of populations, abetted by the emergence of techniques of quantification and statistics, in what came to be known as public health (Rosen, 2015).

Height figured in this ‘birth of the clinic’<sup>26</sup> by serving as a visible, quantifiable measure of children’s health in scientific researches which sought to understand children’s growth and development. Informed by the knowledge that came out of these researchers, American public health system gave emphasis on children’s growth: children’s heights were regularly measured, and those falling short of the norm were labelled as ‘stunted’. Underpinning this categorization was an idea that there is such a thing as a ‘normal’ body—one of the notions espoused by the new scientific paradigm. As Vertinsky (2002: 96) explains: “The idea of an average or normal size and shape of person...is less a condition of human nature than a feature of modernising society. In many respects it is a nineteenth century concept that, through statistical revisions, became conflated with historical notions of the ideal body.”

Held against this bodily normativity, the short stature of Filipinos—while *naturalised* in racial discourses, was *problematized* as a medical pathology—one that the Americans could improve with their public health knowledge. Consequently, Filipinos’ claims for autonomy and independence found articulation in their own public health efforts, adding further importance to the growth of children.

### Height in understanding children’s growth

The Belgian mathematician Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874) was perhaps the first to systematically measure the heights of children<sup>27</sup>, and his methods were quickly taken

acteristics and mental ability. Succeeding eugenicists likewise emphasized the role of anthropometry in evaluating successful hereditary characteristics. Eugenics was widely accepted by the academic community in the US in the early twentieth century (Bashford and Levine, 2010).

26 This allusion to Foucault’s work reiterates the role of modernist views of progress and scientific dis-courses in setting the “conditions of possibility” for biomedical knowledge and practices (Foucault, 1973).

27 Tanner (1981) stresses that Quetelet’s philosophical inspiration was the idea that a *homme moyen* or “average man” existed, and that it could be discovered through numerical (i.e. statistical) methods. A second point is that the settings where he and succeeding investigators would conduct their studies were hospitals which allowed for a wide sample of children - something hitherto unavailable. Thus, Quetelet’s work could only have arisen in a milieu of biomedical and statistical advances.



Fig. 5 - St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that “little brown men are popular” among ladies at the fair, posing a threat to the racial-sexual boundaries. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 3, 1904).

up throughout Europe. Quetelet's main contribution was the idea that a pattern of distribution existed for human stature in a given population, and consequently, there was a *homme moyen*, an 'average man' who can represent the image of a population based on all their average values.

But what constitutes a "population"? Succeeding studies, with increasingly larger and more diverse samples and geographic range, would challenge Quetelet's assertion of a fixed distribution by finding growth differences between the working class and the rich; rural and urban children, and those with poor and better nutrition (Tanner, 1981). By the late nineteenth century, the idea that children's growth must be monitored had taken hold, finding in the schools a venue for monitoring and surveillance (Spencer, 1997:91). Various theories informed and surrounded this practice, including the view that height was linked with mental ability.<sup>28</sup>

In the Philippines, the first study on children's anthropometry took place within the first decade of American rule. In 1909, educator John Bobbit published an article called "The growth of Filipino children" (Bobbit, 1909), responding to the dearth of anthropometric data of children other than those who belonged to 'white races'. In this work, we can read a comparative paradigm that informs global public health to this day: "Besides determining growth-stages, a further aim of the study was to make a comparison of Philippine children with those of Europe or America in size and efficiency." (Ibid: 4)

Moreover, like many scientists of age, his notions of "race" affected his methodology: he excludes "mestizos" in his population in an attempt to study the "pure" Filipinos (Ibid: 4):

One cannot say that the students measured were all of pure Malay blood, so widespread is the infusion of Spanish and Chinese blood in the archipelago. The most that can be said is that they were typical Filipinos, fair representatives of the Christian population of the archipelago. Measurements made on students that admitted themselves to be mestizos, or that gave unmistakable evidence in their appearance of the possession of Spanish or Chinese blood were discarded.

By excluding people who did not appear to have "pure Malay blood", Bobbit's study creates a paradox: He wanted to measure the average height of Filipino students, even as the students were selected, at least in part, on the basis of their heights—if we take it that these children were chosen because of their "typical" Filipino characteristics.

Bobbit's study was taken up in the newly-established Philippine General Hospital

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<sup>28</sup> Intellectual and physical growth were seen as inseparable by many during the time. Maria Montessori, the influential Italian educator, even wrote a book called *Pedagogical Anthropology* and wrote: "The stature, which is biologically significant, is lower in the weak-minded." For various thinkers who espoused this view see "History of Early Childhood Education" by Lascarides and Hintz (2011).



in Manila, with three medical doctors publishing a text on the “physico-mental development of Filipino children” in 1916 (Albert and Arvisu, 1916). Subsequently, Edward Ruth (1918), an anatomist affiliated with the University of the Philippines, studied the growth of infants, giving the following report: “The weight of Filipino children is invariably greater than in American children of the corresponding age after the sixth month. After the tenth month the difference in size between American and Filipino children at once becomes apparent. Whether this difference is due to an environmental cause or a hereditary influence has not yet been determined.” He goes on to relate these findings to the Filipino body: “That the Filipino is shorter in stature is a well-known fact, but the explanation for this has not yet been satisfactorily determined.”

Like Bobbit’s study, Ruth’s study reveals a tendency to relate the height of Filipinos with that of the Americans, and an *a priori* assumption that Filipinos are short.

### Paediatric anthropometry during the American period

Although the Americans’ initial concerns centred around the health of their soldiers and the hygiene and sanitary conditions in the cities where they were stationed, they soon turned their attention to children’s health, mirroring the practices and rationales of growth monitoring that have been done in the West. For instance, as in the United States<sup>29</sup>, public schools became the venue for public health efforts, starting in the 1910s and reaching its zenith in the next decade. As Planta (2008: 118-119) noted, this initiative was supported by the colonial leadership:

[Governor-General] Taft, for instance, believed that “the Filipino should be developed physically”. In his letter to Worcester, Taft stated that the physical development of the Filipinos could be achieved through good water supply, good food, and proper hygiene. Taft, who believed that the public schools carried a more sanitary rather than an educational function, also wrote of the vital role of the school system in promoting healthful living through the example of its students.

School inspections started in 1911, complemented by the teachers themselves who were “required to compile a health-index for every child in class” (Planta, 2008). As the monthly bulletin of the Philippine Health Service reported in 1925:

There was also started among all the schools in Manila, especially in the elementary schools, the weighing and measuring of the school children, with a view to a study of the relation of their weight and height to their progress in physical and mental development. Other studies connected with health of the school children and its relation with the physical and mental development will be started.

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<sup>29</sup> Spencer (1997:91) writes of the late nineteenth century: “The use of anthropometry in the assessment of physical status, including its relevance to school health, was eventually extended to schoolchildren.” He also references William Porter, who attempted to “relate anthropometry to ability in school”.

Historian Warwick Anderson, writing about how public health became an important part of colonial governance and surveillance, elaborated on the inspections that were done in schools (Anderson, 2006:117):

The public schools became a major sanitary venue. Teachers compiled a “health index” for every child in their class. The Bureau of Education’s idealized “healthy child” had a “well-formed body”, “clean and shining hair”, “a clear skin of good colour”, “ears free from discharge”, “a voice of pleasing quality”, an “amiable disposition”, and so on. A premium was thus placed on the Filipino child’s formal, expressive qualities. Furthermore, every child was to be weighed twice a month, and the height measured at least twice a year.

Aside from the schools, another site for anthropometrics were the puericulture (child care) centres, the origins of which I will elaborate on in a short while. In these centres, health was turned into a form of competition: Parents aspired to have a ‘A-1 child’—one that is “free from all correctable defects, who increased in weight and practices and health rules of cleanliness...” (McElhinny, 2009:247). That these contests were copied from the eugenics-inspired ‘Better Baby’ contests in the US (Dorey, 1999; Pernick 2002) speaks of how American ideals easily diffused from metropole to colony.

As mentioned earlier, there was a prevailing notion that children could be “civilized” through their bodies, and can thus be a marker of successful governance—and more broadly—of the colonial project itself (McElhinny, 2009). What was at stake, thus, in the efforts to make children healthier was the colonial government’s ability to govern properly, and fulfil the ‘civilizing mission’ on which they staked their legitimacy.

However, it was not just the colonial government that had a stake in public health—but also the Filipinos who held aspirations for autonomy and independence. McElhinny (2009:227) writes: “...the question of who should be responsible for public health in the Philippines was often a fraught issue, and the state of public health work was used to assess the readiness of Filipinos for self-government.” Filipino physicians and political leaders pushed for initiatives such as the provision of adequate milk supply for infants, and the establishment of puericulture centres. Through their lobbying, Act No. 2633 was enacted in 1916, directing health officials to organise puericulture centres all over the country. From 1921-1926 alone, 329 such centres were established.

As in many instances of colonial medicine, the American public health system “made Filipino bodies ever more visible to the colonial, commonwealth, and national state, in ways which made them available for political and economic disciplining.” (McElhinny, 2009:252) In the emerging forms of biomedical and public health knowledge and the ever-expanding practices of measuring and comparing, height figured as an indicator of individual and population health, and national progress.

## **Physical education and sports**

Gems (1995) notes that for the American colonial regime, “schoolchildren were the hope of the future; they were the ones who were educable and reachable, while adults were seen as more recalcitrant to change.” In the above section I already highlighted the significance of the school as the venue for public health interventions. In addition, the incorporation of physical education and sports in the curriculum and in the students’ life in general likewise opened up another domain in which the body in general, and particularly height, materialized in the school setting.

We can speculate on a number of antecedents that led to the integration of physical education and sports in the curriculum. First, there was an ethos of “muscular Christianity” that gained traction in America in the late nineteenth century (see Putney 2009; Applin, 1982)—spurring a lot of interest in physical education. Second, there was the idea that physical education was a vehicle for physical development—which in turn, as I already mentioned in the previous section, is in turn associated with mental development. Third, there was also a widespread belief in physiognomy, the notion that a person’s character can be interpreted from his or her physical appearance. Lombroso-Ferrero (1911:237) for instance claimed: “Criminals are rarely tall. Like all degenerates, they are under medium height. Imbeciles and idiots are remarkably undersized. The span of the arms, which in normal persons about equals the height, is often disproportionately wide in criminals. The hands are either exaggeratedly large or exaggeratedly small.” With its promise to mould children’s bodies into those that are idealized by society, physical education was widely supported.

Finally, and particularly for the Philippines, physical education and sports fit in the colonial government’s goals of pacification and channelling the Filipinos’ nationalism towards benign activities (Gems, 1995), and it was encouraged by its leaders, including William Taft (Planta, 2008).

The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), which can be credited for the invention of basketball and volleyball (Myerscough, 1995), was an early driving force for the introduction of sports—with positive results (Gems, 2006:55):

By 1905 both boys and girls engaged in required physical education. A principal reported that ‘each boys’ class has a team is (sic) baseball, indoor baseball, volley ball (sic) and basket ball (sic). Each girls’ class has a team in indoor baseball and volleyball.’ Within five years, tennis courts and tracks were added to school facilities to instil competitive spirit, discipline, work ethic and community pride. Formal interscholastic competition began in 1905 with district leagues and interprovincial championships.

In 1922 it was reported that “Within the last few years interest in physical education

has grown so rapidly in Philippine schools that statistics show that at the present time about 95 per cent of the Philippine public school children obtain physical exercise at school in some form.” (England, 1922: 3)

Height mattered both in physical education classes, and in sports teams. In physical education, height was an organizing principle in marches and formations, as this 1922 Physical Education manual indicates (Ibid: 88):

Fall in line! On this command, the pupils take their places in line according to height, the shorter pupils falling in to the right of the taller pupils. Each pupil moves by short side steps to the right until he touches the elbow of his neighbor or moves to the left until there is no crowding. The arms should hang straight and naturally at the sides.

Fall in column! On this command, the pupils form according to height in single column, one behind the other, the shortest pupil being at the head of the column. Each pupil should be within facing distance (16 inches [41 cm] from the back of one to the chest of the other) of the pupil in front of him.

In athletic teams, height became part of the selection criteria. Spencer (1997) writes in American schools in the early twentieth century, “Anthropometry was used to classify students for physical activity and sport, primarily on the basis of age, stature, and weight.” I was not able to find accounts of selection criteria in Philippine school athletics, but given that the Philippines was part of the American polity and demonstrably adopted many of American educational policies, it very likely that the same can be said of the Philippines, and thus the students’ height became one of the determinants of their inclusion to these teams.

The significance of these endeavours went beyond the confines of the school. Competitions reached the international level, through initiatives led by the YMCA officials themselves. Referencing a 1905 game between the Philippines and a visiting baseball team from Japan, Gems (2008) writes that it was a way for the Americans “to redirect Filipino nationalism into sport”. As early as 1913, a “First Oriental Olympic Games” was held in Manila with the participation of Japan, China, British East Indies, Kingdom of Thailand, and Hong Kong—in what would be the precursor of the Asian Games. By being able to participate as a nation, Filipinos became invested in the Games as a point of national identity and pride, contributing to the growth of baseball, basketball, and other sports.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics—the first time basketball was played in an Olympics—can perhaps be considered as the high point of Philippine sports, particularly of basketball, during the American period (Antolihao, 2015). Despite their short stature—which observers found very remarkable—the Philippine team put up a strong showing,

compensating for their lack of height with speed, and losing only one game—to the United States. Interestingly, the original rules set a 6’2 maximum height limit to players—but the US managed to overturn it (one of their best players, Joe Fortenberry, was 6’8). Nonetheless, the “Islanders” (as the Philippine team was called) performed so valiantly that even Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, wrote in his diary that the US team would have lost against the Philippines if not for their height (Rains, 2011:161). One Filipino sports columnist (Velasco, 2011) wrote that:

this platoon of handsome, mysterious young men from a small archipelago started grabbing attention. German teen-agers swooned and handed them scented love letters begging for clandestine rendezvous. The wealthy were inviting them to parties. People were putting down their newspapers because our boys played a faster game. And they were nudging other events out of sports page headlines.

Despite the fifth place finish, it was—and remains the best performance of an Asian team in Olympics basketball and the Philippines was proud of its team’s accomplishment. The narrative in Berlin: coming as underdogs because of a height disadvantage, managing to beat the odds, ultimately losing, but taking pride in the heroism of the defeat—would serve as template in future international competitions (Antolihao, 2015).

Gems (2006: 46) reminds us that “sports are not value free entities, nor are their producers.” He pointed out how sports and physical education became means of cultural assimilation during the American colonial period. American values such as competitiveness and individualism replaced the values fostered by traditional Filipino games, such as teamwork.

On top of these values, however, we can also see how sports, and physical education, privileged certain bodies. By virtue of the architecture of the basketball court—or the volleyball field—height materialized as an advantage for students who could avail of the travel opportunities financed by the state in the form of inter-scholastic competitions, not to mention gain recognition in their schools.

Yet, as in the case of public health which not only valorized certain “achievers” but also punished those who fell short of its standard, physical education also became a way to exclude children from school system. As Gems (2006:62) noted:

Students that failed physical education were not promoted to the next grade level. The Bureau of Education maintained that exercise was necessary to make Filipinos taller and bigger and ‘that the stock of the race can be improved considerably’

We can take two things from this passage. First, we can read in it a connection between physical education and the above-mentioned public health efforts for children’s growth—alongside their eugenic rationales. Secondly, it was revelatory of the prevailing view that physical education not only privileged, but *produced*, bigger and taller youths.

As the *New York Times* reported (Marshall, 1912): “It is a fact that in the physique of the young people of the islands, speaking generally, a marked improvement is already visible as a direct result of the introduction of healthful outdoor sports.”

Indeed, through physical education and sports, as with public health interventions, the schools were a venue that figured prominently in the making of the ideal Filipino child. As sports took a life of its own through local, national, and international competitions, it eventually became an institution, too, where much was at stake, from national identity and pride to individual aspirations. With its attention to physical bodies, selection criteria, and architectures that structured the game (i.e. the basketball ring being 10 feet high), it was an institution that privileged tall bodies.

**Height requirements in the uniformed services**

The Philippines Scouts was established in 1901 (Coffman, 2014: 67-78), marking the beginnings of a Filipino presence within the US military institution (from 1914 until 1992, one Filipino was allowed to enrol in every class in the US Military Academy)–

Position	Salary per annum	Height and weight requirement
First class patrolman	900 USD	5 feet 8 inches (173cm), 145 lbs (66kg)
Third class patrolman	300 USD	5 feet 4 inches (163cm), 110lbs (50kg)
First class fireman	900 USD	5 feet 4 inches (163cm), 125 lbs (57kg)
Second class fireman	240 USD	5 feet 2 inches (163cm), 125 lbs (57kg)
First class engineer, fire service	1200 USD	5 feet 4 inches (163cm), 125 lbs (57kg)
Second class engineer, fire service	240 USD	5 feet 4 inches (157cm), 110 lbs (50kg)
Prison guard, first class (English speaking)	900 USD	5 feet 6 inches (168cm), 110 lbs (50kg)
Prison guard, second class (non-English speaking)	180-240 USD	5 feet 2 inches (157cm), 110 lbs (50kg)

Table 1 - Salaries and physical requirements of selected civil service positions. Source: “Manual of Information Relative to the Philippine Civil Service” (Bureau of Civil Service, 1906)

one that will ultimately expand as the Philippines braced for the threat of a Japanese invasion in the 1930s. In the same year, other civil uniformed services (police, prison guards, firemen) were also organized (Bureau of Civil Service, 1901). Height figured in the uniformed services as a requirement for admission, and as military service was valorised, it also figured in the formation of an idealized male aesthetic.

**Height requirements in uniformed civil services**

Height requirements were imposed for uniformed positions within a few years of the



start of American occupation. A 1906 manual from the Philippine Bureau of Civil Service had the following requirements for various civil service positions:

Note how salaries increased as heights increased: Those who are 5'2 (157 cm) can only earn up to 240 dollars annually, while those who are 5'6 (168 cm) and taller and earn up to 900 dollars. Of course, there were other qualifications—including weight—and those with other credentials (i.e. the first class engineer) need not be taller than 5'4 (163 cm) to earn the highest-starting salary: 1200 dollars. Nonetheless, we can see in these stipulations how height was an undeniable determinant of employment chances.

We can infer various rationales for these requirements. Anthropologist Sylvia Kirchengast (2011:52), surveying height requirements for police offers around the world wrote that:

[Historically] body height and especially tallness symbolized strength, status and power, essential characteristics for a policeman who represented the State... height was also a very useful instrument to diagnose effectively malnutrition and some other somatic deficiencies...During the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, police work was extremely demanding physically. Policemen had to walk their beat or had to go by bicycle or on horseback in all kinds of weather, up and down hills and less frequently in an urban environment. Physical confrontation happened regularly and policemen had to be able to defend themselves (Bonneau and Brown, 1995). It was supposed that large men were better able to do this kind of work.

These rationales may not have been directly involved in the determination of height requirements in the Philippines, which may have simply been copied from the American institutions that served as template for the new Philippine government.<sup>30</sup> However, these requirements would have had a different impact in the Philippines, where the average male would barely make it to 5'4 (163 cm).

### Height requirements in the military

Though height requirements have been imposed in Western armies since the 18th century (see Tanner, 1981; Gorden and Friedl, 1994), they were not immediately applied in the Philippines. Because the Americans needed local help in fighting the war, the first inductees had no requirements save for their “loyalty and reliability” (Laurie, 1989). This lack of height requirements is perhaps reflected in a 1916 US *Surgeon General* of the Army Report, which detailed that of 877 Filipino recruits, 9 were 4'11 (150 cm) below; 36 were 5 feet (152 cm), and only 10% were higher than the then-American average of 5'7 (170 cm). It also noted that only three were rejected for

<sup>30</sup> As early as 1809, for instance, the New York police and fire department had set minima of 5'9 and 5'7 respectively, in language and tone similar to the above-mentioned requirements in the Philippines. (see New York Civil Service Commission, 1809, “New York State Merit System”).

being underheight, at a time when being underheight or underweight was the leading cause of army rejection in the US itself (Hoffman, 1918). Hence, there was a pragmatic acceptance of Filipino men are short; the standard of 5'4 (163 cm) did not apply.<sup>31</sup> The Americans had to work with this short stature of their Philippine recruits, and even adapted their guns for them: the 1898 Krag-Jorgensen rifle had to be specifically designed for the Scouts, because they were of “short stature” (Whelen, 1960).

In the 1920s, height requirements appeared in the military as well. By the time the Philippine Constabulary Academy was established, height requirements were included in the operations manual: the first one, released in 1926, specifies 165 centimetres (5'5) as the minimum height—and must correspond with “54 kilos body weight” and “81 centimetres chest circumference.”

In response to fears of Japanese expansionism in the Asia-Pacific, the Philippine Constabulary Academy was upgraded into the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) alongside the establishment of an autonomous “Philippine Commonwealth” in 1935. McCoy (2000) writes that in order to shore up support for the PMA, its cadets were raised up as exemplars of Filipino masculinity. Aside from the height requirements, McCoy (ibid:329) adds:

To ensure that its cadets would be archetypes of masculine beauty, the academy barred applicants with “any deformity which is repulsive” or any who suffered from “extreme ugliness”. Medical examiners had to insure, moreover, that a cadet was free from any “lack of symmetrical development” or “unsightly deformities”.

These requirements produced a military force of men which the colonial authorities regarded as having good physiques—and by virtue of the height requirement, all relatively tall by Philippine standards at the time. An even more elite group—the Malacañang Guard, established in 1938 by Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon, had a more stringent height requirement of 5'6 (167 cm) (Jose, 1992). As in the above-mentioned civilian services, having a higher height meant better opportunities.

The rationale for these requirements was not included in the manual, but army scholars in the United States at the time invoked the need for the “adaptation of the human machine to the always more or less highly complex requirements of modern social and economic life” (Hoffman, 1918). ‘Diminished stature’ was also seen as part of a

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31 The US Army itself changed its rules on height - or at least considered to do so - depending on the situation. During the height of World War I, one army scholar (Hoffman, 1918: 28) noted: “In view of the fact that small stature in a large majority of cases signifies normal variation and not weakness or degeneration, as has repeatedly been proved by certain regiments of short stature of England and other short stature troops of European countries, the Committee recommended that the minimum stature requirement for the new United States Army be reduced, for all branches of the ser-vice, to 60 or at most 62 inches...” (p.28) Moreover, “recruiting officers are allowed to exercise their discretion as to the enlistment of desirable recruits (such as band musicians, school teachers, tailors, etc.) who may fall not more than a fraction of an inch below the minimum standard of height.” (Ibid: 27) These examples show that height in the military was oftentimes negotiable - but only to a limited extent.



‘stigmata of degeneracy’ (Ibid:20-21). Friedl (1990:35) suggested that there were many reasons that ranged from the symbolic to the practical, including the sheer pride in having tall soldiers, the exclusion of unwanted personnel given that some eugenicists claimed that criminals tended to be shorter, and the pragmatic purpose of limiting “the range of sizes for uniforms, protective ensembles, and workspace dimensions.” He adds, moreover, that on top of these rationales, there was institutional knowledge that saw short soldiers as less capable in various tasks.

Friedl (Ibid:35) stresses, however, that “some physical characteristics have changed easily with the need for soldiers, which suggests that what may be portrayed as a soldierly characteristic may not be solidly rooted in combat necessity.” This is an important point: regardless of the actual usefulness of height in the military, its becoming a “soldierly characteristic” helped perpetuate its importance, and for young Filipino men, it became an attribute which could include or exclude them in institutions that offered employment, career advancement, and prestige.

### **Height in Filipino discourses during the American period**

The Americans did not monopolize discourses—and as the public health example demonstrates—nor did they monopolize interventions. Filipinos still had their voices, which they used to protest their representations. Moreover, literature flourished during the American period, and height figured in these texts, but in ways that were largely consistent with American ideals.

When negative portrayals of the Filipino body were circulating in the US in 1898—before they invaded the Philippines, New York-based Ramon Lala, though generally pro-American, scrambled to defend the Filipino body in a country profile that was sympathetic to the Philippines:

Many of the women are pretty, and all are good-natured and smiling. Their complexion, of light brown, is usually clear and smooth; their eyes are large and lustrous, full of the sleeping passion of the Orient. The figures of the women are usually erect and stately, and many are models of grace and beauty.

But as the Philippine-American War commenced and the Americans, Filipino nationalists were concerned that these representations were defining the Filipinos in terms that were unfavourable to them, as polemicist Calderon (1909:9) opined in an essay:

If those belonging to foreign lands say that we are a bad race, evil people, or monkeys: can we do anything? Therefore if we have our own History, it would validate whatever we mean, and justify us. Because a History is the one that tells whether a nation has a meaning; a nation without a history is without sense or

meaning.<sup>32</sup>

The protests of the Filipinos over the exhibition of “natives” in the 1904 St. Louis Fair also speak of a concern over the ways in which Filipino *qua* body was represented on the global stage, even among the Filipino elites who cooperated with the Americans and joined the government. Mirroring the responses of Filipino *ilustrados* in Spain upon seeing the ‘natives’ in the Madrid Exposition of 1887 (Sanchez-Gomez, 2002), they protested that “the savages were no more representative of the Philippines than the American Indians are of the United States,” adding: “It created in the minds of hundreds of thousands of Americans the indelible impression that the Filipinos have not yet emerged from savagery,” protested another (Fermin, 2004). But by distancing themselves from the Negritos, they were participating in the same racial vocabulary of the Americans, and not challenging the idea of hierarchy of racial differences itself.

In the St. Louis Fair, arguably the high point of Filipino “objectification” during the American period, we also see ways in which Filipinos bodies resisted the constraints imposed upon them by the fair organisers and their handlers. As mentioned earlier, the muscular Igorots and Philippine Scouts posed a sexual attraction to the White American women in the fair, leading to a moral panic (Fermin, 2004) in a register that challenged American hegemonic masculinity. A similar concern would materialize in California in the 1920-30s, with Filipino male laborers “conceptualized as sexually attractive to vulnerable girls”, eventually leading to Filipinos’ inclusion in anti-miscegenation laws (Volpp, 2000)<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the works of the exemplary writers at the time, on the other hand, one could see height as figuring in the positive descriptions of protagonists, while shortness was seen as a handicap and identified as a characteristic of ‘typical’ Filipinos.

For instance, in “Dead Stars” (1925)<sup>34</sup>, perhaps the most famous short story in English written by a Filipino during the American period, Paz Marquez Benitez describes the main character, a Filipino man who belonged to the elite, in this sentence: “Tall and slender, he moved with an indolent ease that verged on grace.” In Loreto Paras’ “The Bolo”, a female protagonist, Sita, a storekeeper, was seized by a “feeling of panic” when a customer, described as “young, tall, and well-built” approached her.<sup>35</sup> In another

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32 Free translation. The original Tagalog reads: “Ipalagay nga nating di natin talos ang ating kasaysa-yan, at tayo’y magkataong mungkahin ng mga taga- ibang lupa na sabihin tayo’y masamang lahi o mga taong hamak o mga ungoy: makapagmamauid ba kaya tayo ng hindi? — Datapua’t kung tayo’y mayroong Istorya ay siyang magpapatotoo ng ano man ang ating ibig sabihin at ipag-mamatwid dahil sa ang Istorya ang nagpapakilala kung mayroon o walang saysay ang isang bayan-kaya,t ang bayan n lamang- walang saysay o kabuluhan ang walang kasaysayan o istorya.”

33 While anti-miscegenation laws have been in place for Latinos and “Asian-Americans”, Volpp (2000) argues that “There appears to have been a greater level of tension felt about Filipino male sexuality than for Chinese and Japanese.” (2000:809)

34 From “Philippine Short Stories, 1925-1940” (1997 [1946]). Leopoldo Yabes (ed.) pp 1-17

35 *ibid* pp. 26-32

famous story in English “How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife” by Manuel E. Arguilla, a tale of juvenile desire, the protagonist was enraptured by the loveliness and stature of his brother’s wife.<sup>36</sup> And in N.V.M Gonzales’ *Far Horizons* (1935), women gathered around a young man in admiration:

What a tall man he has become! How handsome with his curly mop of hair! How like a hero!<sup>37</sup>

Writers in Tagalog likewise included tallness as an attractive feature. In a 1913 romance entitled *Nang Bata Pa Kami* (“When We Were Young”) by Pura Medrano (1913), a handsome youth was described as “*balingkinitan ang katawan, mataas, malago ang buhok, matangos ang ilong at matingkad pa sa kayumangging kaligatan kulay...*” (Well proportioned body, tall, with flowing hair, pointed nose, and beautiful brown color): attributes that were typical at the time.

While tallness was ascribed to exemplary characters, shortness was presumed for typical Filipinos. In *The Filipino Rebel: The Romance of the American Occupation* (1930), a Filipino was described as “tall for his race” (Kalaw, 1930). In Arturo Rotor’s “Dahong Palay” (Rotor, 1928), the opening paragraph introduces the main character, Sebio, as “above the height of the ordinary native”. In these texts, we can read an acknowledgment that the typical Filipino was short although certain characters could be “taller than the average”.

On the other hand, just as the Americans writers saw Filipinos as short, these Filipino writers saw Americans as tall. In *The Filipino Rebel* (Ibid), for example, we find this passage:

Here he met Captain Timothy Jones, a typical westerner, tall and heavily built, a veritable giant...

These height differences, musy, of course, be seen in relational terms. In Carlos Bulusan’s “The Romance of Magno Rubio” (1930), a Filipino youth in California described as “Four-foot six inches tall, dark as coconut. Head small on body like a turtle” is lovestruck with Clarabelle, an American girl from Arkansas who was “Five-foot eleven inches tall...A girl twice his size sideward and upward” (Bulosan, 1979). As in the story in which I opened this chapter, height differences—imagined and real, typological and individual, set possible conditions of possibility for plots to be constructed as such.

There is much more that can be analysed from these texts. For instane, was the desire for tall women expressed in some works in fact a desire for taller progeny, and thus a way of negotiating the value of height? And what were the differences in the ways height was used, between the more bourgeois genre of Philippine literature in English,

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* pp.222-227

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* pp. 251-254

and the Tagalog works that had a broader audience? A more thorough review of textual material can attend to these questions, but my readings are sufficient for us to suspect that forms of resistance against American representations of Filipinos were not palpable. Besides, what is there to “resist”? In the realm of the colony, these Filipino writers must have found it difficult to escape, or even realize, the inequalities that were being made possible by the physical reality of different bodies, and the discursive practices that made these differences visible as well as material in different domains.

### Conclusion

In 1931, the *New York Times* reported: “Philippine Scouts Now an Efficient Little Army” (Ginsburgh, 1931).<sup>38</sup> Though the article heaped glowing praise for the progress made by the 8,000-strong force, the use of the term ‘little army’ is revelatory of the underlying framework of bodily inequality and difference with which the Americans saw the Filipinos. The phrase ‘little brown brothers’, which was emblematic of this view, continued to be in use throughout American colonial rule, and in 1945, as World War II drew to a close, a *Life Magazine* feature spoke of Philippine soldiers as “fervently loyal to the nation that treated them as “little brown brothers.” (Mydans, 1945). The making of Filipinos as ‘little brown brothers’—that is, affixing shortness to their identity—is thus a legacy of the bodily encounter between Filipinos and Americans.

Moreover, in the deployment of anthropometry in physical anthropology, public health, and public education, height figured in various forms of governmentality and colonial surveillance. As Rafael (2000:23) averred, these various techniques of governance performed the labor of “rendering visible the subjects of colonization in particular ways [and] colonial supervision amounted to a powerful form of surveillance.”

Finally, more than an attribute that plotted them in racial or colonial hierarchies (or rendered them visible under the colonial gaze) height was used as a criterion to include or exclude people in opportunities in school and the workforce. Informed by various rationales and policies imported from the metropole, height requirements privileged tallness, and excluded short



Fig. 6 - Filipinos who were cast in Hollywood films to play “native types” were required to be below a certain height. (Marc Wanamaker/Bison Archives reproduced from Montoya, 2008)

38 “Philippine Scouts Now an Efficient Little Army”. *New York Times*, August 10, 1931.

people from the uniformed military and civil services which offered economic security and prestige.

These materialities of height affected women and men, although it seemed to have affected the latter more—since the uniformed services were largely a masculine profession—as they remain today. Height, thus was associated with masculinity, even as it created a hierarchy within it: taller men had access to more opportunities and privileges, while those who literally fell short did not have access to all of these masculine professions.

I offer one final anecdote which illustrates, with no small irony, how these materialities came together. As referenced in my introductory story of the giant Filipino boxer, Filipinos migrated to the West Coast in search of jobs in the 1920s, and one of the available jobs in Los Angeles was to play “native types” in Hollywood movies. In one movie, *The Pagan* (1929), the producers were looking for a “native” type, and they actually set a *maximum* height requirement of 5 feet [152 cm] for the one who will be cast in this role (see Figure 6). In this photograph, we see once more how racial ideology, physical reality, and selective representation participated in the literal “casting” of Filipinos as “little brown brothers”.

As in the Spanish colonial period, there were voices that articulated resentment and protest, particularly against the representational practices of physical anthropology. However, the problematics brought about by normative bodies eluded recognition as a vector of inequality or difference: there was no record of protests against height requirements in the civil service positions, nor against the rules of basketball that specified the vertical dimensions of the court, nor in the measuring and categorizing of children. Largely unchallenged, what all these practices generated in different registers was a value for tallness that hitherto did not exist—and a physical framework that underwrote the terms in which colonizer and colonized saw one another: the same terms in which latter-day Filipinos would see their own selves.



## CHAPTER 2

### **The ‘making’ of height**

It is Tuesday morning in Brgy. Sicsican, Puerto Princesa where I have volunteered to be the barangay (village) doctor, and children and their mothers have lined up in the covered basketball court that acts as the multi-purpose hall. The supervisor of the seven daycare centres within the barangay requested me to perform the annual physical examination of the children, and I obliged. I didn't expect that there would be over 100 children, all waiting for their turn, but, accustomed to medical missions and the endless queue of patients in the Philippine General Hospital, I agreed. “It will be a long day,” I told myself.

Barangay Sicsican belongs to the urban cluster of Puerto Princesa. ‘Sicsic’ in Cuyonon means rattan, and might have referred to the numerous rattan vines that used to be abundant in barangay's forests. But as the barangay officials tell me, it has acquired another meaning, alluding to the ‘crowding’ (*Tagalog, sicsican*) in the barangay as a result of high birth rate and migration. As mentioned in the demography section of the introduction, migrants from poorer towns in Palawan and from poorer provinces elsewhere in the Philippines have contributed significantly to the growth of Puerto Princesa, and I have the impression that many of them ended up in Brgy. Sicsican, the site of many a resettlement area. From a population of only 1,513 in 1990, the 2010 census estimates that there are currently 10,459 people living in the barangay.

It takes about 30 minutes for the jeepney, coming from downtown, to reach Brgy. Sicsican's barangay compound. From the city centre, the jeepney passes through the busier sections of the highway, with scores of banks, commercial squares, and primary schools. Then you make a left turn at what is called “Junction 2”, under the shadow of mighty *acacia* trees. From here, amid the verdant environs you find military camps, universities, and colleges. High school and college students walk around, wearing their uniforms. Past the universities, the road becomes less busy, and the big establishments give way to houses, sari-sari stores, elementary schools, and barangay compounds, like the one I regularly visited. If you follow the road through, you reach the mountainous villages of Irawan, then the penal colony in Iwahig, and finally, the Southern towns of Palawan, all the way to Bataraza and the mining centre of Rio Tuba.

On any given weekday, the barangay compound bustles with activity, mainly centered on the barangay hall, which facilitates bureaucratic work, such as the issuance of a *barangay* clearance (a certification that you don't have any issues with the barangay) — a requirement for many job applications. Adjacent to the barangay hall is the barangay health centre, where children and pregnant mothers come for regular checkups, and where barangay residents can come for the initial management of their ailments.



Opposite them is a daycare center for children aged 3-5, one of six within the whole barangay, and in the middle, taking up half the space of the whole compound is a basketball court that doubles as a multi-purpose hall. Whenever there's no activity, this hall is the region of male youths, who would play basketball all day. I could always see them from my table in the daycare center whenever I held free clinics there and saw patients.

The annual physical examination is a requirement for the children, and reflects the government's concern for the nutritional and health status of kids. As the City Development Plan states:

The general state of health or “unhealth” of the population is determined by the proportion of malnourished or underweight children below the age of 6 years. The critical importance of this age group is that undernourished children at this age acquire a handicap they may not be able to overcome for the rest of their lives.<sup>39</sup>

Puerto Princesa's City Nutrition Office reports children's malnutrition rates of 11.47% for urban areas and 12.33% for rural areas. Interestingly, for infants 0-12 months, the rates are much lower; it is past the first year that malnutrition kicks in. The report concludes: “As children grow older and stop breast feeding they tend to get less nutrition from other food sources.” I spoke with officials at the City Nutrition Office and they attributed the lack of nutrition to the sheer lack of food in the rural cluster, and the poor quality of food in the urban cluster.

Though the clinical work was demanding, I welcomed the opportunity to see the children and talk to their mothers, to learn more about their nutrition practices and views on height. But it seems that the mothers themselves have the same question: “*Doc, ano po bang mabisang pampatangkad?*” (“Doc, what's the most effective way for my child to become tall?”)

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What concerns me in this chapter is the ‘making of height’: what parents and local nutrition officials are actually doing in the attempt to make young people grow taller. Looking at height-making as a cultural practice allows us to further appreciate its significance and understand the meanings people attach to it, as well as the logics behind it. Whether as part and parcel of child-rearing practices, or as independent acts, these practices open up avenues for new sets of questions. What circulations of knowledge (i.e. mass-mediated, word-of-mouth, “trainor's training”) inform the mothers and young peoples, as well as barangay nutrition scholars, in these practices? What values or “goods” do they see in justifying the cost? What efficacies (pharmaceutical, social, symbolic) are engaged? Mindful of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, how do the practices

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39 “Puerto Princesa City Comprehensive Development Plan 2011-2013”, p. 29



themselves shape what height means?

One important premise of this chapter is that the *making* of height is both biological and social. While the physiology of human growth would point to genetics, nutrition, and illness prevention as determinants of growth, all these factors are contingent upon social and cultural practices: genetics through the choice of partners; nutrition through nutritional practices; illness prevention through socio-economic circumstances. Indeed, the child born of a wealthy family is likely (but not certain) to have better healthcare, proper nutrition, and presumably, “taller genes”, given the broader range of partner options. Studies that suggest how social status induces variations in insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1) and consequently, height (Bogin and others, 2015) lend credence to the complexity of height’s making, and the only tenable conclusion is that the *biological* and *social* have always been co-productive—and inseparable. Looking at height-making practices in the field, thus, entails a mindfulness of these entanglements.

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Annalyn (30, 5’4) is a mother of two infant boys, 19 months and 12 months old, respectively. Her husband works as a supervisor at a local shoe store, while she considers herself a “housewife” even though she also does part-time jobs as a cook. I ask her what she thinks determines height. “*Nasa lahi yan,*” (it’s in the genes) she says, adding with a hint of pride, “*Lahi din naman namin ang matatangkad*” (tallness is in our genes). She doesn’t think that height is related to diet. Instead, she believes that children shouldn’t carry heavy objects, as this might cause stunting.

She says that the *panganay* (eldest) was mixed-fed, while the *bunso* (youngest) was exclusively breast-fed for six months, then eventually given complementary foods like *lugaw* (rice porridge). In a way, she was applying the lessons from the *panganay*. “*Pag breast feed kasi mas maganda hindi masyadong nag kakasakit yung bata tapus hindi sumasakit yung tiyan. Hindi kabagin.*” (“Breast feeding is better; the infant doesn’t get sick and his stomach doesn’t ache. He’s not *kabagin*.”) *Kabag* is a local term that loosely translates as stomach upset or colic.

In addition, she gives vitamins for both the boys: Celin (an Ascorbic Acid preparation) and Tiki-Tiki (a multivitamin formulation with Lysine, Taurine, vitamin B complex, and vitamins A, C, D, and E). Everyday, as soon as the boys wake up, she gives them the vitamins. She plans to shift to Cherifer as soon as her kids are old enough, explaining that she has heard good things about the supplement. “*Oo meron, matatangkad naman sila at hyper.*” (“Yes, [the one’s who have been using them] are tall and hyper”) she said, referring to the children of her friends who are taking the supplement.

When the boys turn two, she also plans to shift them to a diet that is “*malusog*” (healthy) and “*masustansya*” (nutritious). For her, this means eating rice, soups, vegetables, fruits,

and eggs.

Asked about her dreams for her children, she has a ready answer: “Gusto ko maging pulis sila, kami kasi ng asawa ko criminology ang kinuha siya graduate ako hindi, pero hindi narin siya nag pulis kasi ok na din ang trabaho nya kaya gusto nya yung mga anak nya nalang ang mag tuloy mag pulis.” (I want them to be policemen. My husband and I were Criminology students — he’s a graduated, but I’ve not—but he didn’t go to the police force anymore because his job is okay. But he wants his sons to “continue” [the dream] of being part of the police.)

What about height requirements? The police have height requirements, and what height would she like for her boys? “5’6 should be good enough for policemen,” she replied.

### **Height and heredity**

Annalyn’s responses touch on various aspects on the making of height. Her view on the hereditary origins of height is echoed by many of my informants. Phrased differently, some say height is *namamana* (inherited) or *nasa dugo* (it’s in the blood).

*But where does height come from, the mother or the father?* When I bring this up with Annalyn and other mothers, I am met with mixed responses. Some believe that height comes primarily from the father, while others say *depende* (it depends). If the father has *malakas na dugo* (strong blood), then his characteristics can prevail over the mother. But both can influence a child’s height. If the parents are both tall, their children will be tall. If the mother is tall, the father short, the child will be tall if he or she is *mana sa nanay* (has inherited trait/s from his/her mother) or short if “*mana sa tatay*” (has inherited trait/s from his/her father). Traits, however, can also come from grandparents or even distant relations. In a clan reunion of one of my interlocutors, Zaldy (34, 5’11), one topic brought up over dinner was how tall most of them are, except for a cousin, whose short stature they attributed to a grand-uncle.

The hereditary nature of height makes it a sign of belonging, or “out-of-placeness”, in families. In a conversation I overheard in the City Baywalk of two men who were talking about a local basketball player who has tall sons. “But what happened to the youngest son, why is he *pandak* (short)?” The other wisecracked: “Maybe the guy is thinking, is this child really mine, or the neighbor’s?” Conversely, Jomar (15, 6’0), a student at a government high school, lamented that his tallness gets him teased as ‘ampon’ (adopted) because his parents and all his siblings are “short”—the closest to his height was his older brother, who was 5’7. These anecdotes show a strongly-held belief that height, like many bodily traits, are inherited, and consequently, children’s heights are measured in relation to people they are genetically related to, especially parents and siblings.

The barangay nutrition scholars are equally unsure. The seminars they attended, as well

as the informational materials in the health center, emphasize food over genetics, while their roles as surveyors of the barangay's nutrition landscape lead them to suggest that there's a relationship between height and socio-economic status: richer families tend to have taller children. Reflecting on their own experiences—as mothers, as children, as siblings—they also acknowledge the role of genes, echoing the “*nasa lahi*” discourses of their constituents. One of them added the dimension of race: “*Iba ba yung sukat nung may lahi talaga ang bata. Pero kapag pure Filipino, talagang normal sila*” (the measure is really different if the child has *lahi*. But if he or she is pure Filipino, they're “normal”) Normal, as I found in many instances, meant “short”.

As in the scientific debates (see previous chapters) or in the thinking of the mothers I have spoken with, there is an uncertainty about the mechanism of height. “*Swertihan din siguro,*” concedes one mother. (Maybe it's just a matter of luck.) For others, like Ellen Santamaria (49, 5'1), the mother of three boys, the genetic basis of height is a “baseline” that provides an impetus for them to do something about it:

*Pandak na nga kami ng mister ko, kung wala akong gagawin kawawa naman yung mga anak namin. Kaya pinapatingnan ko talaga sila sa Pedia at lahat ng pwedeng gawin ginagawa ko para lang sila tumangkad. Gusto ko talaga silang tumangkad.* (My husband and I are short, if we don't do anything, our children would be pathetic. That's why I really bring them to the pediatrician and all that I could do, I do just to make them grow tall. I really want them to become tall.)

In the following sections I will follow the Santamarias and other families to find out what exactly these practices are, proceeding in a developmental fashion, starting with a practice for infants: breastfeeding — and ending with the growth supplements that young people consume even beyond their adolescence.

## **Breastfeeding**

Only a few mothers directly linked breastfeeding with tallness, but it is generally associated with growth and good health, and is worth discussing if only to see the contradictions and tensions in the way mothers understand their children's growth and the imbrications of these understandings with socio-economic constraints. (Milk in general is more explicitly seen as something that children should take to become tall, as I will elaborate on in a later section on food.)

Ask any mother in Brgy. Sicsican if she breastfed her children and she will most likely say yes; breastfeeding is an almost universal practice among mothers in Brgy. Sicsican. Following government policy (Sobel and others, 2011), the barangay health center has been very active in promoting breastfeeding, reinforcing what has always been a customary practice among Filipino mothers (see Jocano, 1973 [2003]). As mentioned earlier, this probably explains the (relatively) low incidence of malnutrition for

infants. However, as with most measurements, high breastfeeding rates, obscures how “breastfeeding” is practiced in everyday life. For instance, in Region IV-B, the region where Puerto Princesa falls under, the incidence of continued breastfeeding until 2 years of age is only 48.1% (FNRI, 2015), underscoring what our ethnographic data also reveals: in practice, breastfeeding is mixed with other forms of infant feeding.

Maria (28, 5’3) is a housewife and a mother of two. Like Annalyn, she thinks that height is inherited, saying: “No matter how much you feed your children, if you and your husband are short, they’ll be short.” She thinks breastfeeding can make children *grow faster*, but not necessarily taller, an important reminder that height is a temporal process: one that has speed, duration, and extent. Maria exclusively breastfed her children, and said that until they were three years old, she was giving them milk. More than growth (she concedes that “maybe” breastfeeding can add a few inches), she is more strongly convinced that breastmilk protects children from illnesses.

Maidenea (51, 5’1) is another housewife and mother of nine children.<sup>40</sup> Like Maria she thinks breastfeeding is good for growth velocity: “*Mas maganda talaga pag ang bata ay breast feed mabilis sya lumaki.*” (It’s really better if a child is breastfed, he grows faster). But unlike Maria, she wasn’t consistent in her feeding practices. Some of her children were breastfed; others were bottle-fed. Upon further questioning, it turns out that her breastfeeding depended on how busy she was at the time. Some were breastfed for six months; others for just a few weeks. Thus she couldn’t correlate the type of feeding and the children’s eventual heights. Asked whether the breast-fed children were taller, she replies: “*Hindi rin...pantay-pantay din sila.*” (“No, they’re just the same”) Like many mothers, there is a tentativeness, and even a contradiction, in her answers, which I felt reflected the uncertainty of her knowledge about the mechanism of height and growth.

Maidenea’s confused account of bottle versus breastfeeding is mirrored by many others. Indeed, I observed a great variability on what constitutes “breastfeeding”, in terms of consistency and duration. There are those who still engage in bottle-feeding, citing constraints of work. Although many of the mothers, including Annalyn above, speak of themselves as “housewives” (and they may well be categorized as such by various surveys), one finds that they engage in different kinds of informal work. Some work as laundry-washers, kitchen assistants, sari-sari store owner-attendants, barangay assistants, among many others.

Maita, 28, has two children, a 7-year old boy and a 3-year old girl. She works as a laundry-washer, earning 200-300 pesos per day, while her husband is a “laborer” who get summoned whenever there is a construction project in the barangay-like road repairs—or a house being built—getting the minimum wage of 350 pesos each time.

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40 It is worth noting that the older mothers usually have more children; most of the mothers in their 20s only have 2 or 3.

Both of them depend on these irregular and conditional job opportunities. Maita's work requires her to go to the houses of the people who request her laundry services, and thus she has to leave her children with her husband, or with her brother-in-law who lives with the family. She says that breastfeeding is ideal, but she has no choice but to bottle-feed. Interestingly, she makes that addendum that bottle-feeding is better for her children anyway, because she's not able to eat well and is always sick, and consequently, her breastmilk might cause the baby to be sick. Her view mirrors long-held beliefs that a mother's illness or constitution as well as her diet can affect the quality of the breastmilk, and consequently, her child's health and development.

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The advantages of breastfeeding are not hard to miss in the field. While doing the check-up for preschoolers, I examined two cousins, both males, aged 3 and 4, and the three year old looked healthier, bigger, and taller than his four year old cousin. I learned that the three was exclusively breastfed for six months, and continued to be breastfed until past his second birthday. On the other hand, the four-year old who I later diagnosed to have mild stunting was bottle-fed. Learning about the kids' respective parents and their backgrounds, I wasn't sure, however, whether the difference in health is due to breastfeeding itself, or because of their different socio-economic backgrounds.

Indeed, there are many "confounding variables", but the ethnographic picture reveals: Mothers have limited time, and have to work as soon as they can as laundry washers, housemaids, or kitchen attendants. Like Maita above, they do know about the benefits of breastfeeding, but are unable to do so given the constraints of their work. Implicated here is the urbanization of Brgy. Sicsican, which is reconfiguring labor, as sociologists Teresa Abada and others (2001:80) observed in the Philippines in general:

Increasing urbanisation, a key structural determinant of breastfeeding behaviour in many developing societies, will most likely limit the ability of policymakers to promote an increased awareness of lactation. The rise in education and labour force participation among women may enhance their economic status, but it will also likely lead to the abandonment of traditional values or practices regarding infant feeding. Lifestyle changes as influenced by the mass media, the modern health sector, and the increased availability of modern consumer goods, will continue to affect the mother's decision to initiate, continue or terminate breastfeeding in modernising societies.

Moreover, looking at the circulation of knowledge, one cannot discount the role of milk companies themselves, many of which make use of the language of growth in their marketing strategies. The passage of a "Milk Code" in 1994 notwithstanding, the marketing of milk formulas remain unimpeded, and representatives from milk

companies continue to visit health facilities and barangay health centres, giving free samples to midwives and barangay health centres, winning their goodwill and endorsement, something I personally witnessed in Brgy. Sicsican (see Sim, 1980; Sobel and others, 2011).

Whatever benefits these infant formulas provide, they, too, are diluted as these products become ingredients for improvised milk formulas, alongside “evaporated” or “condensed” milk.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, their high cost means that many families could only afford them intermittently. As early as 1984, a study done in Manila suggested that 16% of family income goes to infant formulas.

The female doctors I met in Puerto Princesa were more convinced about breastfeeding. All of them exclusively breastfed their children, and used the language of evidence-based medicine to justify their decisions. “Of course, I did a lot of research,” says Wena, 34, an obstetrician and mother of two children, who are now about to enter adolescence. Guia, 35, an anaesthesiologist, had just given birth to her third child, likewise said that she is breastfeeding the babies. Asked whether their work interferes their motherly duties, they say that being private practitioners gives them a control over their clinic hours.

Even then, however, they too are confused about whether breastfeeding can influence height. “Theoretically, yes,” was Wena’s best answer. But she is worried about her eldest, whose growth spurt she’s been waiting for, but had seemingly not yet come. For the mothers in Puerto Princesa, as with the barangay nutrition scholars, the benefits of breastfeeding — not just for growth — is a foregone conclusion; what is more of an issue is its practicality.

## **Food and appetite**

Past their children’s breastfeeding years, a concern for food and appetite emerges among parents. The growing child gradually conforms to the three meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner) that is customary for most Filipinos, as well as one or two *meriendas* (snacks), one in the mid-morning, and another in the mid-afternoon.

A proper diet, it is generally agreed, consists of vegetables, rice, eggs, milk, fish and meat. What kind of vegetables? “The vegetables in *Bahay Kubo*,” Josephine replies, referencing a folk song about the different vegetables found in a typical Filipino rural scene. Other mothers stress the importance of *malunggay* (Moringa), which has recently been hailed as a “wonder vegetable”.

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41 In Brgy. Sicsican, these formulas are often mixed with other ingredients, such as ‘am’ (rice water) - leftover water from soaked rice, or “condensed milk” or “evaporated milk” (I highlight these terms because, looking at their ingredients, they are not really milk, but essentially a combination of oils, cream, and sugar.) At times, these ingredients are used in themselves without the milk formulas. These folk ‘recipes’ are both local (i.e. the addition of honey) and influenced by the market.



Mothers often complain that their children are “*walang ganang kumain*” (don’t have an appetite) or *pihikan* (‘picky’), and my clinical encounters with the mothers centred on these discourses. *Walang gana* refers to a general lack of interest in eating, while *pihikan* usually refers to being selective about food. Usually, the vegetables are the casualty of this selectiveness. Marietta (37, 4’11) blames being *pihikan* on junk foods: “*Kasi nakakakain sila ng mga pagkain na hindi masustansya katulad ng mga junk food nagiging maarte sila at yun alang ang gusting kainin.*” (It’s because they eat foods that are not nutritious like junk foods, they become *maarte* [picky] and that’s all they want to eat). Nena (41, 5’0), a mother who I met at the waiting shed of one of the elementary school, blames “fried chicken” for the children’s lack of appetite for foods at home, specifying the one from Jolibee, the major Filipino fastfood chain. Usually, fish (boiled, fried, steamed, or stewed) is served at home. Fishing is a major livelihood in the city and fish is much cheaper than meat in the market. Rufo, one of the city nutrition officials who I met in one of his visits in Brgy. Sicsican, likewise blames junk foods and instant noodles in shaping people’s food preferences.

I am not seen as an authority on food. They expect me, a doctor, to prescribe vitamins to increase appetite. They seem disappointed when I give nutritional advice, such as the eating of vegetables, and suggesting healthy alternatives to junk food, such as boiled bananas—as *merienda*, it’s as if they have heard it many times before. On the other hand, from our conversations I learn specific food practices that have a connection to height.

Star Margarine, for instance, is seen as particularly effective in making children grow taller, and it is commonly mixed with fried rice to form “margarine rice”—which the mothers then feed their children for breakfast, together with hotdog, dried fish, *longganisa* (pork sausage), *tokwa* (tofu), or other protein-rich *ulam* (viands). This practice dates to a 1970s television commercial in which the margarine used “*Iba ang matangkad!*” (It’s different if you’re tall!) as the tagline. A lifestyle columnist (Francisco, 2002) recalls the commercial:

“*Iba na ang matangkad!*” so proclaimed Aurora Pijuan in a 1973 television commercial, citing her having been fed Star Margarine as a kid as the reason why she shot up to her enviable height of 5’8” [173 cm] which supposedly became her edge over the rest of the



Fig. 1 - Star Margarine. Take note of the “height building nutrients” mentioned on the lower right. For several decades, the margarine has capitalised on people’s desire for tallness. Photo by the author.



contestants in the 1970 Miss International pageant.

This tagline continues to be used by the same brand today. One recent commercial showed a boy and a girl being fed Star Margarine-infused rice, where the boy is depicted as a future basketball star, and the girl a future beauty queen. Indeed, more than forty years after the commercial came out, some mothers in Puerto Princesa still mix Star Margarine with the rice they feed their children for breakfast. And Star continues to encourage this practice by actually foregrounding “Star Margarine rice” in their product labels. The margarine’s ingredients are primarily coconut oil and other oils—sources of saturated fat that are not exactly healthy for children. However, it continues to be used, primarily by low-income families. Star Margarine’s association with height capitalized on Filipinos’ high regard for tallness, but also reinforced the value of tallness, and created a novel food practice: an example of how TV commercials have a dialectic relationship with cultural perceptions and practices.

In many cultures, milk is strongly associated with children’s growth and development. Wiley (2011:11), for instance, documented how milk was presented in India and China as a food with “special qualities that enhance physical growth, which in turn serves as a powerful metaphor for individual and national power and wealth.” In Puerto Princesa, milk is sometimes viewed—and overtly advertised—as a “height enhancer”—a widely-held view across different classes, and beyond the Philippines.

In conversations I’ve had with various people, many point to the example of the Dutch, with their tall statures and country that is abundant with milk, as proof that milk can contribute to increased height. The choice of milk, however, varies across social classes. Those who are affluent, including the doctors, prefer the 1 liter cartons of pasteurized Cowhead milk that they can buy in Robinson’s Supermarket. Ellen Santamaria’s second son, VJ (15, 5’5) likewise asks for liquid milk, and Ellen is happy to oblige — she pointed to the cartons of Nestlé milk that are for sale in her sari-sari store that she ends up buying herself. VJ tells me that he learned about the fresh milk from his classmates, and that they researched it on the Internet. For the majority, however, “milk” means the cheaper condensed and evaporated milk, often diluted with water, and for younger children, powdered milk.

Allusions to height have also been used by milk companies. Writing in 1981, Lumbrera and Gimenez-Maceda (1981:320) reported: “...today, commercial after commercial appeals to them to buy this and that brand of milk so their children will grow tall.” Alaska Milk, which makes evaporated and condensed milk products, has a long-standing team in the Professional Basketball Association, whose players have routinely appeared in their advertisements for at least 40 years. In a 1974 TV commercial, a small, blond-haired, white kid wearing the Alaska jersey is seen to beat a tall black man in basketball, juxtaposing ideologies of race with notions of an ideal, athletic body. In

2012, the script of a TV commercial goes (translated parts are in italics):

At what age does a child stop drinking milk? 7, 9, 12? If you ask me, never. *Between ages 7 and 12, the body should store nutrients. So that growth will happen in what is called shooting up years.* That's why [children] must keep drinking Alaska Powdered Milk Drink with Lakas Nutribuilder *which the body will use to kick in growth. Giving them milk is just like your love: it mustn't stop.*

The commercial ends with an illustration of the “shooting up years” in which a figure of a boy lengthens like a spring cardboard. Another commercial for the same product shows a basketball-playing teenager encouraging his younger brother to drink Alaska so he can be tall like him.

Milk has always been associated with height, but arguably these commercials, like that of Star Margarine, have had an reinforcing influence on height's importance. Moreover, these promises of height enhancement in commercial products have since been taken up by vitamins, a topic I will return to later in this chapter.

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At the barangay level, the barangay nutrition scholars (BNS) are tasked to measure the children's weight and heights and make reports to the city health office. Because intestinal parasitism is common, mass deworming is also conducted annually as well as occasional vitamin supplementation.

A more regular activity, which the BNS do in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), is the Supplemental Feeding Program (SFP), the provision of one extra meal for daycare children (age 2-5) for 120 days of each year. The current program, an ‘upgrade’ from the previous ones that lasted for 80 days, was launched in 2011, as part of a broader move of the Philippine government to meet the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the first goal: the alleviation of hunger (United Nations, 2015). The children's mothers were also recruited to volunteer and help cook the food. The following is an example of an actual recipe for “Fish Sinigang” appeared in a weekly menu for daycare children:

Fish 1 1/2 kg.

Talbos ng kamote (cassava leaves) 1/2 kg.

Tomato 1/2 kg.

Onion 2 pcs

Salt 25 gms

With a budget of P13 (\$0.23) per child, nutritionists have complained that the budget is

severely limited. On the other hand, they emphasize that the food is “supplementary”; the primary responsibility for the provision of food still belongs to the parents. “Some kids are healthy during the SFP, but once it’s over, they return to being underweight because they don’t eat right at home,” a nutritionist laments in a *Rappler* report (Rodriguez, 2014). This is echoed by Jamir, the city nutritionist who stresses the centrality of parental responsibility: “it’s really up the parents. We can only do so much.”

For the low income parents, an additional incentive is linked to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (contracted as ‘4Ps’) which includes, as one of its “health conditionalities”, compliance of children to health programs and initiatives—but this has not made much of a difference when it comes to treating the supplemental feeding as “supplemental”.

In July 2014, the “40th Nutrition Month” was celebrated, with a theme “*Kalamidad paghandaan: Gutom at malnutrisyon agapan!*” (Prepare for disaster: prepare hunger and malnutrition!)—partially in response to Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan), which devastated parts of the Philippines in November 2013. The nutrition scholars of Puerto Princesa went to a local beach resort to celebrate the month with a day-long program, and throughout the month there were feeding programs and other awareness activities about nutrition. In these nutrition awareness programs, the lessons are pretty much the same: the importance of a balanced diet, which must have the “go”, “grow”, and “glow” foods, and avoid unhealthy foods like junk foods.

But the parents act as if they already know; as in my case, they listen politely, but are not convinced. When they go back to their homes, it will still be a matter of making do with whatever food their limited budgets can afford. Oftentimes, it is protein sources that suffer. City nutrition officials point out that in rural areas, protein sources usually come from fishing—but when the weather is bad, there is nothing to eat. In the urban areas, on the other hand, it is sheer lack of money. Fish is cheap, but even so, they can only buy in limited quantities. Poor families frequently end up buying instant noodles. High in carbohydrates and fat, but low in protein, vitamins, and minerals, nutritionists have implicated these noodles in the rise of non-communicable diseases in the Philippines. However, even the Department of Education used instant noodles in its feeding program in the late 2010s, justifying it with its cheap cost and the “vitamins and minerals” that were found in the noodles (Tubeza, 2010).

Nutrition scholars have pointed out that protein energy malnutrition among children in the Philippines remains high (UNICEF, 2012) and that protein intake varies according to socio-economic backgrounds. For instance, Florentino and others (2002) found that private school students in Manila tended to consume more chicken, beef, and pork while those belonging to public schools consumed more instant noodles. They concluded (Ibid:269): “Translated to nutrient intake, the higher food consumption

by children in private schools resulted in a higher total energy intake arising from the higher fat and protein consumption. The total energy intake of the children from private schools was 19% more than that of the children from public schools. Compared with the RDA, the mean nutrient intakes of the children from private schools were generally adequate. On the other hand, the mean nutrient intakes of those from public schools were deficient.”

Another important observation they make is that the parents of children in private schools have more awareness about what a healthy diet means. Thus, it is not just that the better-off parents have more money; they also have more education. Paradoxically then, good nutrition has been linked to better academic performance, but for children to have good nutrition, their parents must have had some form of education.

Viewed in light of these social and economic constraints, being *pihikan* and *walang ganang kumain* can thus be “idioms of distress” that communicate a dissatisfaction for the food that’s available. The deficiency of protein—identified by nutrition scholars as a major problem among Filipino children—is particularly salient for growth and can make the difference of a few inches of desired height, for which the vegetables in *Bahay Kubo* may not be enough.

## Sleep

“*Matulog ka para tumangkad ka!*” (Go to sleep so you will become tall!) is a constant admonition of mothers for their children. Ellen Santamaria complains that his teenage sons are surfing the Internet all night, warning them that it can have consequences for their growth, but she takes consolation that they sleep lengthily: “*Pag natulog naman, talagang tulog talaga. Masarap matulog, pahirapang gisingin!*” (“But when they do sleep, they do sleep a lot! They enjoy sleeping and it’s difficult to wake them up!”) Indeed there is a widespread perception that growth happens during sleep, and thus, for children to reach their growth potential, they must sleep as much as they can.

Some mothers have specific regimens for their children. Zesha, a mother of two, shares her prescription drawing on her own experiences:

A child needs to sleep 2-3 times a day. Upon waking up at around 7:30, he will be bathed, then it will eat and breastfeed, then he will sleep at 9 am, and will wake up at 11. He will eat then play, and then it’s time for sleep again...

This is just one example of a parent’s regimen of sleep for her children. As in most societies, as the child grows older, the less he or she is supposed to sleep, but until they reach their teens, there are general rules: For most children, bedtime is between 7-8 pm, while the older ones allowed to stay a bit later — around 9 pm — to finish their homework.

However, even past being toddlers, most children are mandated to take naps after lunchtime, from 1 pm to 3 pm. Understandably, the children who are already in school cannot sleep on weekday afternoons, but they are made to take the nap on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and everyday during summer vacation. Interestingly, Seminario de San Jose, the all-boys high school, has an institutionalized *siesta* (nap time) everyday when the high school boys can sleep for 90 minutes after lunch. One teacher says that it's for their health and growth. All said, there seems to be a widely-held view that children should be given as much sleep as possible.

I also learned of some finer points to this whole practice of sleeping. Others believe that the growing child must not be interrupted while sleeping, because it will be detrimental to his growth.<sup>42</sup> A barangay health worker explained to me that the process of height is *nahihinto* (aborted) when children wake up 'wala sa oras' (literally 'not in time'). That is, there are proper sleeping and waking times and these must not be altered so that the child can grow optimally.

"The reason why I'm not tall is because I lacked sleep when I was young — I think watched too much TV instead," jokes Dan (24, 5'4), a PSU graduate working in a call centre agency in Manila. He adds: "But, I'm already tall as it is, compared to my brothers." Reyboy (22, 5'3), an out-of-school youth still hoping to finish college, was more skeptical: "They told me to sleep early, so I always slept early, but I didn't grow tall."

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"It's because of the growth hormones, they're released during sleep, aren't they?" asks VJ on one of my visits to their house. Typical of Puerto Princesa gatherings, the guest of one member of the family is seen as the guest of everyone, and often, my interviews with mothers like Ellen are actually "family discussions", with family members coming and going. His question, which draws from the knowledge he learned from school, classmate, and the Internet, points to the fact that growth hormones have become an explanatory model for vertical growth. In the minds of children and their parents, the idea that growth hormones are released during sleep provide a "scientific basis" for the importance of sleep in children's growth. Doctors like Dr. Rebs Andal, a pediatrician, likewise hold this view, encouraging parents to make sure their children have adequate sleep.<sup>43</sup> But the hormones likely just give form to a long-held belief about the role of sleep. Nenita (47, 4'11), a housewife and mother of three children, believes that sleep allows the body to recover. "*Hindi tulad namin dati bugbug sa trabaho kaya siguro hindi*

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42 A Tagalog proverb that goes "Magbiro ka na sa lasing, huwag lang sa bagong gising" ("Make fun of a drunk, just not a person who just woke up") points to the sacredness of sleep in general, but perhaps more so for children)

43 More recent studies have demonstrated that sleep duration per se is not strongly associated with height. "Variation in sleep duration between children is unlikely to have an important influence in growth" (Gulliford and others, 1990:119).

*kami lumaki.*” (“Unlike us in the past, we were ‘beaten up’ by work, maybe that’s why we didn’t grow big”).

There are some studies that corroborate the importance of children’s sleep for Filipino parents. In a cross-cultural study of differences in infant and toddler (0-36 months) sleeping patterns, Mindell and others (2010) found, on the basis of 1024 online respondents from parents the Philippines, an average nighttime sleep duration of 9.15 hours, and a daytime sleep of 3.53 hours—the second highest among the 20 countries included in the study. In a follow-up study involving pre-school children in 13 Asian and Western countries (Mindell and others, 2013), the Philippines had the highest duration of sleep—both nighttime (9.99 hours) and daytime (2.08 hours).

Though the study was able to arrive at generalizations like “most children in Asian countries continue to nap, whereas most in Caucasian countries stop by the age of 5 years”, left unexamined are the societal and parental perceptions about sleep that inform sleep practices. Based on my ethnographic findings, we may surmise that longer sleep translates to better growth and height in accounting for this relatively long duration of sleep among Filipino schoolchildren.

### **Physical activity**

Some of my informants also see engaging in physical activities as a way to make children become taller. They say that stretching in the morning, especially if done faithfully everyday, can increase height in a natural way. Kristin (16, 5’2), a Grade 8 student who believes that height gives confidence, although it depends on how you “carry yourself”, said that every morning she would do stretching exercises like reaching for the ceiling by tiptoeing and her outstretched hands touching the sky for twelve times. Sheepishly, she admits that she is not able to do it everyday, and that she’s not sure if it’s really effective, but she says she will keep doing it.

Stretching seems to be part of many teenagers’ routine, mentioned in the same breath as Cherifer and taking naps as the things they have tried for growing taller. Kurt [15, 5’6] who has dreams of making it big as a Manila celebrity, already has some local fans as the leader of the ‘boy band’ Gwapitos, but said that he recently started stretching as well, pointing to a YouTube video<sup>44</sup>. Perhaps he is beginning to worried that he may not be able to catch up with his brother Kent (18, 5’10), the “reigning” Mr. Palawan State University.

“*Kailangang mabangat ang mga buto,*” (“the bones have to be stretched”), explains Mario, father of two with whom I shared a couple of chats at the waiting shed of an elementary school.

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<sup>44</sup> I followed this up on YouTube using the search terms “exercises to grow taller” and found many videos, including: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ol75AqPsbU>



Aside from stretching, engaging in sports and physical activity is also seen by many students as contributing to growth. “I’m tall because I played basketball since I was young,” says Kurto, suggesting that it was basketball that made him tall, an interesting contrast with the more common accounts of teens who say that they play basketball because they are tall.

My informants’ accounts draw parallels with the rationale for physical education laid out early on during the American period (see previous chapter), which continue to be invoked today. As one textbook says: “What do you have to do to have an attractive figure? Regular activity stimulates growth and development and can give the body an efficient and suitable musculature.”<sup>45</sup> Thus males are encouraged to engage in sports; and additional impetus to engage in sports and physical activities. In the process, height and sports draw from each other to boost their respective — and thoroughly interrelated — importance among young people.

### **Circumcision**

Circumcision (*pagtutuli or tuli*) is also believed to make boys grow taller. Specifically, some see it a prerequisite for *hugot-laki*, or growth spurt of boys.<sup>46</sup> Though largely medicalised (two generations ago most males in Puerto Princesa were still circumcised using the traditional method), it remains an important rite of passage for boys in Puerto Princesa and elsewhere in the Philippines.

In Puerto Princesa City Proper, circumcision costs anywhere between 1500 to 5000 pesos if performed by medical doctors. Thus many poor residents, especially those in rural communities, rely on ‘tuli missions’ in which the boys who are of the right age are circumcised in one day.

I actually participated in one circumcision mission in the course of my fieldwork. Held in the rural barangay of Marufinas, it was part of a larger ‘medical and dental mission’ organised by the city government of Puerto Princesa in partnership with the Marines who were stationed there. By the time we arrived in the daycare centre that was converted into a circumcision station, 30 boys had lined up in front, waiting to be registered by Ivy, a nurse from the city health office.

For the boys and the organizers alike, circumcision was a test of courage and manliness. “You will not cry right? If you cry, you’re *bakla*<sup>47</sup>,” I overheard Ivy telling one of the boys who wore a timid face. Also, while the boys were told to take off their shorts and put them over their faces so that they wouldn’t see the procedure, others — perhaps

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45 See Mapeh in Action Ii’ 2008 Ed. Rex Bookstore p. 199

46 Most of the boys are circumcised between 10-12 years of age, while the growth spurt among Filipino boys is estimated by Filipino pediatricians from 12-14 years of age.

47 As mentioned in the introduction, *bakla* is a Tagalog term that refers to gay men, particularly to those who identify or act as female.



in a show of courage — put their shorts behind their heads instead, bravely watching what was able to be done to their penises. As a medical doctor, I myself had performed circumcisions on my own, but I just assisted the doctors, preferring to observe and listen to the onlookers. Here are some excerpts from my field notes:

*A soldier was also looking on, and I asked him whether it's a requirement for soldiers to be circumcised. He gave a chuckle. "Are you serious? Of course we're all circumcised in the military—except for the women!" Later, he and his fellow Marine made a joke about penis size, with one of them cracking that "I bet yours is smaller than that!"—pointing to the boy's penis that was underdoing circumcision.*

*One woman, a parent of a 12-year old who was also queuing for the tuli, later told me that his son was also in the military, and told her that being circumcised is important for a soldier. Men who are supot (uncircumcised) are pagurin (easy to get tired); they can only have good enough strength if they are tuli (circumcised) and thus all of them get circumcised, if not before, then during their training. She added her belief — echoed by the others I talked to — that circumcision can make the boys become matangkad (tall) and mas malinis (cleaner). She cited the contrasting examples of her soldier son, who grew tall right after getting circumcised at age 9, and his about-to-be-circumcised son, who at 12 still has to grow taller than her.*

*As we all know, it's a non sequitur," Mutya, one of the two paediatricians with us, said. "The age when most boys get circumcised also happen to the time when their growth spurt happens—and maybe the time they become conscious about their hygiene." When I asked her about how they can become really tall—her answer: "Nutrition. But of course genetics plays a role too."*

*Not everyone among the villagers believed that circumcision can do wonders. One man, with a shirt that read 'Barangay Tanod' (barangay official) says: "The Americans—they don't get circumcised but they're very tall." However, he adds: "But this boy will be happy because his classmates will no longer call him supot."*

*Doc Paul, at his late thirties the most senior surgeon in the group, as he was performing the last circumcision, commented that the oldest man he circumcised was 60 years old. This man, also from Palawan, was told by a priest that 'he can't go to heaven unless he's circumcised', and turning 60 made him realize that he could die anytime so he better do it as soon as possible.*

From these passages we can glimpse at the ideals that are associated with circumcision: the strength and belongingness that make it essential in the military; cleanliness and good hygiene that are marks of adulthood; and even national (and racial) identity. The religious associations of circumcision have led many to assume that it was another legacy of the Spanish colonialism, but many historians believe that it was actually the

Muslims who brought the practice. In any case, it is associated with both physical and spiritual cleanliness.

In sum, the imagined benefits of circumcision correspond to the ideas of what an adult man should be: brave, strong, clean, virile. By transitivity, the notion that circumcision makes boys grow taller likewise links — or reinforces the already-existing linkages of — height to these ideals, associating it with them among the demands of masculinity.

## **Masturbation**

Very briefly, it is also worth mentioning that masturbation is believed to make boys grow taller: the more you masturbate, the taller you can be. Tall boys are thus jokingly chided by their peers as frequent masturbators, even as the joke itself acknowledges their sexual maturity.

References to masturbation's role in growth are spoken mostly in jest. In one focus group discussion with a high school basketball team, after discussing sleep, diet, and vitamins, I asked them if they knew other height-enhancing practices, one of them alluded to masturbation: "Ask Gino — he does it a lot!" Bobby (16, 6'0), the tallest in his high school class, says that:

*Minsan po inaasar nila ako na giraffe pero bihira lang. Yung mga lalaki po hinihirit nila na kaya daw ako tumangkad dahil sa sobrang pagmamasturbate. Totoo po ba yun?* (Sometimes they tease me, calling me a giraffe, but that's uncommon. The guys—they joke that the reason I'm tall is because of too much masturbation. Is that true?)

Ellen Santamaria for her part joked in the presence of her two boys: "If that is the case [that masturbation can make boys grow taller], then all the boys should have been very tall!".

These jokes notwithstanding, some of my interlocutors also give the connection between masturbation and tallness some credence. Asked what he does to make himself grow taller in one of my written questionnaires, Lion (15, 5'3) writes: "*matulog ng maaga, huwag magpapuyat, mag-ehersisyo, uminom ng vitamins, at minsang "pag masturbation"*" Note that masturbation comes last and is qualified with an apologetic "minsang" (occasional)—but the fact that he mentioned it means in the same breath as "drinking vitamins" suggests that he takes it seriously. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, boys refer to masturbation as "Vitamin J", an allusion to its "nutritional" benefits. Monmon (18, 5'8) says it was actually his science teacher in elementary school that told him that masturbation is good for growth.

Masturbation's identification with height may be explained by the fact that most boys start masturbating right before their growth spurts—making for what Doc Mutya would

call a *non-sequitur*. Once again, however, the mere fact that masturbation is linked with tallness -even if half in jest-further associates height with with masculinity.

### **Vitamins: From *pamapsigla* and *pampagana* to *pampatangkad***

Vitamins are seen as a potent way of making children grow taller. In particular, “growth supplements” like Cherifer, with their promise of “reaching your growth potential” and “tangkad-sagad” (height to the fullest) have captured the imagination of parents and children alike, just as Star Margarine did for the previous generation. I realized the centrality of vitamins in child-rearing practices when I noticed that most of the questions in my clinical encounter revolved around them. This is in stark contrast with the relative disinterest mothers show when I talk to them about the importance of nutrition and good food. It was as if vitamins, being drugs (*gamot*), were in the province of medical professionals (*manggagamot*), while when it comes to food, our opinions are not quite important.

My response has been fine-tuned through the years: “Vitamins may help, but your food choices are still more important. There isn’t really any “best” vitamin but whatever works best for your child is good.” Whenever I tell them this, some of the mothers are visibly disappointed.

My lack of a recommendation notwithstanding, the mothers get excited when we talk about vitamins. Often, I would deflect their questions and ask instead why they prefer the vitamins they give their kids, and what benefits they see in these vitamins. Frequently, they ground their choices on the recommendations of pediatricians: “This is what Dr \_\_\_\_\_ prescribed.” But the notion of *hiyang*, too, comes out: the idea that the vitamin and the child ‘fit’ with each other; that the efficacy of a drug is contingent on its compatibility with the individual. By unsettling the idea of a “one size fits all” vitamin, the notion of *hiyang* informs experimentation and an evaluation of efficacy based on personal experience.<sup>48</sup>

The benefits parents see in vitamins (i.e. what these drugs ‘do’ ) as a generic category of drugs given to children are worth mentioning, as they allow us to understand the appeal of the overtly-marketed growth supplements. Rather than view the *pampatangkad*, which first emerged in the 1990s (see previous chapter for the genealogy), as a new class of products, we can view them as an offshoot of a long-standing idea that vitamins are useful for children.

The perceived benefits, or functions, of the vitamins are best expressed as a set of

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48 The idea that multivitamins can be *hiyang* was documented by Anita Hardon (1992) as well as Michael Tan (1999). Hardon (1992:92) explains: “people relate *hiyang* to an interaction between the individual (family, age, size), as well as the illness ( cause, type of symptoms) and the drug (brand, dosage, dosage form, and the price), but especially to the effect of the therapy. If the drug make the individual better, the drug is auto-matically ‘*hiyang*’ to him or her.”

words prefixed by “*pampa*” which means “for”. *Pampatangkad*, for instance, means “for tallness”, *pampaputi* means “for whitening”. It is similar to the semantic role of the English suffix “-er” as in height enhancer, or skin whitener. Pharmaceuticals in the Philippines, broadly construed, are often defined in terms of these “*pampa*” words, that is, what they “do” to the body.<sup>49</sup>

First, vitamins are *pampasigla*, booster of enthusiasm, vigor, and activity. My clinical encounters in Brgy. Sicsican allowed me to appreciate this appreciate this role of vitamins: many mothers cite children’s activity: “malikot” (naughty), “mahilig maglaro” (loves to play), “maliksi” (agile) as proof of their good health. And the opposite is also true: “lampa” (weakling), “matamlay” (pale), “mahina” (weak) are seen as symptoms of poor health.

Vitamins are also seen as “*pampagang kumain*” (booster of appetite). As mentioned earlier, a nagging concern of mothers is their children’s appetites, and vitamins are seen as the ultimate remedy to poor appetite. Pediatricians themselves attest to the appetite-stimulating potential of certain ingredients such as Taurine, but like the mothers, they too acknowledge that certain vitamins work for certain children; and there is an element of “trial and error” in the prescription of vitamins, a medical nod to the concept of *hiyang*.

Third, vitamins are seen as boosters of *resistensya* (i.e. “resistance”), that is, immunity to diseases. There is the idea that children are naturally vulnerable to diseases, and that vitamins play a central role in a long-term preventive strategy.<sup>50</sup> Embedded in this idea is a understanding of vitamins (and nutrients) as substances that circulate and dwell in the body for a long period of time. Thus one vitamin is marketed as a “*resistansya-builder*”: through the repetitive consumption of vitamins, resistance is “built”, laying down the foundation for a vigorous immune system.

How do we link these three functions — *pampasigla*, *pampagana*, and *pampalkas ng resistensya* — with height? Our discussion of various practices reveals some clues. While vitamins are seen to lead to more physical activity, we also saw that physical activity itself is seen to contribute to growth. While vitamins lead to increased appetite, we also saw in our discussion of food practices that a healthy appetite is seen as requisite to growth. As for *pampalakas ng resistensya*, while I did not identify “disease prevention” as a discrete “height-making” practice, on various encounters mothers have cited their

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49 As a demonstration of the range of “functions” articulated by the “*pampa-*” suffix, in an earlier study I found that young drug users also articulated the perceived roles of methamphetamine and canna-bis using this term: “*pampatulog*” (sleep inducer); “*pampatanggal ng problems*” (remover of problems) (Lasco, 2014)

50 This notion of *resistensya* draws from long-held theories of illness causation. Himes (1971:28 as cited in Tan, 2008:130) notes: “The Filipino emphasizes not the germs plus low resistance but rather the correct timing (*tiyempo-tiyempo*) of the two most important elements in the development of low resistance - internal predisposition and external mitigating circumstances.” Children who are *sakitin* are those who are seen to have this internal predisposition.

child's being *sakitin* (sickly) as a reason for growth problems, or for being *pandak*, a correlation that pediatricians like Dr. Andal endorses. With all these functions—and the fact that vitamins, with their vague effects and unfathomable mechanisms of action, are particularly amenable to ascription of various efficacies.

On top of these indirect connections, however, certain vitamins have also begun to be overtly marketed as *pamaptangkad* (“height enhancers”), and people are choosing it for this reason. Cherifer, manufactured by Intermed Philippines, was the first product to explicitly associate itself with growth and height. First released in the mid-1990s, it soon led to the proliferation of similar products like Growee and TLC Vita Plus. Ellen Santamaria jokes: “My parents should have given me Cherifer...but then it wasn't available then!”

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Enter any pharmacy in Puerto Princesa and you could immediately appreciate the popularity of the growth supplements, figuring prominently in the shelves of the branches of Mercury Drug—the country's largest drugstore chain. There is Cherifer Syrup for children, and Cherifer tablets for teenagers. Whenever I would go to Robinson's Mall to buy my groceries, I would always drop by the adjacent Mercury Drug and observe who would buy the supplements, and it would mostly be parents (sometimes with their children in tow). Sometimes, however, there would also be teenagers. In a small drugstore along the National Highway, my research assistant Julius gained permission to act as a helper-observer, and he made similar observations: sometimes, teenagers, wearing school uniforms, would come and buy a few Cherifer tablets.

Jane (24, 5'4). a pharmacy assistant in Ching's Drugstore along the National Highway who had held the job for two years, makes the same observations, adding that vitamins are usually bought during the middle or the end of the month: when service employees' salaries are usually released. Asked whether there are particular groups of people who buy Cherifer, she says:

*Yung iba matangkad na yung iba naman maliit, yung ibang sakto lang...Sa tingin ko nasa average lang din ang kanilang pamumuhay. yung iba kasi gusto mag military at mag model kaya importante sakanila ang height. (Some are tall, some are short, the others have average height. I think they come from ordinary households...some want to enter the military, others want to be 'models' that's why height is important to them.)*

For Jane, the fact that the customers keep coming back is a sign of efficacy: “*Siguro naman effective kasi bumibili naman sila ulit eh.*” (Maybe it's effective because they go back). Jane, who is married, but has no children yet, also says that if she had money, she would give Cherifer to her future kids, but adds that “*hindi rin siguro magiging maliit*

*ang magiging anak ko kasi matatangkad naman kami kaya siguro naman magiging matangkad din sya*” (I don’t think my children will be small because we [my husband and I] are tall so I guess he will be tall too). Even as she acknowledges, and attests the, the efficacy of Cherifer, the heredity of height remains a consideration.

The Santamaria family are regular customers in that drugstore; it is Ellen who buys the tablets for her teenagers—and a bottle of Cherifer syrup for her youngest son. As mentioned above, she believes that the short stature that she and her husband have is a liability to her sons. Later, she would reflect that her eldest son became botsog (fat) because of her attempts through various foods, milk, sleep, and vitamins to make him tall. But “ngayon, hi-tech na” (nowadays, it’s ‘high tech’), she reasons, suggesting that growth supplements have rendered obsolete all the previous practices that had, in JV’s case, the unintended consequence of obesity. The “hi-tech” practices of today also means that children are taller and that she as a responsible mother should make sure that her children are not left behind:

*Yung mga kaklase nya nagugulat ako, matatangkad. Siguro dahil narin sa panahon ngayon yung mga vitamins, mga gatas.* (His classmates, I’m surprised, are tall! Maybe because nowadays there are vitamins, milk.)

Costing 20 pesos (\$0.43) per tablet, Cherifer translates to 600 pesos (\$13) a month for VJ, and around 400 pesos (\$9) for Timothy (JV, already 19, feels that he won’t grow anymore and is already satisfied with his height of 5’8). Thus she spends a total of 1000 (\$22) pesos—not including the fresh milk that costs 80 per litre. When I present my calculations to Ellen, she justifies her “investment” of Cherifer in these terms, echoing the “Iba na ang matangkad” of Star Magarine:

*Iba rin talaga pag matangkad. Kung hindi ka masyadong gwapo pero matangkad ka, mahatak na ng tangkad mo yung itsura mo. Pero kung maliit ka na nga, pangit ka pa, sorry ka na lang.* (It’s really different if you’re tall. Even if you’re not too handsome but you’re tall, the tallness can “pull” your appearance. But I feel sorry for one who’s short and ugly!)

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To further understand the appeal of these vitamins, one must look at the way they are marketed, and how this marketing resonates with local knowledge about height and height-making; as well as aspirations that are linked to height. In Cherifer, the key ingredient is “Chlorella Growth Factor” (CGF), a neologism that the manufacturers trace to Japanese scientists in the 1960s. Sounding like the naturally-occurring Insulin-like Growth Factor (IGF) and growth hormone itself, CGF builds on explanatory models of growing up that implicate growth hormone as the mediator for growing. As Joshua (35, 5’5)—an instructor at the Palawan State University: “Yes, I think it’s effective,



because it promotes the release of growth hormone from the pituitary gland.” Taurine, which gets “second billing” in product labels, is already a key ingredient for appetite stimulants, thus linking Cherifer with these older supplements and the trust they have gained for doctors and parents alike.

Looking beyond the ingredients yields further insights. For Cherifer, the very image in its product labels is that of a boy playing basketball, and a banner that reads “Height is might”. In TV and print ads, the main endorser for Cherifer is Kobe Paras, a rising star in Philippine basketball. An American citizen by virtue of his mother, a former actress, Kobe currently plays for Cathedral High School in Los Angeles, awaiting his entry to UCLA. His story has an element of subversive triumph: US players are usually “imported” to play in Philippine basketball leagues; Kobe on the other hand is a Filipino playing in the US. The advertisements show him with his hand above his head—an act of measuring himself against his imagined “potential”.

Television commercials of Kobe alongside his proud father, a basketball legend of the 1990s, and brother Andre, also a basketball player, engage notions of genetics, kinship, and parenthood, while the slogan “*Tangkad sagad*” (tall to the fullest) suggests that with Cherifer, genetic potential can be achieved. In Katipunan Ave, the approach to two of Manila’s biggest universities, a larger-than-life image of Kobe Paras about to do a slam dunk appears in a billboard with the words “Take your potential to new heights”. In small print, a clarification reads: “Achievable with adequate sleep, proper diet, and avoidance of drinking and smoking.”

Note how these advertisements make use of parental roles and family relationships. In the field, I realized that asking the mothers which vitamins they give, especially in a public setting, is almost certain to elicit a response, even if further questions reveal that in reality they hardly give vitamins—and they were only responding because they didn’t



Fig. 2 - A Cherifer billboard in Metro Manila shows two generations of basketball players: 1990s legend Benjie Paras, and son Kobe (18, 6'5) - a rising star of Philippine basketball - alongside the words “Height is might”. Photo by the author.



want to appear irresponsible or not caring enough. On the other hand, for the makers of Cherifer, a proud father does not only pass on good genes to his son; he also makes sure that he reaches his full potential through the consumption of Cherifer.

These TV commercials are not peripheral to my interlocutors' experiences. Alvira, another instructor at the Palawan State University, shares that her 7-year old son came to her one day, demanding that he be given Cherifer—after seeing a TV commercial. Among high school students, Lizette (19, 4'9) spoke of sessions in which she and her other “pandak” classmates bought and drank Cherifer tablets together. VJ (15, 5'5) makes fun of his classmate who takes “two tablets” a day:

*May isa akong kaklase, dalawa ang iniinom na Cherifer. Hawak-hawak pa nya yung Cherifer. Gusto talaga nyang tumangkad. (I have a classmate, he takes two tablets of Cherifer everyday! He even holds the Cherifer [all the time]. He really wants to grow tall.)*

As with the other practices we have surveyed, however, there is uncertainty about whether vitamins are really effective. Nenita (47, 5'0), mother of three, has doubts based on experience:

*Kung anung height nila yan nalang din talaga ang tangkad nila yung isang anak ko na umiinom ng cherifer pero mas matangkad pa sa kanya yung isang hindi umiinom. (Whatever their height is, that's really how tall they will be. One of my sons took Cherifer but the one who didn't take it is even taller than him)*

The ambiguity surrounding the making of height makes unclear how long one has to take Cherifer for it to be effective. When I asked Monica (15, 5'2), a high school student, if Cherifer is effective, she replied: “*Effective po kasi tumangkad naman ako*” (“I think it's effective because I grew tall”). But when I asked her to think about what happened to her classmates who took Cherifer, she responded: “*Siguro po sa iba effective, sa iba hindi. Hindi ko rin po talaga masabi.*” (“Maybe for some it's effective, but not for others. I really can't tell for sure.”)

*Certain drugs work for certain people.* Once again, we see here how the notion of *hiyang* structures the way people's understandings of drug efficacy. By implicating lack of compatibility as the probable reason why a drug didn't work, it deflects question of a drug's inherent (i.e. pharmaceutical) worth. Thus even upon hearing evidence the contrary, parents and children can keep thinking that Cherifer is worth a try. Perhaps this “experimentation” is the reason why, in my survey of elementary and high school students, a majority of students have tried growth supplements at least once—even though very few reported regular and consistent use.

Socio-economic considerations, and even heredity, come into play, too: Others, including JM (19, 5'11), a basketball player in PSU, says that he is “naturally” tall; his

parents and grandparents are tall so there was “no need” for him to take supplements. This minor discourse of “natural height”, accompanied with a hint of pride, like Filipinos who boast of “natural whiteness” or “natural beauty”, deserves further exploration. For the purposes of my dissertation, it would suffice to say that people see their heredity as a “baseline”; and growth supplements as substances that augment height if needed.

But young people who are “confident” of their eventual tallness are in the minority; for most, the opposite is true: as with Ellen Santamaria, who predicts that her sons will be short if she doesn’t do anything, there is the eventuality of shortness that must be averted through various practices. This is where Cherifer comes in, but with a caveat: its ambiguity, and the very difficulty of measuring progress, attenuates people’s use and expectation of growth supplements.

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Public health centres are also involved in the use of vitamins and supplements. In Puerto Princesa, vitamin A and Iron supplementation are performed quarterly, with barangay nutrition scholars going house to house in order to administer these as drops. Evidence is mixed whether iron and vitamin A supplementation are effective interventions, but barangay health workers are convinced that these are a big help to children, even as they acknowledge that ultimately it’s up to the mothers to make a difference; vitamins can only do so much. In the face of intractable malnutrition, however, these programs have at least one benefit: they are responses, allowing the a sense of control—or at least of action—in dealing with the problem.

Pediatricians are also on the receiving end of requests for vitamins, but the relationship is more complicated than a mere rendition of the dictates of textbook knowledge. Though there is completely no literature that supports the utility of Chlorella Growth Factor and Taurine, some pediatricians do report efficacy from their clinical experiences. Dr. Rebs Andal says that for certain children, vitamins have a marked effect in boosting appetite—which he proposes to be the mechanism for its promises of tallness. Like the mothers, he subscribes to the idea of ‘hiyang’. Yet, as Sharon, another pediatrician, acknowledges:

*Sinasabi ko sa kanila na baka ganyan talaga ang limit ng height nya. Kasi ang height naman..Alangan namang bolahin ko sila na uminom tayo ng Cherifer. May limit din yung genes. kaya nga we compute the midparental height. Kung ganong talaga ang height, wala tayong magagawa. May role parin yung genes. (I tell them, maybe that’s really the limit of [the child’s] height. Because height...I cannot flatter them and tell them to drink Cherifer. Genes also set a limit, that’s why we compute the mid-parental height. If that’s really the height, we cannot do anything. Genes still have a role.)*

Medical anthropologist Michael Tan (1999:77) called the emergence of vitamin supplements as a “gray area, but one which is old terrain, already seeded with ideas ready to germinate.” Certainly, we could look at the *pampatangkad* as the germination of an idea on a ground already made fertile by pre-existing ideas about what vitamins can do for the growing child’s body.

Importantly, however, it is not just that the ground that is fertile; the seed itself is potent: growth supplements like Cherifer make available for immediate consumption the possibility of tallness, by standing for a *alter*-nutrition that is anterior to that offered by food and traditional practices, and a modernity for which tallness is both proof and promise. In our survey of the “making of height”, growth supplements stand out in its transmutation of an abstract, long-term “body project” into a tangible “thing”<sup>51</sup>, consumable in an instant, encapsulating desires and possibilities.

## DISCUSSION

### The materiality of height

My survey of the various practices that are related to height first and foremost bolsters the case for height’s materiality in the Philippines. In the table that ranks the country as having the highest amount of daytime sleep for children, I see evidence of height being a concern *particularly* in the Philippines. The relative popularity, and even the very existence, of growth supplements like Cherifer says as much. Despite similar pharmaceutical profiles, for instance, neighboring Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, did not have growth supplements in their MIMS (*Monthly Index of Medical Specialties*) drug databases. Indonesia and Vietnam both has one, Growee, which originated from the Philippines. In comparison, the Philippine MIMS revealed 58 products with Chlorella Growth Factor.<sup>52</sup>

However, it must be emphasized that these practices are, more often, not just about height alone. For many of my interlocutors, the desirability of tallness is embedded in a matrix of values that includes the growing child’s overall health (as in the case of breastfeeding or milk) or social acceptance (as in the case of circumcision). Parents’ choices of food and vitamins are mediated by concepts like *hiyang*, what their children find delicious, and certain more pressing concerns like boosting their appetite and making them “masigla” (vigorous; active). Circumcision, for its part, is a rite of passage of boys with as much negative (i.e. not being bullied for being uncircumcised) as positive social incentives. Without discounting the ways people make sense of these

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51 In using the word “thing” I am inspired by Whyte and others’ (2002) reflection of how the “thingi-ness” of medicines make them of “great analytic importance to anthropology”, and a “bridge between culture and economy” Also: “Medicines hold out the promise of making disease graspable, casting the problem as something tangible and amenable to efficacious action.” (2002:50)

52 This data can be generated using a quick online database search: <http://www.mims.com/philippines/drug/search?q=chlorella>

practices, moreover, there is the force of tradition, and the givenness of “common knowledge”, that drives practices like putting children to sleep during afternoons, or making them stretch their bones in the mornings.

Even those that are overtly for height, such as Cherifer, are embedded in a suite of benefits that include increased appetite and disease prevention. Height-making does not emerge as a visible, grand project that families knowingly embark on, but one that pervades various aspects of child-rearing.

Looking at the temporal dimensions of height-making practices (i.e. when, during the child’s development, are they done?) and its subjects (i.e. who among the children are made to undergo them?) allow us to refine the scope of this materiality. Our findings show that mothers don’t really worry about their children’s height until they go to school and get compared with other kids — cousins, neighbors, and eventually, classmates in school. Doc Sharon, a local pediatrician agrees that it is only when the children become a bit older—“when they start falling in line in school” that height becomes a concern for the family. Older children usually take Cherifer before the start of a school year, particularly before entering high school: demonstrating that the concern for height is always in relation to current or expected field, usually the school, in which the children find themselves. As in the American period (see Chapter 1), we see a *comparative paradigm* that informs the attention to height. (In the next chapter, I will discuss the specificities of the school that make it a venue where meanings of height are “learned”.)

There is also a gendered component to this materiality. The fact that many of the practices are related to boys (sports like basketball; practices like circumcision and masturbation) speak of tallness as a masculine attribute; and while tallness is desired by (and for) girls and boys alike, it is the latter for which it is a particular concern. Indeed, there is a greater expectation of tallness for boys—an expectation that translates to greater attention to their growth.<sup>53</sup>

### Explanatory models of growing up

Beyond establishing and clarifying height’s materiality, these practices also illuminate explanatory models<sup>54</sup> about height: lay models espoused by mothers; scientific models applied, but not fully subscribed to, by barangay nutrition scholars; and hybridized forms of knowledge that leak from the Internet, mass and social media taken up by teenagers. All of these coalesce to form models of how children grow up.

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53 The very Tagalog term for male (“lalaki”) is derived from the word growth and “big-ness” (“laki”), suggesting a linguistic connection between masculinity and size - one that American philologist FR Blake (1917:426) called a case of “reduplication”: “The reduplication may be used to emphasize the strength or size of the male (laki means ‘greatness, size’).”

54 Kleinman’s original use of the term “explanatory models” applied to illnesses (Kleinman, 1980), but here I take them to mean any sets of beliefs that surround a particular health phenomenon, whether pathologic or physiologic.

Insofar as notions of physical growth and development are concerned, the term “hugot-laki” is central. *Hugot*, which literally means “to draw from”, suggests a view of the body as a depository of nutrients and genes from which, at that opportune moment, the child would draw the elements of physical growth and maturity (*laki*). This view, which I hear more often when discussing the growth of boys, looks at height-making as both a long-term project and one that culminates at a moment in puberty.

The idea that height is long-term informs the attention to breastfeeding, vitamins (*qua* “nutri-builders”), food, and sleep. On the other hand there are also practices that surround *hugot-laki*. Circumcision is seen as a trigger, and so is masturbation (hence its being ‘vitamin J’). Growth hormones, seen to facilitate the spurt, are mimed by “growth factors” advertised to help trigger and maximise the child’s “shooting-up years”. Not surprisingly, it is during the expected time of *hugot-laki* that many young people take Cherifer, as in the case of Lizette (above) who tells of her shared consumption of the vitamin with classmates of a similar “predicament”.

“*Hugot-laki*” points to something inherent in the child’s body, from which it will draw its growth. But understandings of what exactly these inherent substances are, and how effectively they are mobilized by the body, are constantly undergoing change. Vitamins, for instance, are sometimes seen as facilitators of natural growth; but some mothers also see them as a source of growth in themselves. As one blogger-mom says of Cherifer: “Now if this were only available during my youth, instead of looking eye to eye with most people, I would be towering over them!” The new products in the market are thus used to explain the “secular trend” of children getting taller even as the idea that children are now taller informs the need not to “get left behind”, and thus to avail of growth supplements.

### **Capital and commodification**

Using Bourdieu’s framework of capital, we can also see in these various height-making practices how economic capital is mobilized to produce height *qua* body capital. Most of the time, this goes unremarked, but sometimes, it is explicated by the informants themselves, as when they call the use of Cherifer “*puhunan*”, investment. If people “invest” in height, then they see value in it—and in the next chapters I will try to illuminate the ways in which it becomes capital; and how it relates to other forms of capital.

Andro (13, 5’2) mentioned that he couldn’t keep taking Cherifer because his family was poor. So all he could do is to jump during New Year’s Eve and sleep on weekend afternoons—which he reported to be ineffective. Tellingly, in a Grade 7 section of private school, while 57% of boys and 71% of girls reported using Cherifer at some point, only 38% and 36%, respectively, did so among their public school counterparts.

Related to this view of height as capital is the commodification of height, which is likewise premised on the idea that height has value for people. Whether in margarines, milk formulas, or vitamin supplements—parental (and individual) aspirations are mobilized to entice them to buy vitamins. Imagery of beautiful, smart, athletic youths are presented with growth supplements, appealing to parents’ aspirations of who they their children with *grow up* to be. In folding tallness with success, beauty, athleticism, affluence, and fame, note how the commodification of height conflates physical growth with social progress and mobility; physical stature serves as a metaphor for social stature.

In the introduction, I emphasized that “body capital” does not belong to the individual alone, and in looking at height-making practices we see other “stakeholders” in growing child’s body, who likewise see it as capital. For parents, children are sources of pride, reflecting their pedigree and parenting. It is no accident that the commercials also include images of the “smart” and “good” mother, alongside imagery linked to height: basketball, beauty pageants, children that are smart, confident, beautiful. After all, this is a shared body project.

There is also something at stake for the government. Health officials seek to make children become taller, seeing it as a indicator of health for their barangay, the city, and the country. In the move to prevent “stunting”, they implement supplemental feeding programs, vitamin supplementation, and counselling to parents. Consonant with parental aspirations are bureaucratic goals — of being voted the “most improved barangay” in nutrition month contests, or being awarded a medal — accolades that find their way in the Annual Report of the City Health Office. Even without an improvement in the indicators, the very act of engaging in programs like vitamin supplementation is itself “efficacious” as it allows health officials to say that they did “something” in response to the malnutrition problem. Writ large, these public health objectives, as with the children’s measurements, are transcribed as regional and national “performance reports” and “accomplishments”, amenable to epidemiological comparisons on a global scale.

We see in height a confluence — not a conflict — of interests, which are in themselves revelatory of what height means, and consequently, reinforcing of height as *habitus*. As da Silva and others (2004:525) write: “Modern society has given a lot of value to being slim and tall. The search for a body image, many times idealised by parents, media, social groups and the adolescents themselves, many times unchain harmful behaviours for health. Among the several existing stereotypes, the search for slim and tall appearance is usually reinforced since childhood.” And as I will stress throughout this work, height is not just reinforced by its perceived aesthetic worth, but in its immanence in various domains.



## Ambiguity and efficacy

In reflecting on all these practices, one final theme that comes out strongly is the ambiguity of height, that is, the uncertainty of its mechanisms. Some are “slow growers”, who, even without any special intervention, would “shoot up” from *pandak* to *matangkad*. Others grow fast but their growths are ‘nahinto’ (arrested) at some point. Moreover there is also an ambiguity about the efficacy of these products and practices. For others, Cherifer is very effective; for some there is no effect. This ambiguity mirrors the equally-ambiguous and inconclusive scientific research about the roles of various practices in height-making.

Thus when I try to probe about their explanatory models for height, the mothers and children bring the question back to me: *So how can our kids actually be taller?* I cannot not answer their question, and I give my advice; and I tell them that based on what I know, height is a function of genetics, nutrition, quality of life. While these generalizations may hold true at the population level, there is no way to accurately prognosticate adult height at the individual, and even quotidian advice like eating healthier food can only present likelihood, not certainty. They are disappointed. Probably, some were expecting me to prescribe some vitamins or recommend an exact number of hours of sleep.

However, whether or not these practices and products have a certitude of efficacy in the pharmaceutical sense; they have other “efficacies” that allow the parents to look past my medical opinions and form their own, or act anyway in the absence of any conviction or opinion. In the absence of proof, the parents keep doing what they can, saying “*wala namang mawawala*” (there is nothing to lose), even as they invest time and effort in the pursuit of children’s tallness. Vitamins, with their mass-mediated, pediatrician-sanctioned, anecdotally-validated promises of tallness, are products that fulfill the existential demands of an imagined efficacy in the future. And as visible, tangible objects in the household, placed on top of refrigerators or on kitchen shelves, there is “symbolic efficacy” in their provisioning, as they serve as the link between that hoped-for future and the present. Moreover, they also have “social efficacy”, as both the act of giving it and its anticipated effects are marks of good parenting.

Which is probably why Mario (45, 5’6), waiting for his children in the waiting shed in front of San Pedro Elementary School, proudly declares that he religiously gives Cherifer to his two boys, raising his voice a bit so that the mothers waiting for their own children can hear him: “*Basta itutuloy-tuloy ko ang pagbibigay ng Cherifer sa kanila. Malay mo ang anak ko ang susunod na Michael Jordan!*” (“I will keep giving Cherifer. Who knows, maybe my child will be the next Michael Jordan!”)



## ENDOTE: NEW YEAR'S EVE IN PALAWAN

Spending the New Year's Eve in Puerto Princesa allowed me to observe the once-a-year phenomenon related to height: jumping at the stroke of midnight, at the very beginning of the new year. Yasmin (24, 5'1), the environmentalist who had become one of my key informants, invited me to spend the New Year with her family, and I eagerly accepted her invitation.

The mechanics of this annual tradition is simple: Jump at the stroke of midnight. Some say that one must jump 12 times, for the 12 months of the year. Others say children must jump as high — or as many times — as they can.

The origin of this practice has continued to elude me. Though the act of jumping is a New Year's Eve tradition in many parts of the world, it is only in the Philippines where children jump to become taller. I ask Yasmin's father if he remembers jumping in New Year, he responded in the negative. So it must have began sometime in the 1960s. Several middle-aged writers have reflected on their experiences on New Year's, including one business columnist:

I also remember my uncles and aunties telling us gullible kids, "Hey, don't forget, at the stroke of midnight, jump as high as you can repeatedly so you'll be taller" And like a bunch of idiots, we'd jump up and down at the stroke of midnight. I didn't grow up to be as tall as Yao Ming, as I had hoped (that guy probably jumped a whole lot during Chinese New Year). But luckily, I did grow up to be reasonably tall. Well, at least tall enough to have the confidence to go out on dates without feeling too insecure about my height. My brothers and sisters were fortunate, too. But oddly, I have some cousins I jumped with who are still, er, "vertically challenged." Some of them are in their 40s now and they're still jumping every New Year. I don't know. I'm beginning to think that this whole "jump as high as you can at midnight on New Year's Eve" routine has nothing to do with how tall you eventually become. Could it be possible that maybe, just maybe, genetics has something to do with it? Hmm...<sup>55</sup>

A blogger who describes herself as a "single mother" born in the 1960s, also has similar recollections:

At the stroke of midnight, all children are supposed to jump up and down. We were told to take extra effort to jump as high as we can. The reason for this is that it is supposed to make us grow taller. I did believe in this and made sure I jumped like crazy on New Year's Eve. Did I grow tall? Nope. After all those years of jumping when I was a kid, I only grew to be 5 feet 1 1/2 inches [156 cm]. I wonder...

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55 "Bored resolutions" by Rod Nepomuceno. *The Philippine Star*, January 1, 2007

if I didn't jump on New Year's eve when I was a kid, would I have been a dwarf?<sup>56</sup>

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Yasmin's young sister Jenny (16, 5'0) is a fourth year high school student in one of the Catholic private schools. She wants to become at least 5'2—the height of Kathryn Bernardo, girlfriend of her idol, Daniel Padilla (18, 5'9). When Daniel, a pop singer and actor, visited Palawan—she made sure to get front-row seats and managed to have a photo with the singer, much to her joy. She always jokes that if she has the same height as Kathryn, maybe Daniel will consider her. “*Asa ka pa!*” (You wish!) other family members reply, all in good cheer.

“Even mother wants to grow tall!” she responds; the light-hearted bantering continue. In their family, they are all relatively short, but they are able to joke about their shortness among themselves and with others. For them, height is not a big deal—but something that's nice to have; nice to hope for.

New Year's Eve is perhaps the only day in the whole year when the children are exempt from sleeping early. In fact some consider children staying awake until midnight a tradition in itself. From dinnertime until around 11:30, the children in the Garibay family played video games. There were six of them, cousins all, ranging from 3 to 10. Jenny and Yasmin are like their big sisters, although in reality they are their aunts. The TV is also on and the grownups are watching, while the women are preparing food.

By 11:30, people begin to come out of the house; a table is set up in the porch and the conversation moves there. Their father comes out and I engage him in a conversation about their family history, and life in Puerto Princesa. Inevitably the conversation goes to the changes that have happened in the past decade; how the prices of land have skyrocketed, how there's a new hotel being built everyday.

Our conversation is cut short as everyone pitches in to prepare for the impending celebrations. Fireworks are brought out, as well as candles to light them with. Yasmin's father remarks: “You can tell if we had a good year depending on the amount of fireworks that people display.. If the economy is good you can expect a lot of fireworks!” He adds that they themselves don't spend on fireworks, preferring to watch from a distance.

The television serves as the countdown machine. Somewhere in Manila, celebrities, including Jenny's idol Daniel Padilla, have gathered to entertain a huge crowd and they will welcome the new year together.

Finally, the moment arrives. 5 minutes... 1 minute... and then the chanting: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one..

*HAPPY NEW YEAR!*

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56 <http://www.bornadragon.com/2014/12/12-strange-filipino-traditions-on-new.html>

As if one cue, amid the lights and sounds and fireworks near and far, the children began jumping. After several jumps the young ones got tired and play with the fireworks at hand; Jenny however kept jumping for a couple of minutes. “You have to jump as high as you could, and as many times as you could,” my informants had said, and Jenny was living it out.

Perhaps the young ones don’t care about height as much as Jenny—or they have yet to experience what height means in their social lives. In the coming chapters I will demonstrate that height becomes more important in school, where the children are compared with each other, and when children realize that they have limited years during which they could grow. High school is particularly significant because this is the age when time when many undergo growth spurts while others are left behind. Jenny’s jumping, just like the students going to the pharmacy to buy a couple of tablets, are informed by similar logics: of ambivalence and hope, the notion that there is nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

The festivities continue past midnight — there is singing amid the partaking of different foods and drinking San Miguel beer. As I took part with the merriment, it dawned upon me that, in the act of jumping, Jenny and her nephews and nieces were not just expecting to be tall someday; they were also enjoying the moment.

Like children having fun while jumping on New Year Eve, there is something existential in the hope of getting taller. Perhaps it is not just in being tall, but in the “becoming”, that is, in the aspiring and reaching for, that height is at once experienced and realized. The vitamins, milk formulas, and margarines not only commodify the hope for tallness, they make it available for instant consumption, and the same is true for the children’s jumping.<sup>57</sup> Given the uncertainties in the making of height, there is always a chance that it “works”; even if it doesn’t, there is joy in believing that it will. And therein lies the efficacy of these products and practices.

The child who jumps on New Year’s Eve, at least momentarily, becomes as tall as his or her desired height — before falling back to the ground.

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57 See Biehl and Locke (2010) for a discussion of desires and potentials. My notion of “becoming” is also related to Vicente Rafael’s thesis that “anticipation” is a recurrent theme in Philippine history (see Rafael, 2000)



## CHAPTER 3

### **Stature and schooling**

In this chapter, I present the ways in which height materialises in the school environment, and show how the meanings of height are learned in schools and embodied by children as a form of ‘habitus’. The flag ceremony is illustrative: For the 12 years that children are in school, they are made to ‘find their height’ when they would form lines in these weekly ceremonies. I would argue that this practice, while largely taken for granted, accustoms them to the idea of height as an organising principle.

An underlying premise of my argument is that in Philippine society, as with many societies around the world, schools play a central role in the process of socialization. Parsons (1959:309) observed that schools provide an “internalization of a level of societal values and norms that is a step higher than what he can learn from his family alone.” Sociologists, psychologists, and educators have analyzed the manifold values inculcated in schools—from topics as diverse as political affiliation (Langton and Jennings, 1968), religion (Regnerus, 2001), gender roles (Joff, 1971; Kandel, 1978; Eder, 1995; Pascoe, 2011), and environmentalism (Hungerford and Volk, 1990). In the Philippines, Mulder (1990) analysed Social Studies textbooks and their implicit lessons on national identity. These studies build on the idea that there is more that is at stake in schools than just its curriculum; students also learn about ways of relating with others and being part of society.

Building on my engagement with the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (see Introduction), I draw particular inspiration from his emphasis on the role of pedagogical institutions not just in *socialization*, but in *social reproduction*, that is, in the perpetuation of class structures in society (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). In this analytic effort, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* underscores how the reproduction of height’s meanings and materialities requires a sustained experience of them—which is what, as I will show in this chapter, the school offers.

For Bourdieu, habitus is the ‘durable, transposable system of definitions’ that children acquire, firstly from their families, and secondly from schools (which Bourdieu highlighted as of paramount importance in social reproduction). It is a product of class, social status, education, and societal norms and values. Lizardo (2004), noting the under-utilization of this idea in contemporary social research (vis-à-vis Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital), distinguishes between two meanings of habitus: first, as a perceptual and classifying structure (e.g. how to evaluate the quality of food and appreciate various cuisines), and second, as a generative structure of practical action (e.g. how to eat properly using a fork and knife). The former is particularly salient in my study, as I sought to uncover what children experience repeatedly in the school that

makes height itself a “classifying structure” that is embodied by the students as bodily capital.

As my point of departure for this chapter, I share my findings from, and experiences with, a comic strip I designed as an ethnographic tool to elicit students’ perceptions about height. I then present a survey of different situations in schools where height figured, which will, aside from making my case about the materiality of height in the school setting, allow us to make sense of students’ own perceptions.

Height figures as an organizing and classifying principle in the everyday lives of students. I have already cited the example of the flag ceremony, which I will further discuss using students’ own “lived experiences”. Moreover, beyond the flag ceremony, students are also arranged according to height in various situations, including field demonstrations, classroom activities, and in the selection of who gets to perform certain roles.

Height also figures in peer interactions among the students themselves as a mark of distinction and difference. Oftentimes, short students are bullied and teased as ‘pandak’, and it is often the taller students who initiate acts of bullying. However, the picture is far more complicated: Some tall students are also teased about their height, while short students find ways to contest their representation by fighting back, or by highlighting their other ‘advantages’. In these peer interactions we see height’s *relationality*, that is, how height becomes a physical framework with which students relate to one another.

Height is also a determinant in who gets to be picked in school athletics and beauty pageants, two activities that are important for students and the schools themselves. As with the rest of the Philippines, basketball is the most popular sport, and its very architecture favours the tall. This advantage is not absolute: short players and teams can win basketball games—and their victories are even more meaningful. Even so, by becoming a precondition to these activities, height becomes associated to athleticism and beauty.

Finally, height appears in the content of textbooks themselves, as a marker of racial identity in Social Studies lessons, and as a plot device in reading materials, and as an example of bodily difference in morality discussions. Stories from reading materials mirror the materialities of height children experience in schools, while morality discussions acknowledge how height differences can cause discrimination and inequalities.

Taken together, these materialities show that height, while mostly taken for granted, is a pervasive presence in schools. I will conclude this chapter by reviewing my conceptual framework in light of my findings, and offer insights on height’s *relationality* and *lived reality* to further refine our understanding of the embeddedness and importance of height in society.

## FRANCIS LIIT, FRANCIS LAKI: DOING ETHNOGRAPHY AMONG SCHOOL-CHILDREN

To elicit students' perceptions about height and use these perceptions as an "ethnographic starting point" in observing *practices in which height figures*, I designed a comic strip entitled "Francis Liit, Francis Laki" (Small Francis, Big Francis) accompanied by a questionnaire. Drawing from my initial fieldwork, the comics is about a boy named Francis who was the shortest in class and feels unhappy about his height, complaining to his mother that he gets frequently bullied. He fervently wishes to become tall, and did various practices believed to make children grow taller (i.e. those I discussed in Chapter 2), but to no avail. One summer vacation, however, he experiences growing pains and emerges the following school year as the tallest in class. Contrary to his expectations, however, his being too tall still makes him teased and in the end he learns to be content about whatever height he has (see Appendix A for the English translation of the story).

By presenting shortness and tallness and their advantages and disadvantages in as balanced a way as I can, I hoped to make the topic more value-free or neutral in a discussion that would otherwise be skewed towards the disadvantages of shortness. Moreover, having a protagonist allowed the students to project their own thoughts or at least to relate to him, which I felt made the questions easier to answer. Doing the survey in public and private schools (and thus between different socio-economic classes), different grade levels (Grade 4 to Grade 10 classes, and their ages ranged from 10 to 17), and different genders allowed me to have a rich material that made for a useful starting point for my ethnography. At the end of my research, over 500 students — around 200 from a Protestant, co-ed private school, 100 from a Catholic all-boys school, and 200 from a public school — had read the *Francis Laki*, *Francis Liit* comics, and answered my questionnaire.

The administration of the comic strip turned out to be an ethnographic exercise in itself. True enough, the comics provoked genuine interest among the students, many of whom were thrown into conversation

# FRANCIS LIIT, FRANCIS LAKI

Isinulat ni: Gideon Lasco  
Nilarawan ni: Tod Abolucion

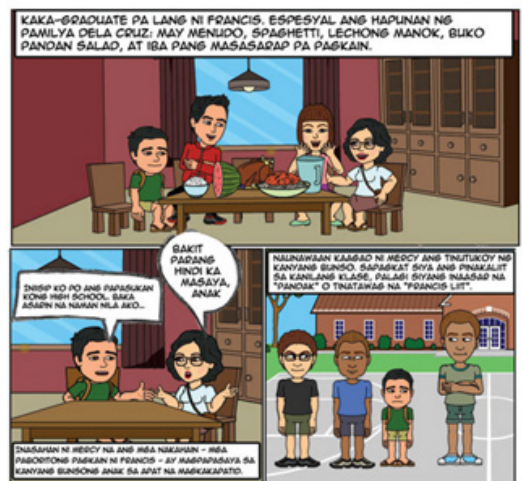


Fig. 1 - The first page in the eight-page comic strip entitled "Francis Liit, Francis Laki" (Small Francis, Big Francis) that I used as an ethnographic tool.



and comparison as soon as they received the comics. Upon receiving the booklet and the questionnaire, some stood up to measure their heights against each other, using their classmates as measuring stick. While people speak of human height in terms of feet and inches, in everyday life this measuring is done by comparing one's height with others. *If someone's 5'3, and I'm just a little bit taller, I must be 5'4.*

I asked the students several questions, from the ideal height of their partners to their perceived advantages and disadvantages of height, but their responses were more of a guide as I progressed in my ethnography, and I will only incorporate them in the latter parts of the chapter where relevant. In what follows, I will present just two key findings from this exercise: the students' *self-reported heights* and their *height aspirations*, together with accompanying insights. If we are to look at the school as a 'bodily field', physical differences between various groups, and the range of these differences, are a very important context. Students' height aspirations, for their part, are linked to gender ideologies, family and peer relationships, students' own career aspirations, and tempered by the students' (growing) understanding of height.

### **The students' heights**

The students reported heights that ranged from that of a child to that of tall adult: from 4'3 (130 cm) to 6' (183 cm).<sup>58</sup> While it is to be expected that the older students would be taller than the younger ones, there are less obvious differences: for instance, the fact that height differences between boys and girls only become more pronounced in the later years, as a consequence of the girls' earlier growth spurts. But the range is also significant: There was more variation among the younger students. Among the private Grade 7 students, there was a one foot difference between the tallest and the shortest boy. All these remind us that height is not a fixed attribute for these children — they are still in the process of growth.

Students in private schools are significantly taller than those in public schools. This mirrors the view of one teacher: "During inter-school activities you know which are the private students, not just by their uniform but the way they look: they're bigger and healthier." Importantly, however, the range tells us that while the averages differ between public and private schools, there are tall students in public school, and short students in private school. Explaining these differences between socio-economic groups is a lively scholarly debate (see Chapter 2), but for this chapter what is important to emphasize is that a student can be "tall" or "short" depending on which school he's in: these are

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58 The Philippines officially shifted to the metric system in 1973, by virtue of Presidential Decree no. 187, and it has since been widely adopted. However, height remains measured in feet and inches, from sports commentaries to casual conversations. Perhaps we could also look at this as another example of habitus in action: an official move to the metric system notwithstanding, people's dispositions towards the "nakagawian" (customary way of doing things) are difficult to change.

Interestingly, many students reported heights by the half-numeral, i.e. 5'6 1/2, which in my view further highlights the importance of height, for even half an inch matters.

	Private - Male	Private - female	Public - Male	Public - Female
<b>Grade 7 (12-13)</b>	5'3 (4'7-5'7)	5'3 (4'5-5'6)	5'1.5 (4'9-5'8)	4'11 (4'4-5'6)
<b>Grade 8 (13-14)</b>	5'5 (4'8-5'10)	5'2 (4'9-5'4)	5'2.5 (4'3-5'9)	5'0 (4'5-5'6)
<b>Grade 9 (14-15)</b>	5'5.5 (5'0-5'11.5)	5'3 (4'9-5'6)	5'5 (5'2-5'10)	5'1 (4'4-5'4)
<b>Grade 10 (15-16)</b>	5'7.5 (5'3-6'0)	5'3 (4'11-5'5)	5'4.5 (5'0-5'8)	5'1 (4'7-5'5.5)

always relative terms.

Although the heights were self-reported, the values generally corresponded to what I, on observation, estimated to be their actual heights. Also, the children seemed to be very aware of their actual heights. I also included a weight field in my questionnaire and while there were many cases where the “weight” field was left blank, the “height” field almost always had an answer, which suggests that indeed there is an awareness about height. Otherwise, it is also a very visible and comparable attribute of one’s body: When some of them were in doubt, they just stood up and compared their heights with their classmates who knew their own heights. Others inquired about the height of the person next to him in the flag ceremony as an approximation.

### Height aspirations

To elicit the students’ height aspirations, I resorted to two questions: “What height do you want to have when you grow old?” and “Who do you want to be as tall as”. As in their self-reported heights, height aspirations varied across genders, year levels, and kind of schools. Here are some of their typical responses:

*“6’5 ako upang maging player talaga na basketball at matulungan ang aking pamilya.”* (I want to be 6’5 so I can really be a basketball player and I can help my family)–Leynon (12, 4’11) male, public school

*“Mas pipiliin ko ang 5’9 dahil para sa edad ko sa ngayon ay matangkad na ako para sa mga Pilipino at para sa aking sport na swimming mas malaki pa ang advantage”* (I would choose 5’9 because at my age I am already tall for a Filipino and for my sport, swimming, it will give me an advantage).–Shaina (11, 5’3.5), female, private school

*“5’6 dahil para sa akin ito ang average height ng isang babae”* (5’6 because for me that’s the average height of a woman)–Jizelle (16, 5’3.5), female, public school

*“6’, kasi sa tangkad ko na ito marami na kong magagawa sa buhay at para sa’kin kaya ko gumawa ng mga bagay-bagay na gusto ko.”* (6 feet because at this height I can do many things in life and allow me to do the things that I can want)–John William (17, 5’6) male, private school

Gender differences can be observed from these height aspirations. Most of the boys

wanted to be really tall—i.e. to become “six footers”<sup>59</sup>—and basketball is a strong motivation for this desire. Some furnish more details, mentioning for instance that the increased height is needed so that they can ability to perform *dakdak* (slam dunk), in which the player is able to literally slam the ball into the ring and hang on the ring afterwards. Their height exemplars were also basketball players—with the only notable difference being that the private students picked American players like LeBron James (6’5), while public students picked local sports heroes like Marc Pingris (6’4), June Mar Fajardo (6’11), Japheth Aguilar (6’9). Interestingly, several boys who were relatively short mentioned Jimmy Alapag (5’9), one of the shortest players in the Philippine national team, as their height exemplar.<sup>60</sup>

Girls, too, want to be tall, linking this desire with aspirations of being a model, being a flight attendant—and like the boys, to have an advantage with sports. Their height exemplars were celebrities, and as in the boys, there was also a divide between private and public schools, with the former favoring Hollywood stars and globally-recognisable celebrities, such as American actress-singer Selena Gomez (5’5), American TV personality Kendall Jenner (5’10), and English fashion model-actress Cara Delevigne (5’10), while among the latter, local stars like 18-year old actress Kathryn Bernardo (5’2) and singer Sarah Geronimo (5’4) were cited. I call attention to these differences between public and private schools to show how cultural reference points (i.e. Hollywood) can also be reference points for their bodies, and that as these references change in different fields, so do bodily aspirations.

While many of the boys sought for very tall heights, girls were more constrained in their preferences, many of them justifying that they only want be at the height of an “average girl”. Not a single one of them, for instance, said that they wanted to be a six-footer. “*Kung masyado akong matangkad walang magkakagusto sakin!*” (If I’m too tall no one will be attracted to me!), Sharmaine (16, 5’4) says, a view shared by my female informants of all ages. But aside from concerns over their romantic prospects, they are also anxious not to be feel “*ilang*” (awkward) with their peers, that is, not being too different from them. Thus, for many girls, the ideal height should be just above average, and lower than the boys, thus constraining their preferences to a range. The terms “*katamtaman*”, “*tama lang*”, “*sakto lang*”, which all mean “just enough”, all express the desire to belong to the median, or *not to stand out too much*.

I also noticed differences based on the students’ age. Older students tended to mention

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59 The category “six footer”, often used in everyday conversation when talking about height, is a case of how the act of measuring the body gives rises to certain identities. Without the English system of measure, there would be no ‘six footers’.

60 In the lead-up to the Philippines’ run in the FIBA World Cup 2014, I followed the commentary and popular discussion - in the field and online - about the Philippine team and Alapag’s relatively short stature was routinely highlighted, with reports dubbing him the “Mighty Mouse” and “Little Big Man”. This is despite the fact that Jimmy Alapag’s stature (5’9) makes him relatively tall in the Philippines.

employment prospects as a reason for wanting to be tall. As Christine (16, 5'2) said:

*Gusto kong maging 5'6 kasi pangarap kong maging stewardess at kelangan at least 5'4 ka para makapasok. Lamang na ako sa iba kung 5'6.* (I want to be 5'6 because I want to be a stewardess [i.e. flight attendant] and need to be at least 5'4 to be accepted. I'll have an advantage over others at 5'6)

Moreover, older students tended to have lower expectations about how much inches they would still gain, perhaps mindful of the fact, taught to them in Biology and perhaps by experience—that growth stops at a certain age. As Mary (16, 5'0) says:

*5'5 pangarapin ko man ay imposible ko pong maabot naaayon parin iyan sa "heredity" na makukuha ko mula sa aking mga magulang mula sa pinagsama nilang genes.* (5'5—even if I aspire for it, it's impossible for me to reach it because it's still determined by "heredity", I only get [my height] from my parents, from their combined genes)

Family members also figured in these height aspirations. Some, like Leynon above, wanted to be tall so they can help their families. Others wanted to be as tall as their parents or elder siblings:

*Gusto kong maging kasingtangkad ng tita ko dahil palagi siyang pinupuri at mas madali siyang nakahanap ng trabaho.* (I want to be as tall as my aunt because she's always praised and she got a job easily)—Princess (14, 5'3)

Some also wanted to be taller than their parents. saying that it was their parents' wish, not just theirs, as Emilaine (13, 5'0) said:

*Gusto kong maging mas matangkad sa nanay ko na 5'3 dahil yun ang gusto nya.*

Finally, there was a "negative reason" for wanting to be tall: So that they won't get bullied. Not surprisingly, this was more frequent among those who reported their heights to be below 5 feet:

*"Gusto kong maging 5'4, maging matangkad lang nang konti para hind po ako aasarin ng "pandak" (I want to be 5'4, just to be a bit tall so that I won't be teased as 'pandak')—Mariel (13, 4'9), female, public school*

*"6'0 upang mapantayan ko na ang mga iba at hindi na ako aasarin" (6'0 so that I can be the (equal of others and they will no longer tease me)—Christian (14, 5'2), male, public school*

There were only a handful of students who said they did not want to get taller than their current heights. Some explained that they had reached their "*pangarap na tangkad*" ("dream height"), like Gio (16, 5'10) who says he's already happy with his height; any

taller and it wouldn't be “bagay” (fit) with his body. This notion of “bagay” — i.e. that bodies must ‘fit’ — adds *corporeality* to the notion of relationality and I will explore this theme later in this chapter.

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My ethnographic exercise revealed height as a physical attribute that the students are aware that they possess, and as a topic, I found it as something they are *interested in*. Their heights are in the process of change, and in this period there is wide variability of heights, making differences pronounced between the tall—who are taller even than the average Filipino adult—and the short—who still have the heights of “children”. While the degree of desired tallness is contingent on gender ideologies, peer relations, present height, and aspired-for careers, most of the students wanted to be tall—just like Francis.

To make sense of these findings, however, we must look at the school itself see how height *materialises* in the everyday experiences of students.

## HEIGHT IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF STUDENTS

In school, students experience height as an organizing and classifying principle. The flag ceremony, as I mentioned earlier, is illustrative of this and merits further discussion.

During this ceremony, the whole school assembles in front of the flagpole. Students are neatly arranged according to year level, from the most senior to the most junior, and each section is divided into two lines according to gender.

“Find your height!” teachers would tell the younger children as they shepherd them from their classrooms to the assembly grounds. But most of the time, it is a given; students know what to do. The rationale is for everyone to see what's going in front. It also makes the arrangement self-explanatory, as students need only to measure themselves against each other to know where they fall in the line. Though this is rule, however, the elegant arrangement of children rarely happens as latecomers have to be at the back of the lines.

Anthems are sung, pledges are recited, and prayers are uttered. Students who won awards are called to the stage, the school principal gives a short talk, and finally, the students are dismissed to their classrooms.

The flag ceremony is, in a way, a snapshot of children as they grow through the school system: Ten years separate the most junior and the most senior of the students lined up in the flag ceremony; ten transformative years: from the Grade 1 student who could barely read and do arithmetic to the graduating Grade 10 student (and Grade 12 in the coming years) who could write essays and grapple with trigonometry and calculus. Puberty and adolescence, biological and social changes, stand between those ten years,

but amid those changes, the flag ceremony, week by week, is a constant.

Thus it is not surprising that when I ask college students to reflect about height-related experiences in school, the flag ceremony figures prominently. For instance, Lizette (19, 4'5), a college student who recalls her grade school days in a private school affiliated with a Protestant group:

*Every Monday, I had to be at the very front. I watched people progress from the front to the back, but I was left there. And there was a guy who kept teasing me: "Why are you so short?" I told him: "How can you say that? You're short too!" He responded: "At least I'm taller than you!" And that's when I shot back: "At least I'm a girl! You're a boy you should be tall!"*

Indeed, the flag ceremony gives rise to measuring and comparing, especially during the first day of classes. Height changes, sometimes dramatically, and many of my interlocutors, even those who are already young adults, remember where they were on the line. As Jerome (19, 5'9), a fourth year college student recalls:

*I knew I was growing tall because I was moving. I used to be at the very front, being the smallest in our class. Then the next year, I was in the middle. By the end of the school year I was at the back. I was happy to see that I was 'overtaking' my classmates.*

It is not just in the flag ceremony where height is used to arrange students. In school performances, students are likewise arranged according to height. In Scouting, the "Patrol Leader" stands in front, but the rest of his patrol is arranged by height. As with the flag ceremony, the explanation is that the height arrangement allows everyone to see what's happening in front of them.

Inside the classroom, students' heights also give them certain roles. For instance, taller guys are asked to erase the blackboard, or help the teacher lift the table if necessary. Seating arrangements depend on individual teachers' policies: sometimes it is alphabetical, but there are also classes in which the students are free to pick their own seat. In my observation, however, the taller guys usually sat at the back, while the shorter ones sit in front. This allows the taller guys to engage in conversations while the smaller guys sit beside the girls, closer to the supervision of teachers. I do not know why this is the case, but it is an interesting thought-exercise to speculate on how these arrangements, structured in part by height, in turn structure students' experience of the school and the classroom.

Even in the class picture taking, students are ordered according to height: The smaller ones are in front; the taller ones are at the back or in the very front, but seated. I did not have the opportunity to witness a class picture taking, but looking at the class yearbooks of some of my informants, they could tell the stories of the their former classmates through those pictures. Height is, as I learned from them, a memorable attribute: They



can remember who the tallest and shortest in class were. The class pictures, organized according to height, memorialize physical differences through the years.

By arranging students according to height, schools teach students the *habit* of comparison and measuring, and affix height to their identities.

## BULLYING AND PEER INTERACTIONS

Height also figures in students' interactions with each other, particularly when it comes to bullying, forming part of a physical framework that structures *who gets bullied* and *who gets to bully*.



Fig. 2 - A textbook illustration of bullying. Note the height differences of the bullies and the boy being bullied. Source: Reading Marvels for Grade 3, p. 83, Bulgera and others (1994).

As in many parts of the world (Fleming and Jacobsen, 2010), school bullying — acts of aggression and intimidation that involve students — is common in the Philippines. However, bullying itself is a contested term, and as is often the case, teachers, parents, and students have different ideas of what constitutes bullying (a word that's also used in Tagalog i.e. 'pambubully'). Thus in this section I will not treat bullying as a bounded concept, but as one that is part of a spectrum with other forms of peer interactions such as teasing (*pang-aasar*, *panunukso*).

On paper, there are different kinds of bullying. While *physical bullying* is rare, *verbal bullying* is much more common, even though it is rarely recognized as bullying. If I were to ask students and even teachers about bullying, they would often say it is minimal. However, *pang-aasar* is readily acknowledged, but is not seen as problematic. As one teacher said: "Normal naman sa mga bata na nag-aasaran." ("It's just normal for children to make fun of each other").

In the school year of 2013-2014, 1,700 cases of bullying were reported to the Department of Education (Flores, 2014) but independent studies point to a higher rate. For instance a survey done by Rudatsikira and others (2003) among 7,338 high school students, 35% reported being bullied in the past 30 days. Another study done in 2008 revealed that one in two Filipino schoolchildren gets bullied (Diamond, 2008). Ancho (2013:28) suggests that "[bullying] has probably always been present in school, although it has become the subject of increasing attention and a social alarm in recent years."

In 2012, the Department of Education issued a "DepEd Child Protection Policy" that dealt with school violence and bullying. One year later, the Republic Act 10627, the

“Anti-Bullying Act of 2013”, was passed by the Philippine Congress, mandating schools to “adopt policies to address the existence of bullying in their respective institutions.” Aside from the formations of district-level committees that would tackle bullying in their respective jurisdictions, the law mandated schools to make visible the actions they are taking (RA 10627: Section 3, Article 2):

All elementary and secondary schools shall provide students and their parents or guardians a copy of the anti-bullying policies being adopted by the school. Such policies shall likewise be included in the school’s student and/or employee handbook and shall be conspicuously posted on the school walls and website, if there is any.

It is likely because of this provision that the schools I visited in Puerto Princesa had anti-bullying material conspicuously posted in its premises. “This is a bully-free school”, read one poster in a private high school. In one public high school, I saw an entire bulletin board devoted to bullying. In what was likely a student project, the bulletin board was made up of “tweets”, each with a fact about bullying. One such “tweet” defined bullying as “a pattern of aggressive behaviour meant to hurt or cause discomfort to another person. Bullies always have more power than victims. Their power comes from physical size, strength, status, and support within the peer group.”

Other “tweets” define the different kinds of bullying, such as verbal bullying, and even cyber-bullying, which has also been identified as an emerging problem among schools in the Philippines (Baronia-Locsin, 2012; Gonzales, 2014).

The definition that implicates “physical size, strength” in the power relations between the bully and the bullied resonates with the way the students relate height, physical abilities, and bullying. For the younger students, the advantages and disadvantages of being tall or short are often physical. Here are some examples:

“If you’re tall you don’t need to step on a chair to reach things”

“If you’re tall, it’s difficult to hide”

“If you’re tall you always bump your head”

“If you’re tall, you’re slow”

“If you’re short you can easily squeeze into holes”

“If you’re short, you’re fast and agile”

These physical advantages relate to bullying as height is equated to strength:

“If you’re tall you’re strong”

“If you’re tall you can easily fight back”

“If you’re tall they won’t bully you”

Notice how in these statements, the perceived/actual strength is seen as the link that makes tallness a deterrent from getting bullied. On the other hand, if you are small, you get bullied, not just because of small, but because of your inability to defend yourself. In the Francis story, to make shortness and tallness neutral, the character gets teased in both too short and too tall. But some students dispute the equivalence. As Aaron (15, 5'10) confidently asserts:

*Eh ano naman kung asarin nila ako na matangkad? Kapag nagkasuntukan wala silang magagawa.* (So what if they tease me for being tall? If it ends up in a fistfight they will not be able to do anything)

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Students get bullied or teased for different reasons. Some of them are revelatory of social norms and realities that students unreflectingly perpetuate. *Ampon*, for instance, means “adopted child”, and the fact that children are labelled as such that speaks of the primacy of an “orthodox” family in Puerto Princesa society. *Supot* means uncircumcised and boys who pass a certain age (usually Grade 4-6) are expected to be circumcised, another impetus for circumcision, aside from its associations with height and hygiene (see previous chapter). *Bakla* (effeminate) is a label given to boys who are perceived as weak, or do not conform to a certain standard of masculinity.

But more commonly, it is the physical appearances of students that become objects of bullying. Examples I saw or heard include *tabingi ang ngipin* (uneven teeth), *pango ang ilong* (flat nosed), *mataba* (fat), *mukhang kabayo* (looks like a horse).

I never encountered a case of someone teased for being too tall. But I have met tall youths whose heights were problematized by themselves and their peers. Bobby (16, 6'0), who belongs to the pilot section of a public high school, prefers mathematics and chemistry to basketball and hates the fact that his non-participation in basketball is always called to attention. He jokes: “*Pwede bang ibigay ko na lang yung height ko sa iba?*” (Can I give my height to others?) Perhaps he is too tall to be bullied physically, but such remarks are a sore point in his school life.

Michael (5'8), is a college student who belongs to the glee club. He is happy about his height but he comments that people always chide him as *mahina* (weak). Though not really particularly tall in his college, he feels that people compare him to his younger brother just one year junior, who, though a bit shorter than him at 5'7, is a good basketball player.

To their classmates, Bobby and Michael are *lalampa-lampa* or *lampa*, which roughly translates to “weakling” and can be used to describe anybody, but is often used for tall guys who are not living up to expectations. Being *lampa* nullifies the power of height, and opens the door for other name-calling, such as being teased as *kapre*, a

mythical creature in Filipino folklore. More often, people say “*Sayang ang height*” (his height is is sayang). *Sayang* evokes feelings of sadness, regret, lost opportunity, and disappointment: it is as if height were a wasted resource.

Tall youths who consider themselves (or are considered by their classmates) as *bakla* elicit mixed reactions. Some, like John Niel (13, 5’8) attract more attention, because, as one of his classmates said, “*Ang tangkad-tangkad, pero baklang-bakla*” (“so tall, yet so bakla!”). On the other hand, being *bakla* can also deflect expectations that come with tallness. Caloy (18, 5’6), a self-identified *bakla* since he was in Grade 6, says he was never called *lampá*. Perhaps by identifying himself as feminine, his notions of height are also that of a girl: he prefers a taller boyfriend and doesn’t feel any desire to be taller. Likewise, perhaps his peers also do not hold any expectations of tallness that they would have if Caloy were identifying as a *lalaking-lalaki* (“manly man”).

In the way students relate to each other, we see how height expectations are structured by gender; and tallness is associated with masculinity.

There is also the tale of Jun-Jun (15, 5’11), a Grade 9 student in a private high school; he said he wanted to stop growing taller, because the rest of his family was short and people joked about his being an ‘ampon’ (orphan). So while his height itself is admired, the identity it creates for him *alienates* him from his family, even though he thinks his parents are proud of him. In these examples, we see how tallness also creates anxiety among students by creating expectations in their bodies that they cannot, or are not willing to, fulfill. In these examples, we see how tallness both constrains and enables possibilities, depending on each situation.

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Far more common than tall students getting bullied or teased are those that are labelled as *pandak* (short)<sup>61</sup>. Grade 9 students of a private high school reference a pop song by British band One Direction, *Midnight Memories*, whose lyrics “Five foot something with skinny jeans” they paraphrase into “Four foot something...” to make fun of their classmate who has a height of 4’9. Occasionally, when Miggy (14, 5’0) enters the classroom, some of his classmates would tell him: “You don’t belong here, go to the elementary department!” Jerose (15, 4’9) recalls says his nickname in school is “bonsai”. Even more vulnerable to bullying are the short guys who have other noticeable features—like being *maitim* (dark) or some of the above.

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61 *Pandak* and related words are often used in a number of Austronesian languages to mean ‘short’. In Bahasa Indonesia, however, it does not carry a negative connotation, and refers to objects as well as humans. A short film, for instance, is called “film pendek”. In the Philippines, another term of short is ‘maikli’ but it applies specifically to other spatial or temporal dimensions but not height (i.e. short time, maiksing panahon, maiksing damit, short dress). Given the absence of a neutral word for short, most Filipinos use “maaliit” (small) to describe short people, or else, use the euphemism “di katangkaran” (not too tall). While privileging the vertical, it cannot be disentangled from other di-mensions in everyday life.

In the basketball varsity team of one private high school that I interviewed as a group, differences in height allowed the centre player, Tom (16, 5'11) to joke that the small forward, Jerrick (16, 5'4) is the “centre” of the team, thus making fun of his height.

On the other hand, some students are able to counter their shortness—with other traits, like being articulate, being at the top of the class, being good in singing, among others. Jasper (19, 5'4), a student at Palawan State University thinks that his good command of English more than compensates for his relatively short stature (he is the shortest in his *barkada*). Perhaps his having finished high school in Manila also contributed to his confidence. Lizette (19, 4'5), a student council member in a public university, thinks that her being active in class and one of the academic achievers protected her from being bullied. In her own words: “To be honest, since elementary, I was a leader type so no one dares to bully me.” Julius (16, 4'9) said:

*sakin napapatunayan ko ito sa pag sayaw dahil mas magagaling ang maliliit sa pag sayaw, kahit maliit ako magaling naman ako sumayaw. (As for me, I can prove my worth through dancing, because smaller people are better in dancing. So even if I'm small, at least I'm good in dancing)*

But more often, the response to bullying is that of resignation or acceptance (“Tanggap ko naman na pandak ako”; I accept that I'm short)—even though there is no such “totalizing” form. The students I interviewed often mix their acceptance with some other rationalization. For instance, Jerose (17, 4'9) says he has accepted that he is short, but takes comfort in the fact that there are others smaller than him. Marjun (15, 5'0) says he is content with his height, but adds that his contentment lies in the fact that he thinks he will still grow taller.

Moreover, those who get bullied downplay the magnitude of the bullying. In one instance of *pang-aasar* (i.e. verbal bullying) that I witnessed while riding a jeepney, there was a group of Grade 8 or 9 boys who were making fun of the smallest in the group. A ‘leader’ kept talking about how they were with someone from Grade 5, dismissing his chances of getting a Prom date, and calling him a ‘Hobbit’—an allusion to Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. The others kept laughing. But the student being bullied himself just smiled, even laughed a bit, and did not seem affected.

But surely, it is not the case that he is impervious to such bantering. Even in the responses in *Francis Liit*, some students would write of their despair at being bullied, with one mentioning “*wala akong kwentang tao*” (“I am a worthless person”). Because contentment is a moral response to the problematics of physical appearance (I will have more to say about the way this ‘morality’ is instructed in textbooks later), students would often say they are content, but it doesn’t mean that they don’t harbour aspirations of tallness — or ill-feelings about their own height. On the other hand, people who say they want to become taller, too, may not necessarily desire it with the same intensity

as others.

The dominant discourse of “everyone gets bullied” glosses over these various degrees of bullying that seep into the general ways in which students interact with each other. Bullying itself is normalized as a natural consequence of physical differences. Interestingly, as part of the bodily field, teachers themselves are not exempt; physical differences can undermine even the hierarchic structure of the field. One teacher (23, 4’9.5) recalls her first year as a music and arts instructor in a private school:

*... dahil nga maliit ako yung mga studyante ko malaki pa sakin, mahirap sila I manage minsan hinahawakan ang ulo ko tapos mahilig kasi ako mag aper aper tapos yung mga studyante ko mag sasabi ng ma’am aper tapos itataas nila ang kamay nila tapos maliit nga ako kaya hindi ko maabot. Tapos minsan pag pumasok na ako sa room sasabi sila nanjan na si ma’am tapos yung iba nasaan nasaan? Sasabi nalang ako nandito ako. Tapos tatawa.* (Because I’m small, my students are even bigger than me, they’re hard to manage. Sometimes they would hold my head then they would ask me to do the ‘high five’ but I can’t reach their hands. Then sometimes, when I enter the room, even when I’m already there, some of them will ask, is “Ma’am” here yet? I just tell them I’m there. Then they will laugh)

As for parents, while most did not think it was a serious problem in schools, there was some who more concerned. Judith (45, 5’2) mentioned that one of the reasons why she bought Cherifer for her daughter is so that she won’t get teased for being too short. Evelyn (42, 5’4) a branch manager of an insurance company, said:

When we were about to enrol him [our son] for kindergarten, because he was born in December, he would be the youngest and smallest in the class because he had a slow start [in growing up] because my mother-in-law said my husband was also a slow grower. So we decided to wait for a year. We thought that being older and a bit bigger would give him more confidence. I think we made the right choice...

From these discourses we see that shortness is both experienced and perceived to be a disadvantage for students — not as an intrinsic liability, but because of the bullying and the negative experiences that arise from it: People are bullied because they’re short, but this shortness only “materializes” in situations where they are bullied and teased. In any case, the risk of getting bullied is a negative incentive that propels the desire for one’s height to be at least *katamtaman* or *sakto lang* — just right — as my Francis Liit responses showed.

Tallness itself comes with its own expectations and problems, but the field is inclined against those who are short, who deal with their heights with contestation or more often, resignation. In a very physical way, students’ experience in school mirror the trademark slogan of a growth supplement: “Height is might”; height becomes part of



the physical framework with which students relate with each other.

## SCHOOL ATHLETICS

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated the rise of school athletics as part of the public school system, informed by the American ideals of physical education in the early 1900s and since then taking a life of its own. Over a hundred years since the first public schools were set up in Puerto Princesa, athletics (especially basketball) remains very important in schools and students' everyday lives. And as in the early days of the public school system, tallness is valued in school athletics as a requisite to inclusion in varsity teams, and as an advantage in the games themselves.

The discourse of holistic development continues to serve as the major rationale for sports and physical education. Echoing the colonial-era policy formulations of the public school system (see Chapter 2), Republic Act 5708 (1969) called for a “integrated physical education and sports development program in all schools in the Philippines” (Sec. 2). It stated that “the goal of physical education is to instil in young citizens a proper appreciation of the importance of physical development and hand in hand with the mental development in individual and social activities.” (Sec. 2, Par. 1)

Translated to concrete terms, this meant a once-weekly session of physical education classes for all the students. Moreover, it also called for the organization of intra- and inter- school tournaments that go all the way to the national level: activities that schools in Puerto Princesa take very seriously.

I observed a number of these tournaments in the course of my fieldwork. Intra-school tournaments are called “intramurals” or “Intrams” while inter-school competitions are called “athletic meets”. These “meets” are stratified: there are annual district meets (for the school districts), provincial meets (for the whole of Palawan), regional meets (for MIMAROPA region, which joins Palawan with three other island provinces: Mindoro, Marinduque, and Romblon). Finally, there is the *Palarong Pambansa*, the week-long national meet that has been called the “Philippines’ premiere sporting event”. In 2013, a “Palarong Pambansa Law” was enacted, further institutionalizing it as the highlight of the country’s athletic calendar.

In Puerto Princesa, most of these events are held in the provincial sports complex (officially the Ramon V. Mitra Jr. Sports Complex) in Brgy. Tiniguiban, which boasts of an olympic-size swimming pool, basketball and volleyball courts, and a track-and-field stadium. These activities are given institutional and political support, with mayors and congressmen sponsoring posters, prizes, and the providing referees for the team sports. In fact, there is a City Athletic Office that coordinates the local government’s participation in these events, and also employs referees, who are kept busy with these events.

“Basketball, the tall man’s game, is ironically the Philippines’ most popular sport,” writes Lou Antolihao (2010:449), a sociologist who drew parallels of Philippine basketball and the Filipinos’ view of themselves as subalterns. As expected, basketball, particularly boys’ basketball, is the most popular in school athletic events, as evidenced by the crowds these games attract -and the fact that they are held in the largest-possible venues. During the Palawan State University’s Intrams in September 2014, the final games, held in the university gymnasium, were jam-packed with several hundreds in attendance. There are also events that are dedicated solely to basketball, such as the city government-sponsored “Inter-High School Basketball Tournament”, which is held in the City Coliseum.<sup>62</sup>

Representing the different schools in these tournaments are varsity teams. Composed of students from different grades or year levels, these teams have dedicated coaches, and members undergo training sessions after school hours, or during weekends. In exchange for these extra hours, they are exempted from the regular physical education classes.

In my *Francis Liit* comics, Francis dreamt of becoming a varsity player and this desire is shared by many students, especially the boys. Looking at the benefits of being a varsity player makes this desire understandable. Varsity players get the chance to travel within the province, the region, and sometimes, around the country. Eric (19, 5’3), a first year Criminology student at the Palawan State University, has been a varsity player since he was in elementary school and he proudly reminisces about all the events he had attended in various cities across the Philippines: Cebu, Cavite, Manila, and Zamboanga, among others.

When I was doing fieldwork, a “Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines” Friendship Games was held in Sabah, Malaysia, and some of my informants nearly attended — until it got aborted due to lack of funds. In a city where Manila is looked up at as a cultural reference point, and where there is a self-consciousness of being in the country’s periphery, the opportunity to travel is seen as a big motivation. Eric adds that many of these tournaments carry cash prizes. Even if it were divided among the 11 players that typically make up a team, they can still pocket a few hundred. He adds that some enthusiasts would recruit players to play in local *ligas* (leagues) as kind of shared bet: “they would pay for our food, our transportation, and if we win, we get half of the prize.”

Finally, these varsity systems link Puerto Princesa with the metropole, in different ways. First, collegiate athletics in Manila fosters attention to particular sports, and

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<sup>62</sup> To be fair, there is also some interest in volleyball, and some female volleyball players from Manila figured among the people the girls want to be as tall as. Moreover, Puerto Princesa takes pride in its swimming team, which has historically displayed a strong showing the Palarong Pambansa.

creates role models for the youth in Puerto Princesa.<sup>63</sup> The interest in volleyball, for instance, is doubtless boosted by the weekend airing of competitions among Manila's universities. Collegiate basketball in Metro Manila is an even bigger affair, with live television coverage. Notable—and good-looking players—like Chris Tiu (29, 5'11) of the Ateneo Blue Eagles, and brothers Jeric (6'2, 24) and Jeron Teng (21, 6'2) of De La Salle University and University of Sto. Tomas—very well known to my interlocutors—have even transitioned into the world of celebrity, and regularly grace various advertisements: from hair gels to insurance companies. As I have already highlighted in Chapter 2, Kobe Paras endorses Cherifer, while his brother Andre has starred in several teen movies.

Secondly, the big schools in Manila recruit promising high school players from the provinces, offering them athletic scholarships in the hopes of winning the coveted UAAP crown. For the part of the players, these scholarships can be life-changing. Compared to the 5000-peso (110 USD) tuition fee for Palawan State University, the annual tuition fee for private universities in Manila could cost up to 160,000 pesos (3500 USD), hence it is an option only for those who belong to Puerto Princesa's elites.

Back in Manila, I interviewed Candy (24, 5'9.5), a former varsity player for one of the leading teams, and she told me that aside from the scholarship itself, successful recruits get free lodging, monthly allowance, and even jobs for their parents. When I asked her whether height matters in the scouts' selection criteria, she replied: "Absolutely! For guys you must be six feet or taller. And for girls, you don't even need to know how to play basketball. You just have to be tall!" In Puerto Princesa, the players I interviewed point to a couple of their contemporaries who are currently in Manila, playing for UAAP teams. Although rare, this very real possibility of being "discovered" — an open door to new horizons — adds to the allure of being a basketball player, especially if you have the height. Importantly, these connections show how school athletics is more than a game — it is also a form of income for many young athletes.

Those *potentialities* aside, the exemption from PE classes, the acquisition of friends (i.e. teammates) in all year levels, and even the privilege of wearing a jersey with your surname at the back, are also "lived benefits" of belonging to a varsity team. This passage from Gems (2006:58) still have a ring of truth today, whenever, during the flag ceremony: "Bureau of Education stressed competitive athletics so much that by 1916, formal policy awarded bonus points on grade point averages or to make up deficiencies for those students who participated in provincial meets. Competitors in the Manila Carnival gained even more favor." Indeed, it speaks of the status accorded to school athletes, including an easier route through academics.

All these privileges and recognitions endow the varsity team with a sense of being an

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63 As part of my fieldwork I also attended some games of the UAAP at the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, Quezon City. Though not as big as the professional league, Philippine Basketball Association, the UAAP

“elite” group that is sanctioned and supported by the academic institutions themselves. The importance varsity players place in their belongingness to such a group is such that Eric (19, 5’3) and his friend Jeric (19, 5’4) were convinced by their high school to defer their graduation for one year so they can keep playing — in exchange for guarantees for scholarship. Unfortunately, they cannot go to Manila because they were told they are too short. “To play in Manila, you have to be at least 5’11,” Eric says ruefully, mirroring what the Manila-athletes themselves say. In the 2014 edition of the Palarong Pambansa, a Rappler feature writes of a high school volleyball athlete who laments that the tournament may be her last (Songalia, 2014). “Standing just 5-foot-4, she’s too short to attract the UAPP or NCAA athletic scholarships she dreams,” says the news article (par. 22) of Shaira Hermano, a volleyball player. The article goes on to quote the player as saying: “I want to play volleyball in college but my height is not tall. I want to help by family because we are a broken family.” (Ibid: par. 23) *Tall in Puerto Princesa but not tall enough in Manila*: when the field changes, the very definitions of what is tall and short likewise change.

These future constraints notwithstanding, many high school athletes do enjoy being local stars, even with the knowledge that their athletic careers can take them no further. For Eric, for instance, the money from weekend games, and the occasional recognition of people while he’s in Robinsons, is enough to keep him satisfied.

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How to get into the teams? The school year traditionally begins in June (though there are moves to shift it to August to synchronize with the academic calendar of most Western institutions), and the “tryouts” for the varsity teams are usually held in July or August. These tryouts are taken seriously by the students, especially the freshmen or the new enrollees.

In these tryouts, particularly for basketball, height immediately comes in as a “requirement”. As coaches and long-time players tell me, during tryouts, what the coaches look for, more than skill, is potential, of which the player’s body — his height and his built—are a big part. As one coach puts it: “*Hindi mo pwedeng ituro ang height*” (“You cannot teach height”). The students themselves think that if you’re tall, you’re “pasok kaagad” (automatically in). Lack of height does not automatically rule out other applicants, but they have a greater need to prove their value.

How much of a factor is height in actual basketball games? I posed these question to basketball players, asking them to specify the advantages of height in the court, and here are some common responses:

1. ***If you’re tall, you get to rebound first***—When the ball misses the ring and falls to the ground, the taller players are naturally poised to grab it first. Thus tall players—even

slow and clumsy ones—are preferred to occupy the centre or ‘5’ (cinco) position. This can be overcome by jumping high, but taller players have a clear advantage.

2. *If you’re tall you can do the ‘slam dunk’ (dakdak).* This is a kind of shot in which the player places the ball directly onto the ring with one or two of his hands on it. Although quantitatively speaking, any kind of shot gives the team two points (or three points if its made further than 7.24 m from the ring), the dunk shot is considered to be more desirable and symbolises dominance in the court.

3. *If you’re tall, the smaller players can’t block (supalpal) your shots.* Basically, you have an unobstructed path to the ring if other players’ hands are not high enough to block you. Again, this can be overcome by jumping high, but taller players have it easier.

Even so, technique also matters, as do speed and style. I watched games in which the team with smaller players actually won. For instance, during the penultimate game of the Intrams of the Palawan State University, the smaller players of the College of Business Administration trumped the bigger ones of the College of Criminal Justice and Education. Brisk fast-breaks, spearheaded by Jeric Dagot (19, 5’4), rendered the towering defences of the enemy inutile; and three-point shots, shot from far nullified the tall players’ blocking advantage. When the taller players dribble there’s a higher gap between their hands and the ground, and the winning team took advantage of this vulnerability by managing to get a lot of ‘steals’. This reminds me of a story about the 2014 Palarong Pambansa entitled “Undersized Cebu girls’ basketball team wins Palaro medal” (Alkuino, 2014), in which the winning coach was quoted as saying (Ibid, par. 9): “We really lacked size, especially on the centre position. But we won it by our determination and aggressiveness.” The article also cited the team’s speed and “superior passing skills” as crucial to their victory.<sup>64</sup>



Fig. 3 - Students representing different colleges play a basketball game during the Intramurals of a state university in Puerto Princesa. Photo by the author.

Still, the advantage of height is accepted as a “given” by many coaches and commentators, as well as the players themselves. In fact, the very newsworthiness of smaller teams

64 Antilihao (2015:15) notes that “small ball” (i.e. speeding up the game to overcome the height advantage of the rival team) is actually an established strategy even in the NBA, but “for Philippine basketball teams...”small ball” is not just a technique: it is something that defines their game and their identity.” In my fieldwork I observed that being ‘undersized’ is indeed a state or situation that many teams prepare for and respond to brilliantly.



winning speaks of how their short statures automatically make them the underdog insofar as sports narratives are concerned. In fact, in the above-mentioned victory of the Cebu girls' team, they only won a bronze medal, but it was enough to earn for them a news article. Likewise, the College of Business Administration team was ultimately defeated by the team who eventually won — CCRD-South, which had even bigger players than the one CBA defeated. Technique, as it appears, can only do so much.

In sum, we see how, by the very mechanics and rules of the games — i.e. “the basketball ring must be 10 feet above the ground” — tallness is an advantage in basketball, and hence, an advantage among tall students in light of basketball's importance in school and society at large. The varsity player — as an exemplar of athletic prowess, good health, and ideal physique — acquires prestige beyond the basketball court or the arena of his or her chosen sport, and by having tallness as one of (unwritten) prerequisites, varsity teams, as well as school athletics in general, reinforce the value of tallness.

## PAGEANTS AND OTHER EXTRA-CURRICULAR EVENTS

Pageantry begins at a young age, with contests in early learning centres mirroring the “Little Ms. Philippines” segments of noontime shows. Schools are often the venues, if not the organizers, of these events. Jerome (20, 5'10) a male beauty pageant contestant and student leader in Palawan State University who occasionally gets invited to judge in these competitions, says that he even judged a pageant for kindergarteners (age 6-7). As with school athletics, height figures in these events again as a requirement for inclusion, and as a (perceived) advantage in the competitions themselves.



Fig. 4 - The winning female and male contestant in a public high school beauty pageant pose for the cameras with their crown and sceptre, respectively. Photo by the author.

In elementary schools, every section has a set of officers, and aside from a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and other positions that mirror those of regular organizations, there would be a “muse” and an “escort”, a girl and a boy who would represent the class in pageants, parades, and other events. The expectation was that they have to be beautiful and handsome, respectively. Some high schools had their own muses and escorts as well. I witnessed a high school pageant in Brgy. Sta. Monica which had a “modelling” segment, where the contestants paraded on stage wearing



their uniforms. Notable in that pageant was that the first year girls appeared taller than the boys. As our height survey revealed, at this age girls are still taller than boys, many of whom have yet to finish their growth spurts. But the height difference may also be explained by the heels that the girls wore. For boys of that age, there is not yet an expectation of tallness.

When I was in Puerto Princesa, there was a school pageant almost every week, reflecting the plurality of pageants within one school. One high school, for instance, had a “Mr. and Ms. Valentines”, a “Mr. and Ms. Intrams”, and another “Mr. and Ms.” that decide who will represent the school in an inter-high school beauty pageant. These inter-high school pageants are also virtually school activities themselves; students are encouraged by teachers to attend to show their support for their own candidates. It is usually the tall boys who are chosen to represent the class, mirroring the formalised height requirements of their mature counterparts such as the *Mutya ng Palawan* and *Ginoong Puerto Princesa*. Which is why I often hear: *Kung matangkad ka, ikaw ang kukuhanin sa mga pageants at pag-momodel*. (If you’re tall, you’re the ones they will recruit for pageants and model searches.)

Just as parents participate in the “making of height” (see Chapter 2), they also devote time to their children’s school activities. Some of them, in fact, hang out in the school waiting shed all day, watching over their sons and daughters. In extra-curricular activities, they are involved in the procurement of costumes. In the beauty pageants I watched, contestants’ parents were almost always the audience. Almost all of the parents I talked to support their children’s participation in such activities..

The other actors in the pageants are also interesting to look at. The judges, for instance, are often young beauty queens (and kings) in their late teens or early twenties, and they dress for these roles appropriately: with long gowns and “coat-and-tie” business suits. Their presence in these affairs, often presaged by salutary introductions, also serve to provide the image of what a beauty queen or king should look like, further reinforcing the physical characteristics valorized by the beauty pageant. Tiffany (19, 5’8) is taller than most girls in Palawan, and wearing her five-inch heels, she looks even taller. Surely, her tallness will not be lost among the impressionable youths.

Beyond the pageant proper — and the usually minimal prizes the contestants get (i.e. one month free use of a local gym) — the “titles” or “crowns” get publicized by the schools just as much as the students or their families. Indeed, just as frequently as banners or tarpaulins congratulating a student for winning a mathematics contest are those that congratulate another for winning in a beauty pageant. In San Pedro Elementary School, a picture of a Grade 1 female student was on display bearing the words “Congratulations, Little Model!” until the monsoon rains of July and August finally swept it off. The flag ceremony gives recognition to these “talented” students for

bringing honour to the school. In colleges, students refer to “title holders” of beauty pageants as “royalties” of the school, and they form cliques that are backed by “handlers” who are always on the lookout for competitions that they can join.

Kurt (15, 5’6) is a Grade 9 student from a private high school. Fair-skinned and handsome, he fits the bill of what his peers would call “artistahin”—having the potential to be an *artista* or actor. He seems on his way to stardom: as I already mentioned, at his young age he is already the leader of a “boyband” called Gwapitos (a diminutive of *gwapo*, which means handsome)—an act which has gained a considerable local following. I have seen this song-and-dance group perform intermission numbers in some pageants, and their performances do elicit some passionate cheers among their “fans”. Kurt has also joined a local “model search”, finishing as one of the top finalists. Moreover, he has already gone to Manila twice to perform some dance acts in malls, thanks to a talent scout who discovered him in one of his local performances. When I met him the day after he arrived from his most recent trip, he made no secret of his ambition to be a celebrity in Manila someday.

In a way, Kurt is an example of the versatility that physical attractiveness can offer. His various activities have exposed him to different people and places — from Manila and some its young celebrities to the small towns of Palawan and his small but growing number of adulating fans. This has allowed him to build social capital by making a lot of friends, and gain confidence as well as a maturity that is reflected in his guarded responses to questions about his feelings about fame. For instance, he would always insist that he is a “humble person”, that he doesn’t think his looks have anything to do with his popularity. As though already speaking to showbiz reporters, he seamlessly injects his gratitude to his friends, family, and supporters, as well as his commitment to studies as his priority.

Asked whether his trips to Manila interfered with his academics, he said that his teachers were very supportive, and gave him make-up classes. Later, when I mentioned him to his schoolmates, they insist that they treat him “normally”, but their knowledge of who he is, and what he’s doing, betrays a high regard, and to some degree, envy, of what he has accomplished.

Like basketball players, Kurt’s experience points to a very real possibility of getting “discovered”, towards a route to success and social mobility that overcomes economic constraints. Several years Kurt’s senior is Myk Perez (24, 5’7), the first-runner up in a nationwide singing contest and one of Puerto Princesa’s local celebrities. With a stocky build, Myk does not fit the mould of the stereotypical *artistahin*, but singing is one of the few areas in showbiz where vocal talent is valued more than anything else. But even then, it is still “matinee idol” — tall and handsome — who has the potential to make it big in Manila. A year after his stint at *The Voice of the Philippines*, he was back in Puerto

Princesa as a freelance singer, occasionally delighting the patrons of Itoy's Coffee Shop in Rizal Ave—the place where I usually meet my informants.

For his part, Kurt concedes that to be a real celebrity, he needs to be “the height of Daniel Padilla” (5'9) by the time he stops growing. He has reason to hope: his brother Kent (18, 5'10) is tall, and is incidentally the current “title-holder” of “Mr. Palawan State University”. As someone in his mid-teens, as leader of the diminutive “Gwapitos”, his young age carries no expectations of tallness yet, just like the first year high school boys competing on a school pageant. But the fact that Kurt briefly attempted doing stretching exercises in the morning suggests that he may be starting to get worried about his height — even as, I should point out, it is already above average in Puerto Princesa and the rest of the Philippines. Young people measure their height not only in relation to others, but also against their own aspirations, and with people who represent those aspirations.

Voltaire (39, 5'7), a “talent manager” for many aspiring models and celebrities, organizes a “Fashionista King and Queen” every November as a screening for “talents”, and he agrees with Kurt's assessment of height's value in the intertwined industries of showbiz, fashion, and beauty pageants:

*Kasi yung height hindi naman na reremdyohan yun, yung mukha kasi kayang pagandahin basta magaling ang make-up artist kayang maging maganda or kung I pupush talaga pweding mag pa retoke ng mukha. Unlike sa height kahit anong gawin pag maliit, maliit talaga. Lalo na sa mga lalaki kasi hindi naman sila pwedeng mag suot ng heels. (Height cannot be 'remedied'. The face can be beautified as long as the make-up artist is good, or if they will really push for it they can retouch the face (surgically). Unlike height, if you're small, you're really small, especially among males because they cannot wear heels.)*

The activities Kurt and many of his peers engage in are “extra-curricular”, but just like school athletics, they are central, not peripheral, to the experience of students. Importantly, the students' efforts are also shared by schools, and so is the case with their triumphs. When winners are announced, their names are not called, but the schools they represent are, i.e. *Mr. and Ms. Palawan State University*.

## HEIGHT IN TEXTBOOKS

Thus far, we have surveyed the school environment, but what of the curriculum itself, and the textbooks that students are required to read? Can we also survey them for the meanings and materialities of height? In this section I show that height also figures in the content of school textbooks, from Social Studies to language learning, by doing a content analysis of actual textbooks that elementary and high school students in Puerto

Princesa were using at the time of my fieldwork<sup>65</sup>.

In this exercise I follow the approach of studies that have looked at scientific texts not for what they say about their topic, but for what ideologies are implicitly engaged in conceptualizing scientific objects in particular ways. Emily Martin (1991) for instance, writes that the way the egg and the sperm are described in science textbooks are founded in gender ideologies of an “active” male and a “passive” female. I also draw inspiration from the work of Niels Mulder (1990) who examined the content of Social Studies textbooks and argued that their accounts of Philippine history are shaping the national self-image. Building on Mulder’s work, I propose that the normativities espoused by textbooks extend beyond notions of national identity, and deal with the body itself: What kinds of bodies are held up to be ideal? What meanings of height are reflected, and reinforced by the textbooks?

In what follows, I demonstrate that height figures (a) in Aralin Panlipunan (Social Studies)–in the narratives of national (racial) origins and identity that assume the existence of racial typologies and reflect an insecurity about Filipino bodily image; (b) in Panitikan (Literature)–in reading materials where the inherent advantage of tallness figures as a plot device; and (c) in Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (“Education in Humanity”) i.e. in lessons on morality where it is cited as an example of inequality that should be overcome.

### Height and Filipino identity in Social Studies

Mulder (1990) writes about the historical narrative of nation building in the Philippines that typically figures in Social Studies or *Aralin Panlipunan* textbooks, noting how Filipinos themselves were depicted as passive recipients of genetic or cultural heritage, from the “waves of migration” of Aetas, Indonesians, and Malays to the Spanish (Christianity) and the Americans (educational system). He also critiques the way negative Filipino traits, such as laziness, bad working habits, *ningas kugon* (never finishing a project), among others, are presented as inherent to Filipinos. Mulder notes: “It seems to imply that all good things have been brought to the Philippines by strangers.” (1990:91) All these, he argues, contribute to having a negative self-image. Rightfully, he points out that the evidence for the so-called “waves of migration” is problematic, and it has since been debunked by anthropologists (see Zaide, 1988; Jocano, 1975).

How is the Filipino *qua* body presented in these texts? Mulder’s analysis focused on traits such as “hardworking” and ideas such as religion and government, but physical characteristics do show up in the discussions of Filipino racial identity, both in relation

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65 Textbooks and learning modules are standardized by the Department of Education and all the public schools and most of the private schools in Puerto Princesa use the same texts. All the texts I cite here were being used in Puerto Princesa during the time of my fieldwork.

to others and in view of the “mixture of many races” that students are taught Filipinos are made of. In a Grade 4 module called “Mga Unang Pilipino”, for instance, the earliest Filipinos were described as “*taas na apat na talampakan, maitim ang balat, makapal ang labi, kulot ang buhok* (four feet in height, dark skin, thick lips, curly hair) while the next arrivals were described in terms that fit the contemporary Filipino aesthetic, save for the skin color: “*Kayumanggi ang kutis, matatangkad, balingkinitan ang katawan, maninipis ang labi, matatangos ang ilong, malalalim ang mata, hapis ang mukha*” (“brown skin, tall, good physique, thin lips, sharp nose, deep eyes”). Another wave of Indonesians were described as shorter and the next arrivals, the Malays, were not described at all.<sup>66</sup>

Like the “scientific racism” that was popular during H. Otley Beyer’s time (see Chapter 2), this narrative clearly associates certain physical features with certain groups of

Filipino “ancestors”	Physical descriptions	Other descriptions
Aetas or Negritos	Short. “very short”, small, black skin short, kinky hair, thick lips and flat noses	Lived in the forests, hunting, fishing and gathering
Indonesians (First wave)	Tall, slender, light complexion, broad high forehead, high bridged noses thin lips	More civilized than the negritos, permanent houses, used fire, crude, farming
Indonesians (Second wave)	Shorter, of darker color, larger noses, thicker lips, heavier jaws (as compared to first)	As above
Malays	Medium height, slender bodies	“Most civilized”, lived in villages, had government, system of writing



Fig. 5 - Early Filipinos are presented in an “evolutionary” way, with increasing height as the most visible sign of “progression” (From “Mga Unang Pilipino”, p. 3).

people—effectively linking many generations of Filipino children with the racial ideologies of the American period. In some texts, this is done implicitly. For example, the Grade 6 module on the same subject repudiates the wave migration theory and offers no physical descriptions for the early Filipinos, but still acknowledges the existence of physical characteristics of the Filipino “race”, asking the readers to infer them based on Filipinos’ contemporary physical appearance(s):

*Ang mga katangian ng mga unang tao sa Pilipinas ay mababakas pa rin sa ating*

66 Grade 4 - Mga Unang Pilipino, p. 1-4

*pisikal na kaanyuan. Gayunpaman, sinasabing nahaluan na ng ibang lahi ang katutubong Pilipino nang makasalamuha at makapag-asawa ng mga dayuhan ang marami sa ating mga ninuno.* (The characteristics of the early people in the Philippines can still be gleaned from our physical appearances. Nevertheless, it is said that indigenous Filipinos have been “mixed” with other races when they interacted and married with foreigners.)<sup>67</sup>

In the the past textbooks I surveyed, the early foreigners who traded with the Philippines — the Japanese, the Indians, the Chinese, and the Arabs — were also given specific physical descriptions, and so were the Spanish and the American colonizers. This seems to have been omitted in the current textbooks<sup>68</sup>, but in one Grade 7 module on the arrival of the Spanish, they were described as

*“Matataas, mapuputi ang balat, matatangos ang ilong, malalaki ang pangangatawan”* (tall, fair-skinned, pointed nose, large body built) and contrasted to the Filipinos who were *“Di kataasan, depende sa pangkat etnikong pinanggagalingan, kayumanggi ang balat, pango o katangusan ng ilong, maliit ang pangangatawan”* (not too tall, depending on ethnic group, brown skin, flat or not too pointed nose, small body built).<sup>69</sup>



Fig. 6 - Depictions of the Filipino-American War show taller Americans vs. shorter Filipinos (From “Aralin Panlipunan I, Module 12: “Ang Pananakot ng mga Amerikano”)

Here the authors try to make a distinction between different ethnic groups, but in relation to the Spanish, Filipinos are “not too tall”, a euphemism for shortness.

Sometimes, height is not even mentioned in the text itself, but pictures show an awareness of bodily differences between the “races” that the textbooks speak of. In the Philippine-American war, images show tall Americans battling shorter Filipinos (see Figure 7).<sup>70</sup> Taken together, these texts and images are grounded on racial typologies, and the idea that there is a Filipino *lahi* (race) is immanent in them.

Perhaps in anticipation of the effect these physical differences would incite among

67 Grade 6 - Hekasi 6, Unit I: “Yaman ng Pilipinas”, p. 21

68 Grade 4 - “Mga Bansang Nakipagkalakalan sa Pilipinas”, p. 1-6

69 Grade 7 - Aralin Panlipunan I, Modyul 5: “Ang Pagdating ng Mga Kastila”, Aralin 2 Gawain 1

70 Grade 7 - Aralin Panlipunan I, Module 12: “Ang Pananakot ng mga Amerikano”



students, some textbooks celebrate these differences by presenting boys and girls from different backgrounds, or families that look different, and reminding the readers that they are all Filipinos. In Grade 6, for instance, a module called “Magkakapantay Kahit Iba-Iba” (Everyone’s Equal even if they’re different) urges children to treat everyone equally regardless of physical appearance or social, racial, economic differences.<sup>71</sup> Another Grade 6 module which glosses over physical descriptions instead carries the following passage:

*Anuman ang pagkakaiba ng hitsura ng mga Pilipino, tayong lahat ay iisa sa dugong nananalaytay sa ating mga ugat at sa lahing kinabibilangan – ang lahing Pilipino (Whatever the differences are in the physical appearances of Filipinos, we are all one in the blood that flows in our veins and in the race we belong to — the Filipino race)*<sup>72</sup>

Rather than present a neutral view of Filipino *qua* body, we read in the narratives a self-denigration, or at least, an insecurity, about the way Filipinos look, especially in relation to colonial “others”. Indeed, though the intent is to teach an open-mindedness for physical differences, the textbooks take *a priori* assumption that different races can be typologized according to various bodily differences, and that these differences, particularly for the majority of Filipinos, are problematic.<sup>73</sup>

#### Addressing bodily differences in values education

Building on the theme of *pagkakapantay-pantay* (equality) that also figured in the above-mentioned narratives of national origin, values education materials also emphasize the celebration of diversity, with attention to differences in physical appearance. One Grade 8 text addresses the topic of low self-esteem and includes lack of height as one of the possible reasons for “not loving one’s self”:

*Marami tayong rason upang hindi mahalín ang ating sarili. Maaaring mataba ka o sobrang payat kaya, iyakin o hindi marunong umiyak, takot sa kabiguan o takot sa tagumpay, hindi sapat ang iyong kakayahan, ganda, kapangyarihan, tangkad, tapang, pagiging interesante. Madalas kinukumbinsi ng tao ang kaniyang sarili na hindi siya nararapat sa buhay na kaniyang hinahangad para sa kaniyang sarili. Ito at marami pang iba ang nagpapahina sa iyo, lalo na sa paningin ng ibang tao.* (We have many reasons not to love our own selves. You may be fat or too slim, always crying or not knowing how to cry, afraid of failure or success, not having

71 Grade 6 - Hekasi 6, “Magkakapantay Kahit Iba-Iba”, p. 1-4

72 Grade 6 - Hekasi 6, Unit I: “Yaman ng Pilipinas”, p. 21

73 William Henry Scott (1994:12) warned against such typologies: “It is important to note that these migrating populations are not considered to have been physically homogenous. This means that Austronesian settlers arrived in the Philippines with considerable variations in stature, pigmentation, and facial features, although it is now possible to identify these differences...many such differences are not genetically significant: it is a common observation that with improved diet and hygiene, younger generations are taller than their parents.

enough skill, beauty, power, height, courage, or enthusiasm. Oftentimes a person convinces himself that he's not worthy of the life he's aspiring for himself. This and many others weaken you, especially in the eyes of other people.)<sup>74</sup>

In the same module, the topic of bullying is addressed, and the reasons for getting bullied are enumerated. "Kaibahang Pisikal" (physical differences) are presented first, and here too, height is mentioned: "*Ang mga halimbawa nito ay ang maaaring pakakaroon ng kapansanan sa katawan, masyadong mataba o payat, mahina o astigin, masyadong matangkad o bansot, at iba pa.*" (examples include having a disability, being too fat or thin, weak or tough, too tall or short, and others). The lesson is twofold: one must not judge or bully others on the basis of physical differences, and one must not be affected if one were to be judged or bullied on that measure.

A more sophisticated argument regarding human differences is advanced in a Grade 9 textbook, invoking German philosopher Max Scheler and using the inherent advantage of height in basketball as an example of every person having his own unique strength:

*Para kay Scheler, bahagi ng pagiging tao ng tao ang pagkakaroon ng magkakaibang lakas at kahinaan. Nasa hulma ng ating katawan ang kakayahan nating maging isang sino. Ang taong matangkad ay sadyang may panguguna sa basketbol kaysa maliliit. Ang babae ay mas may taglay na kakayahan upang manghalina kaysa lalaki. (For Scheler, part of personhood is having unique strengths and weaknesses. Our ability to become whoever is in the "make" of our bodies. The tall person is naturally with an advantage in basketball over the short ones. The woman is naturally more charming than a man...)<sup>75</sup>*



Fig. 7 - A girl gives an Aeta boy school supplies. Notice the height difference. (Source: Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Unit 2 p. 43)

The theme of *pagkakapantay-pantay* is also used to talk about indigenous peoples. In one story for Grade 3, an Aeta child comes in as a new classmate but he had no school supplies, and the girl heroine gives him a pencil and a notebook. The text follows up

74 Grade 8 - Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 14, "Karahasan sa Paaralan"

75 Grade 9 - Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 3, "Pagkakapantay-Pantay"

with a call to treat indigenous children equally, saying that “we” have not treated our “other fellow children” more. Much can be said about the “othering” that takes place in this kind of discourse, but I will limit myself to stressing the role of physical traits in this process: in portraying the unlabelled and therefore normative girl and the poor Aeta boy, height figures as one of the distinguishing marks of indigeneity (see Figure 7).

Height also figures in other parts of the texts to characterize various people, again with implicit assumptions about what it means for them. In a module challenging readers to think about their reactions to various day-to-day situations, a story is presented of a girl whose remarkable tallness causes her to be invited in the volleyball varsity team. She has doubts if she can succeed, but she is willing to learn. The text asks the readers to speculate about the outcome, and the “correct” answer is that she will become a good volleyball player.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, there are also stories that celebrate being small. In a story for Grade 3 students, two small kids help pack goods in a relief centre for disaster victims, and the staff praise them in the end, saying “Even if you’re small, you’re given us a big help.” Entitled “Maliit man ay Malaki Rin” (literally “Even smallness is also big”), this attention to size rather than the sheer youthfulness of the kids point to the need to celebrate smallness not just as an ephemeral state for all young people, but as a characteristic that many may grow up with.<sup>77</sup>

Values education textbooks celebrate physical differences, but these differences need to be established first, just as in addressing bullying, the question of who gets bullied must first be answered. In the process, they project a reality very similar to that which we saw in our ethnography.

### *Height and physical differences as themes in reading materials*

Height figures as well in reading materials in different year levels both in English in Filipino. They come from all kinds of sources, but most of them are related to various aspects of Philippine culture. In these texts too, certain values and normativities are espoused, albeit implicitly. As Bienvenido Lumbera, literary critic, wrote: “Literature as material for values education has the ability to shed light — through situations which illustrates ideas, concepts, and insights we then perceive as values.” (1994:187) Some of these readings draw parallels with students’ experiences in school, further revealing the meanings of height.

A classic example, which appears in the Filipino reading assignments of Grade 7 students, is Rogelio Sikat’s “Impeng Negro” (Dark Impe)<sup>78</sup> which won the Palanca

76 Grade VII - Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 1, p. 39

77 Grade III - Batang Pinoy Ako 1 p. 22

78 Grade 7 - Panitikang Pilipino, “Impeng Negro” by Rogelio Sikat

award in 1962. Impe, the protagonist in the story, is the son an impoverished Filipina laundrywoman and an black American serviceman who deserted her before Impe was born. At sixteen, earning a living from collecting and delivery water from a public faucet, Impe gets bullied for his dark skin. Chief of his bullies was Ogor (probably an allusion to ‘ogre’), and for purposes of our study, his characterization is worth noting:

*Halos kasinggulang niya si Ogor, ngunit higit na matipuno ang katawan nito. Malakas si Ogor. Tuwid ang tindig nito at halos, hindi yumuyuko kahit may pang balde ng tubig, tila sino mang masasalubong sa daan ay kayang-kayang sagasaan.* (Ogor was about his age, but his physique was much more well-built. Ogor was strong. His bearing was straight and he almost never bends even when carrying a pail of water; indeed he can readily subdue whoever he encounters in the road.)

Impe finds redemption by being able to fight and subdue Ogor, and in the end, he was the one “standing”:

*Sa matinding sikat ng araw. Tila siya isang mandirigmang sugatan ngunit matatag na nakatindig sa pinagwagiang larangan.* (Amid in the intense heat of the sun, he was the wounded warrior, but valiantly standing in the field of victory.)

Lumbrera (1994:187-197), writing about how literary texts are deployed in values education, interprets the story as, on one level, “an indictment of the consequences of colonial oppression, which used colour as a weapon of oppression against the *indio*.” He adds another layer, that of the “brutalization of conditions that deprive the urban poor of dignity and deny them release of their unfocused resentments.” Looking at the bodies of his characters, we can add as subtext the physical differences that enable, frame, or represent these symbolisms.

Another work by Rogelio Sikat, which also appears in Grade 7 readings, is “Ang Kura at ang Agwador” (The Priest and the Water-collector).<sup>79</sup> This time, the protagonist, Diego, is himself a bully, and he is characterised as: “*Malaki, may anim na talampakan ang taas, maitim, maharot.*” (“big, six feet tall, dark, and unruly”). His size and tallness becomes so much a part of his identity that he is called Egong Laki (Big Egong). Many years later, the boy he used to bully, Along, has returned as Padre Gonzalo, the new priest of their town. Jealous of his victim’s success, he tries various ways to make his life difficult, but in the end, when the priest himself comes to him to ask for water, he finds illumination and henceforth promised to bring water to the priest. Once again, height (six feet tall) becomes the mark of the bully, but his physical power finds its match in the benevolent power of the priest. His surrender is marked by kneeling down, a symbolic inversion of their height differences.

Height is also a central theme in Genoveva Edroza-Matute’s “*Paglalayag sa Pusong*”

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79 Grade 7 - Panitikang Pilipino, “Ang Kura at Ang Agwador” by Rogelio Sikat

*Isang Bata*” (The Journeys of a Heart of One Child), a required reading among Grade 8 students.<sup>80</sup> In this story, a teacher reminisces about her former student who she describes in these terms:

*Isa siya sa pinakamaliit sa klase. At isa rin siya sa pinakapangit. Ang bilog at pipis niyang ilong ay lubhang kapansin-pansin at tingnan lamang iyo’y mahahabag na sa kanya ang tumitingin.* (He’s one of the smallest in class. And he’s also one of the ugliest. His round and flat nose was severely noticeable and just by looking at it, the observer will feel pity for him.)

Later the teacher finds out that the boy was a hardworking orphan, and despite his being bullied, the boy sticks around after class to help the teacher, who ultimately realises that it is the boy taught her a lesson — not the other way around. In this story, central to the establishment of the boy as someone pitiful is his physical appearance, which begins with his being the smallest in class.

Even in Filipino literature in English, height surfaces in some key texts. In Arturo Rotor’s *Dahong Palay* (1928), an evocation of life in the rural villages, the protagonist, Sebio, is described as tall but very thin, causing him to be bullied as a weakling:

He was quite tall, above the height of the ordinary native, but he had paid for his increased height in diminished breadth. His chest was flat, his neck long, and his legs thin. He was one of the boys who, the village people said “grew too fast.”<sup>81</sup>

The story is about vindicating one’s self in spite of a weakness: Sebio achieves this by heroically battling a snake bite at the cost of his own life. In this story, tallness is a liability because it was not accompanied by the expectation of strength and a good physique.

What these literary works have in common is the acknowledgment of one’s height as a physical attribute that plays a role in their identity. In Sikat’s two stories, height is something that can overcome through other means. Impe uses physical strength to overcome Ogor; Egong is overwhelmed by the spiritual power of his former victim; while Dodo looks to study hard and presumably be successful in his career. The nameless boy in Matute’s tale, too, overcomes his handicaps by his strength of will and humility. Finally in Sebio’s case it is tallness itself that must be overcome—or rather—the expectations that come with it.

We can analyze these texts in two levels. First—and more salient to my broader project, we see how height materialized in these classic works of Philippine literature, and surely attests to its materiality. Secondly, the inclusion of these texts for teaching suggests that they continue to resonate with contemporary Filipino society. To Impeng Negro, Sebio,

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80 Grade 8 - Panitikang Pilipino, “Paglalayag sa Puso ng Isang Bata” by Genoveva E. Matute

81 Grade 7 - English Literature, “Dahong Palay” by Arturo Rotor

and Ogor, we can add Francis Liit.

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One caveat I have to make is that not all textbooks mention height, or tallness; not all stories feature height as a plot device, or even mentioned the heights of their characters. But the examples that I saw suffice to make the case for its materiality, and the insecurity surrounding it. Moreover, our examples demonstrate that the textbooks carry with them an *implicit normativity*. While there are discourses about how smallness can be overcome — and should not be discriminated against — these discourses draw on the the underlying assumption that height is an advantage. Another example of implicit normativity is the reification of racial typologies which we saw in the Social Studies textbooks.

Importantly, these “textbook realities” are not separate from those of the students. Some textbook stories are literally “enacted” by students when they make skits out of them, and some students “embody” certain characters in this role, cast in the latter’s physical mold. And the figures presented in the texts, whether they are Filipino ancestors or a fictional basketball player, are transposed into the ways students apprehend and deal with each other. My own Francis comics caused a stir in one class where someone actually named Francis (16, 5’6) happened to be just like Francis Liit: short and frequently bullied.<sup>82</sup> Raul (14, 5’0), a first year high school student, said that he dreaded Aralin Panlipunan (Social Studies) because he was teased as an “Aeta” whenever the lessons turned to the narratives of early Filipinos. Their predicaments are a reminder that textbooks and reading materials do not just reflect, they also also reinforce, the realities of height in the everyday lives of students.

## DISCUSSION

### Height and habitus through the school years

“I think it’s ridiculous to have it in any other way!” exclaims Fely (72, 5’3), a retired schoolteacher, when I asked her why children are arranged according to height in flag ceremonies. She adds that even when she was a student, they were arranged according to height. Indeed, some of these ways in which height figures are innocuous, even sensible. The “routine-ness” of height as a way of organizing people can be found not only the decade-long primary and secondary education scheme, but throughout over a century of the educational system. It need not be seen as more than a natural, elegant way of organizing and ordering people.

Similarly, class pictures are necessarily arranged by height — otherwise, the shorter ones will not be seen. A freelance photographer in Puerto Princesa only laughed when

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82 Interestingly, this Francis has already gotten tall - but is still bullied, and is still perceived as “pandak”



I asked why the taller guys needed to be at the back. The photographic field structures students according to their bodily dimensions; not everyone can occupy the same place in one photo. As in flag ceremonies, the *hierarchization* of bodies is a necessarily precondition to the very possibility of a class picture.

There are instances when the advantages conferred by height are more overt, as in the height requirements for dance troupe members, and in the benefits of height students begin to perceive in sporting events and beauty pageants. More often, however, height is invisible to the actors — or, its routinization is such that it's no longer noticed, like falling in line during the flag ceremony. Even the very tangible acts of bullying are often overlooked for the physical differences that enable them. The textbooks that teach language and history also impart norms and values, but they can only be excavated through a purposeful survey.

It is in the sustained pervasiveness of these normativities that I find the notion of *habitus* useful. *Habitus* calls for a wider temporal framing of how meanings and practices are socially reproduced. Drawing from my ethnography, which allowed me to observe and interact with students from elementary to college years, we can distill the experience of height (i.e. the “curriculum”) through the years as the following:

**First, height is experienced as a basis for comparison.** From the moment children enter the school system, they are made to conform with the bodily topology which arranges them according to height, as in flag ceremonies, seating arrangements, picture taking, and special events like field demonstration.

**Second, height is experienced as physical power.** In our discussion of bullying and other peer interactions, we saw that it is usually the boys who are big and tall who bully their classmates, whereas shortness makes one susceptible to bullying. But it is not in bullying that height is manifest as physical power, but also in routine tasks like erasing. Eventually, this physicality of height is put to use in basketball, where it is seen as a big advantage. Indeed, the tall student's body is seen as more useful and powerful.

**Third, height is associated with attractiveness.** As boys and girls enter puberty, attractiveness becomes important and height emerges as one of the most desired constituents of this aesthetic, especially for boys, but also for girls. Beauty pageants, which are actually co-extensive with the duration of schooling, from preschool to college, perpetuate this association of height with beauty by privileging tall bodies as contestants and winners, and also by presenting exemplars of beauty.

**Fourth, height is seen as a competitive ‘edge’ in various arenas.** As the students mature, the physicality of height is not highlighted, but what it can do for students in school. “You can join anything,” many of them say. Joyce (22, 5'4), reflecting on her high school days in one of the private schools in Puerto Princesa, calls height an “edge”, a

word I find interesting, because it is, with respect to height, a self-referencing metaphor that falls back on the idea of having a spatial advantage. But if indeed basketball coaches and beauty pageant managers see height as a premium, then it is indeed already an edge — even before the competitions start.

Thinking of height as *habitus* allows us to conceptualize these various meanings and materialises as, in Bourdieu's terms, "cumulative formations" that, over time, interacts with changes in the field.

### **Bagay: Reconceptualizing the field**

In presenting my conceptual framework, I mentioned my view of the 'field' as corporeal and material. The emic term *bagay*, which I had already mentioned a number of times in this chapter, resonates with this view of the field and allows us to relate it to *habitus*.

Bagay literally means "thing", but it also means "to fit with" or "be compatible" with something. Implicit in the notion of *bagay* is that things cannot be evaluated by themselves — their value depends on what is being related to them. Height must be bagay with the body: tallness in boys must be accompanied by muscles, good posture, and displays of strength and masculinity. In Chapter 1, I mentioned the term *balinquinitan* that articulate this desire for proportionality, and the students still use this term *balinkinitan* (as it is currently spelled) to describe their favourite actors.

Moreover, the heights of a boy and a girl must be *bagay* so that they will look good together. If they get too tall, girls will not attract boys. Likewise, boys will not attract girls that are taller than them; and neither will they consider those girls in the first place. To be *bagay*, a boy and a girl must 'fit' in many ways, including personality and interests. But their physical appearances, especially beauty and height, are also taken into account. A beautiful girl (5'4) and a tall and handsome boy (5'9) are *bagay*.

Bagay is also often appended in the phrase "*Bagay kaming tingnan*"—"we are fit to be looked at"), which privileges the perspective of third persons, that is, the "others", in defining or validating what looks good, or what is a good 'fit' (cf. Mercado, 1994: 191-199). This sense of *bagay* extends to one's *barkada* (peer group) and families, helping us make sense of students' desires to be as tall as their siblings, and not stand out too much from them. Drawing from Filipino psychology, we can see this as consistent with the notion of interpersonal relations encapsulated by the word *kapwa* (others) which involves "seeing one's self through the lens of others" (Enriquez, 1986).

Thus we find in the term *bagay* a normative value derived from relationalities among bodies, and shared values within the field. Hence, while many students desire tallness, they qualify it with words like *katamtaman* (just right) or *sakto lang* (just enough). One cannot be too tall, and this is especially true for girls who do not want to constrain the number of possible boys that can be *bagay* with them. Indeed, the notion of *bagay*

structures young people's valuations and aspirations of height and is inculcated as part of *habitus* — even as they themselves, as part of the field, take part in this structuring.

### ***Tangkad, talino, talento: Forms of distinction in schools***

Let us go back to our original illustration of the flag ceremony, and focus our attention to what takes place in the stage. Occupied by school officials and teachers, students who bring honor to the school are occasionally called to be recognized. These are students who had won awards, whether in academic quiz contests, writing contests, basketball tournaments, beauty pageants.

These different categories of awards are also the different ways of distinguishing yourself in school, and these forms of distinction have currency among school officials, students, and parents alike. School officials routinely trumpet their students' achievements by making congratulatory tarpaulins for everyone to see. To the parents, these are the children that give them something to be proud of. Among the students themselves, these the *sikat* (popular) ones in class: the academic achievers, the varsity players, the student leaders, the *crush ng bayan* (crush of the whole town), among others. Those who do not fall under these categories think of themselves as "ordinary" or "average". Being popular, as any student will tell you, gives access to social capital and various privileges.

Given these relationships, we can see these forms of distinction in school as forms of capital. As they function as such, they also acquire symbolic value — i.e. *iba ang matangkad* (it's different if you're tall) — which gives us another conceptual link to the naturalization of tallness as an inherent advantage.

Conceiving of the body as constituting forms of capital allows us to moderate our claims of its importance by situating it in a field rather than presenting it as a one-dimensional picture. Height matters, *but it is not all that matters*. Even the class picture, which is structured almost entirely by height—grants exception to the class president, who sits in the front, beside the homeroom adviser. Indeed, just as there are other ways to reach the flag ceremony stage; there are also other ways to achieve "fame" or gain social capital in schools. *Tangkad, talino, talento* (height, intelligence, talents) as a multivitamin brand puts it: these are the attributes a child needs in school, and these are what the multivitamin offers. As we saw in the previous chapter, multivitamin companies appropriate these various ideas into their marketing.

Aside from helping us avoid a simplistic view of height, the different forms of capital also give us a vocabulary to make sense of counter-narratives and discourses of resistance and contestation. For instance, to go back to a previous example, when Jasper (19, 5'4) says that he's okay with being (relatively) short because he speaks good English and can easily charm ladies with his smooth talk, we can interpret this to mean that

what he lacks in body capital, he makes up for in cultural capital. When Bobby says he prefers mathematics and chemistry, implicit in his dismissal of basketball is a view of his academic capital as a sufficient claim to distinction.

In a way, the textbook discourses we discussed earlier on equality and individuality encourages this view of variable capital. Tellingly, the word *katangian* has been translated as “abilities” but it actually literally means “distinctive factors” or “distinction”. The message to students is clear: God has given everyone a form of distinction which may be physical, mental, spiritual, or financial. One must be content with whatever that is, and use it to distinguish himself or herself in any field as a path to success. As Jessica (15, 5’1), a Grade 8 public high school student, explained:

*Tanggap ko kahit ano pa ang height ko maging maliit matangkad o katamtaman man lang. Kasi po ibinigay ng Diyos kung ano ang dapat sa akin at karapat-dapat kasi po kaya ibinigay ng Diyos kong ano ka dahil po may plano ang Diyos para sa akin.* (I accept whatever my height is, whether short or tall or just right. Because God gave me what’s right for me and that’s just right).

Even so, this moral discourse of “everyone has a gift and everyone must be content” reinforces the idea of distinction by enumerating (and therefore acknowledging) the different *likas na galing* (natural talent) that students have to distinguish themselves. These stories, likewise, do not treat various “talents” equally. By trying to uphold the value of talents like “kindness” and “diligence” as being at par with others, they acknowledge that some forms of distinction are more privileged than others.

One might ask, *capital for whom?* Looking at the flag ceremony, the banners that praise students’ victories, we must see that these forms capital are not just for students but also for schools, as well as parents. The school has a stake, too, in making sure that students have good bodies. Indeed, complementary to the idea of body projects that are “shared” is body capital that is likewise shared and appropriated by different actors in the field. Tall students have symbolic value, reflecting the pedigree of the schools, and it also has instrumental value in various arenas of competition with bodies (i.e. basketball games, pageants).

By constituting a physical attribute that defines an ideal body, by being instrumental to various ways to ‘stand out’, i.e. becoming a basketball player or a beauty queen, height is not just a variable in a linear dimension in this field, but one that contributes to different dimensions. Indeed, tall bodies are privileged in a school environment as a means to various forms of distinction and as a form of distinction in itself.

### **“It feels bad” / “It feels good”: The embodiment of height**

This discussion of height will not be complete without accounting for the ways in which the experience of tallness or shortness is “embodied” and “lived” by the students, and

this is best illustrated by their own accounts, such as this recollection of Lizette (19, 4'5):

*Kahapon, hindi ako pinapansin sa Potato Corner stand sa Rob... Hindi ko alam kung hindi lang ako pinapansin or hindi nya ako makita. nag-aabot na ako ng bayad pero iniignore talaga nya ako. I raised my voice na, "Ate, kanina pa ako dito!" Yun lang. Medyo na-feel bad ako. (Yesterday, no one was paying me attention when I was queuing in Potato Corner. I don't know if they were deliberately ignoring me, or they really just couldn't see in. But I really feel I was being ignored. I raised my voice and said, "Ate, I'm been waiting here for some time!" That's all. I kinda felt bad.)*

They also find their way in students aspirations and perceptions on the advantages of height. Note the affective language in some of their statements:

*Gusto kong maging matangkad dahil gusto kong makita ang bagay na paminsan ay di makita ng iba (I want to be tall because I want to see the things that others cannot see) -Katherine (16, 5'2)*

*Gusto kong maging 5'4 dahil tingin ko ay makakatulong ito sa pagpapagaan ng aking pakiramdam (I want to be 5'4 because I think it can help lighten up my feelings) -Ivanka (14, 5'1)*

*Kung matangkad ka, meron kang dating. Dahil mas kaya mo galawan ang mundo kapag maraming taong bilib sayo, sa tangkad mo. (You have 'impact'. You can move around the world more when more people are impressed with your height) -Hazel (13, 5'0)*

*Naramdaman kong tumatangkad na ako noong ako'y 13 Ang sarap sa pakiramdam nung ako'y tumangkad. (I felt that I was growing when I was 13. It feels good when I was getting taller.)-Mikhail (16, 5'7)*

It will take a thicker ethnography of individual students' life courses to attend to the specificities of height as a lived experience, but I mention it to show that height is also a "felt" attribute of the body: there is a "fleshiness" in it that structures the way we see the world, and how we "are" in the world. Thus, while I speak of the body as a form of capital, we must not lose sight of its embodiment and its everyday materiality: The body is not just capital in itself, but for itself.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, I examined and discussed the ways in which height materialises in schools, among schoolchildren and their parents. Making use of a comic strip, I elicited narratives of growing, of being tall and being short, and of *relating* to each other's

heights. Overwhelmingly, though in various degrees of intensity, the findings revealed a preference of being tall. As the children grow older, they associate height with sports, beauty pageants, partner preferences, and employment prospects.

I then contextualized these findings by looking at the situations where height materialises in the school environment. Foremost of these are situations in which height is used to organise bodies, as when students are arranged according to height—most commonly in the weekly flag ceremonies. Height also figures in students’ interactions among themselves as a mark of distinction and difference that can be an advantage for some, for whom it is seen as a physical attractiveness, and a liability for others who are teased and bullied for their shortness. In “extra-curricular” activities such as school athletics and beauty pageants, height is a competitive “edge” and these activities are peripheral, but central, to the experience of students.

Finally, I presented passages in textbooks that mention height—as a mark of national identity in Social Sciences textbooks, as a plot device in reading material, and an example of “individual differences” that Values Education texts admonish children to respect. The normativities espoused by these texts, I argue, reflect and reinforce the realities in school, and perpetuate colonial ideas about racial identity.

Taken together, these findings show how height materializes in school as one among different species of capital, or, in the language of the students’ textbooks, *katangian*—one that holds value for students, parents, and the schools themselves. Though students may see their own heights as “(God-)given”, and therefore natural, we can look at it as part of *habitus*, a way of thinking and relating to people that is learned through time, structuring and structured by the school environment.

Through different ways, including participation in athletic competitions and beauty pageants, tall bodies are “privileged”. In the field of the school environment, students do not just “find their height”, they discover, and inculcate, meanings and materialities of height in society.





## CHAPTER 4

### **Height and employment**

Following my ethnographic survey of height in schools, I now turn my attention to young adulthood, specifically, to the search for employment and the economic and social demands of sustaining one's self and family. I start by presenting findings from my ethnography, going through my various encounters with height requirements for job opportunities and young people's employment aspirations in relation to these requirements. I will then situate these jobs, and job aspirations, in the economic milieu of the city, the physical environments of the various workplaces, and bring them in dialogue with other discourses: from employers and government officials, and from relevant laws and policies, drawing from the history of height in the workforce (see Chapter 1).

My analysis draws on a continued engagement with Bourdieu's notion of 'forms of capital' (Bourdieu, 1978, 1986), this time foregrounding the ways in which height figures in the acquisition of economic capital through employment, and how employment itself is not just about economic capital—but has other kinds of value for young people and the significant others who have a stake in this capital (i.e. family members, institutions themselves). For Bourdieu, the body is a bearer of capital in terms of its ability to perform manual labor (i.e. physical capital), and in terms of the distinction that it acquires through various techniques and practices (i.e. embodied cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1978, 1986). In delimiting these categories, however, he makes a distinction between the physical (i.e. manual labor) and the social (i.e. playing polo), and precludes other ways in which the physical body itself can have valence other than the mechanical work it can accomplish. Instead of reifying the body as the source of capitals that are either "physical" or "cultural", my approach involves looking at the specificities of each "field" in the labor market to make sense of how height enables employment possibilities in that field.

Using this framework, I show that the advantages of height in the job market depend on the specific domains where it materializes. In the uniformed services, height is seen as a physical asset that is important in the demands of being in the police, military, or security service—among others, but the height of these men also signifies strength, prestige, and power for the institutions. In the tourism sector, height is valued for its being constitutive of physical attractiveness, even as there are also pragmatic reasons for preferring tall individuals (i.e. flight attendants need to reach the overhead compartment of planes) making its physicality indispensable. In these two sectors and in others, we see various rationales coming into play, including the physical environment itself: namely, *the dimensions of the workplace itself create demands for*

*workers of a certain height.*

In grappling and trying to make sense of these rationales, I unsettle of the question of *why tall people are more successful in their careers* (as many studies in other disciplines have suggested), and focus attention instead on how height materializes in the workplace, and what meanings of height are engaged in the imposition, institutionalization, and negotiation of height requirements. Further, by looking at professions where height does not seem to matter, we see that height is important in sectors where there is demand for little else other than the young people's bodies. Without educational credentials, social connections, and economic capital, many of the youth in my fieldsite find themselves competing for jobs in these fields, and in them, we see how the body emerges as a *capital of last resort*.

### **A jobs fair at the City Hall**

Let me begin with a scene at the Puerto Princesa City Hall: there is an ongoing jobs fair, and young people have crowded the second floor of the four-storey building. They are mostly in their early twenties, wearing tee shirts or polo shirts, jeans, and sneakers. Everyone is sitting on monobloc chairs or wooden benches, patiently waiting for their turn while carrying brown envelopes which contain their documents: resumés (locally known as "biodata"), recommendation letters from their high school principal or college dean, and high school or college diplomas.

I asked the young people which jobs are they are applying for, and a handful responded that they are applying for call centre jobs in Manila.<sup>83</sup> Others said that they want to work in hotels or restaurants. A few were hoping for jobs abroad. Most of them expressed willingness to leave Puerto Princesa for a better opportunity elsewhere. "*Kahit saan, basta makatulong sa pamilya ko,*" ("anywhere, as long as I can help my family") said Vince (20, 5'6")<sup>84</sup>. The eldest of six children, he had just received a business administration degree at the Palawan State University and hopes to work soon to help his younger siblings go to college. He thinks Manila is a good place to work. He has been there once, when he was 8 years old when his family visited their relatives in Bulacan, a province north of Manila. For him, Manila is a polluted place—but one that is full of opportunities.

PJ, 20 (20, 5'7), is another hopeful applicant. For over a year after graduating from PSU, he engaged in some 'raket'<sup>85</sup>, like joining AIM Global, a multi-level marketing

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83 Call centre agencies, more formally referred to business process outsourcing (BPO) companies, have comprised the fastest-growing industry in the Philippines in the past decade. As of 2015, the industry employs at least 1 million people (de Vera, 2014).

84 In my ethnographic chapter I indicate the age and height of my interlocutors whenever possible to underscore the "embodied" character of height and to remind my readers of their positionality in the literal sense.

85 The Filipino slang term raket comes from the English 'racket' which means crime or fraud, and refers to activities that are usually informal and sometimes illegal.

company that sells a cure-all called C24/7, among other products. When this scheme did not work out, he finally decided to try to find regular employment. He has a degree in Education but says that there are very limited teaching opportunities in Palawan unless one was willing to be sent to some far-flung area like Balabac. Later, when he found out that I was a graduate of the University of the Philippines, he asked if it's true that some employers don't even look at applications from other universities outside of the three big schools in Manila — UP, Ateneo, La Salle.

The applications are processed by the city's Public Employment Services Office (PESO), which facilitates job placement for Puerto Princesa, the Philippines, and around the world. In 2013, the PESO received 9,078 applicants — 1,010 for overseas and 8,055 for local jobs. Of those applicants, 132 and 4,773 were successful matched for overseas and local jobs, respectively (City Government of Puerto Princesa, 2014). The PESO, which is an office mandated in every local government unit, is itself a recent legislative creation, enacted in 1999 in order to improve employment which has not kept pace with economic growth.

What jobs are on offer? Throughout the course of my fieldwork I would browse through the bulletin boards of the city and provincial PESOs to give myself an overview. Of jobs situated in Puerto Princesa itself, there were vacancies in restaurants, hotels, malls, and other commercial establishments. Elsewhere in the province, there are openings in the agricultural and mining industries. Occasionally, there were also vacancies in government agencies for positions such as clerks, secretaries, and engineers. And for overseas jobs, there are a host of job opportunities, including sailors, barbers, caregivers, drivers, engineers, nurses, and chefs.<sup>86</sup>

The job ads are interesting material to see what particular qualifications employers are looking for — or at least, what they say they are looking for. Occasionally, there will be curious requirements such as, for jobs in the Middle East: “Muslim only or Christian willing to convert”. Or, for a program assistant for a religious non-profit, “with strong Christian commitment”. But a more typical example is this actual ad for food attendants, which I saw in October 2014:

- High school or college graduate
- With or without experience
- With pleasing personality, neat looking, and well-groomed
- Must be of good moral character, hardworking, fast
- Good communication skills
- Willing to learn and be trained

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<sup>86</sup> Over 10% of the entire Philippine population is overseas, and many are classified by the government as OFWs (overseas Filipino workers), a monicker that has become a legal entity (OFWs are entitled to travel tax exemptions, among other privileges) as well as a social status that for the Filipino underclass represents wealth and advancement (see Capistrano and Maria, 2010).

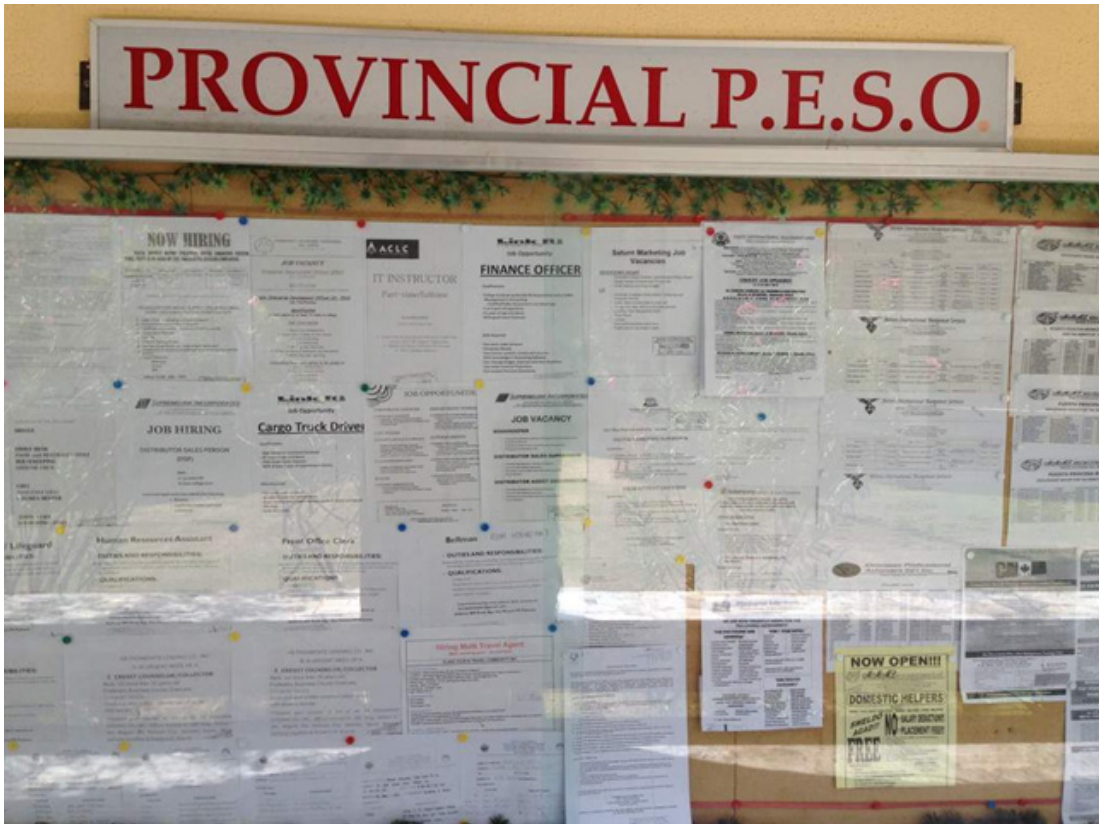


Fig. 1 - A bulletin board at the provincial government compound displaying various job advertisements. Photo by the author.

- Must have basic knowledge in banqueting or in food functions service
- Male or female, 18-26 years old
- At least 5'3 (female), 5'7 (male)

Invariably, academic requirements come first. For specific (and usually higher-paying) jobs, the particular courses are listed, for instance, “Must be a graduate of Doctor of Medicine”. However, for many jobs, the only requirement is that one must have finished secondary or tertiary education. Phrases like “high school or college graduate”, “college degree is a must”, and “preferably college graduate” commonly come up. Others specify that the applicant must be a graduate “of a four-year course”, preferring them over two-year vocational courses.

Age and experience are also part of the criteria. Some ads, particularly those for foreign countries, specify the required number of years of experience. However, there are also ads that mention “with or without experience” to encourage those belonging to the latter to apply. After all, youth is a premium in many fields, particularly in the service sector. Many ads will have an age requirements, such as the one above: “Male or female, 18-26 years old”. Robinsons Mall, the first-full service mall in Palawan and one of the

biggest employers in the city, prefaces its job advertisements with these lines: “We are looking for young, dynamic, committed, and very talented individuals who have the passion for work and with excellent communication skills.” This “age discrimination” has recently come to the attention of public officials and civil society. Perhaps mindful of laws that exist in other countries, such as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) in the United States, Philippine lawmakers have called for an end to age discrimination. For instance, in 2013, Senator Pia Cayetano filed Senate Bill no. 29 (2013) which seeks to make it unlawful for employers (1) to mention age requirements, (2) to require applicants to reveal their age on job applications, and (3) to decline any application because of the individual’s age (Ibid: Sec. 8). Tellingly, its explanatory note acknowledges that “most employers prefer young employees”, and “prejudice against an aging workforce is evident in the qualifications posted in job notices...” (Ibid). This bill, however, was not passed and age requirements continue to be ubiquitous on the bulletin boards.

Physical appearance figures as well, finding articulation in the term “pleasing personality”. I used to think that this term had a literal meaning, with employers looking for candidates who are cheerful, amiable, warm. However, as I learned from my informants, it actually meant beauty or attractiveness, a body that is *magandang tingnan*, “pleasant to look at”.

Finally, we come to the height requirements, which appear in some of the job advertisements, as in our example above. They would frequently appear in ads for military services, like the Navy and the Coast Guard, both of which require a height of 5’ [152 cm], or among hotels and restaurants, which would ask for males at least 5’7 [170 cm] tall and females at least 5’3 [160cm] or 5’4 [163 cm]. However, height requirements also come up surprisingly in jobs like being caregivers and pharmacy assistants.

After interacting with the job applicants waiting outside the office, I went in, and sought to interview the PESO officials. The junior ones were busy facilitating the applications, but a senior officer, a lady, entertained my inquiries and soon we were having a chat about the nature of jobs that are available. “Call center jobs are really growing now and they are recruiting from the provinces,” she observed, adding that these are relatively higher-paying compared to the jobs in Puerto Princesa, though it entails moving to Manila or Cebu.

When I asked about whether height is important, she readily replied: “Who doesn’t want to become taller? You cannot blame the employers for putting height requirements, especially if they’re in the service industry, because that’s what Filipinos want.”



## Height requirements in the uniformed services

In the uniformed services, height figures in the form of height requirements — some institutionalized in laws — rationales of which include the demands for strength and manual work that come with the jobs and the prestige that the institutions themselves derive from the physical stature of their constituents. Even when these requirements are negotiable, they privilege tall youths, and reinforce the value of tallness in society.

Height requirements appear not only on the bulletin boards of government buildings, but also in the offices of employment agencies and manpower services. In a security guard agency at the City Coliseum, the very door to the office has a big sign that spells out the height requirements—5'6 [167 cm] for males and 5'3 [160 cm] for females. Under the height requirements, on a much smaller font size, it reads: “At least college level” (See Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - A poster at the door at a security agency displaying height requirements for security guards. Photo by the author.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the long history of the institutionalisation of height requirements in many uniformed services, such as the Republic Act 5487 (1969) mandating security guards to be at least 5'4 [162 cm]. As of 2015, more than 45 years later, this law is still in effect, and is still impacting the lives of security guards in Puerto Princesa, not in the strictest sense intended by the law, but in determining how much salary one can get, how stable his job can be, and which agencies will accept him. When I entered the security guard agency in the City Coliseum, I asked whether the height requirements are really absolute. “We will see in the interview,” he said, leaving the door open for those below 5'4 [162 cm], but clearly putting a premium on those who are taller. “*Pasok kaagad*,” (immediately in)—as my interlocutors put it. In one of the hotels where I stayed in my subsequent visits to the city, the guard was a female whose height was 5'0 [152 cm]. While she didn't seem bothered by her lack of stature, she acknowledged that taller applicants have it easier: “*kung matangkad ka madali kang matatanggap sa mga magagandang agency*.” (If you're tall you easily get into the better agencies). By “better”, she was referring to agencies that get contracted by malls, banks, and bigger hotels—and give higher pay to their employees.

At the Palawan State University, an advertisement for the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) says that the minimum height requirement is 5' [152 cm] for males and females. A follow-up condition goes: "not to exceed 6'4 [193 cm] for males and females". I usually think of height requirements as those that spell out the minimum, and the presence of a maximum height requirement is a reminder that height is not an absolute scale, and being too tall can also be problematic. Though the minimum limit has already been loosened significantly, there remains the perception that height is an advantage. As Ellen Santamaria (49, 5'1) opines, "*Hindi komo pwedeng mag-apply, pasok ka.*" (Being able to apply doesn't mean you'll get accepted.)

In the police force, the longstanding requirement of at least 5'4 [162 cm] for males and 5'2 [157 cm] for females still holds as mandated by Republic Act 8551 (1998). The subsequent provision is also interesting in its demand for this height to be proportional: "Must weigh not more or less than five kilograms (5 kgs.) from the standard weight corresponding to his or her height, age, and sex" (Section 14). The only way out is "a waiver of height requirement will be issued to those belonging to cultural communities" (Sec, 15)—signifying a lower expectation of height for the country's indigenous peoples, including Palawan's Tagbanua, Palawan, Batak, and Tau't Bato indigenous peoples.<sup>87</sup> National police officials have clarified in interviews with the press that waivers can also be granted to other applicants if the number of applicants fall below the quota—but there is still a requirement, albeit lowered, for this waiver to be granted: male and female applicants must still be least 157 cm [5'2] and 152 cm [5'0] meters, respectively (Frialde, 2013).

To get waivers, moreover, these applicants must prove their worth (Ibid, para. 11):

...applicants for waivers must possess exemplary aptitude, such as special skills in evidence gathering and safekeeping, cyber crime investigation, detection and prevention, crime scene investigation, martial arts, marksmanship and similar skills; special talents in the field of sports, music or arts and culture; extensive experience or training in forensic science and other legal, medical and technical services; outstanding academic records and extracurricular activities; good family background in law enforcement or socio-civic activities; recognised social standing in the community, and awards and commendations.

Here we see that while aspiring police officers that meet the height requirement can go through the normal process of application, if one is short, one must demonstrate special skills to *overcome* this "deficiency", but this can only happen if there are not enough applicants that meet the original requirements to begin with.

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<sup>87</sup> Even so, indigenous peoples still have a height requirement - only lower. In one news report the National Police Commission stressed that: "the minimum height requirement for applicants who belong to indigenous groups, duly certified by the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos or the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, is 1.52 meters for male applicants and 1.45 meters for female applicants." (Frialde, 2013: para. 6)

The imposition of height requirements is supported by Criminology students I met at the Palawan State University. Randy (21, 5'6), a second year Criminology student, dreams of being a customs officer one day. Idealistic, he says he wants to be part of the solution against the growing crimes in the country. He shares his view of the height requirements:

*Ang height requirement sa Criminology ay natural lamang. Kung logic ang pag-uusapan ay hindi pwedeng makipag-away ang pulis kung ang height nya ay 4'11 laban sa 6 footer na kriminal lalo na kung mahawakan nyio baka isang kiga lang yung pulis. Kapag ang iyong estudyante ay nagpaplanong mag-aral ng criminology nasisiguro nya na papasa sya sa mga height requirement. Kaya matangkad kami lahat sa klase.* (Height in Criminology is only natural. If we will talk about logic, a policeman cannot fight if his height is just 4'11 against a 6-footer criminal especially if he gets manhandled. If a student who is planning to study criminology he must be sure that he can pass the height requirement. That's why all of us are tall in class)

Renz, who is 5'6 1/2 (it's interesting in itself that the youths add the 1/2) considers himself tall, but not too tall. *“At hindi ko pinapangarap ang sobrang tangkad mas maganda ay katamtaman lang pero maliksi at malakas ang katawan.”* (“And I do not dream of being too tall, it's better to have just the right height but with an agile and strong body”). He adds:

*At bukod sa Criminology, halos lahat ng trabahong panglalaki ay may height requirement. Mas maganda kasi ang matangkad at lalo't malaki ang katawan, good looking o there is pleasing personality.* (Aside from Criminology, almost all occupations that are for men have height requirements. Taller is better if you have a big body, you're good looking or there is 'pleasing personality')

We can take two important points from this statement. First, he gives voice to the view, common among my informants, that most *panglalaki* (for-male) jobs have height requirements. Second, he reminds us that while Criminology students speak of height as an instrumental advantage in the tasks in their desired careers — and a bureaucratic advantage to get the jobs to begin with — they also see the connection between height and “pleasing personality”. The desire to be attractive is enmeshed in many other desires and aspirations.

There is no actual height requirement to take a Criminology course (though many high school students think there is), but the awareness of height hangs heavily in the College of Criminology. Every weekend, their students, as cadets supervised by the different services of the Western Command, are made to undergo boot camp training and there they are made to form groups. They are arranged by height, but unlike the queues of elementary and high school students, this time, the “Big Guide” (that is,

the tallest student in the group) goes in front, while the “Small Guide” is at the very back. One of the disadvantages of being short is “always being behind”. While in the elementary schools the height arrangement is purportedly meant for everyone — from the smallest to the tallest — to see what’s happening in the stage, the relegation of the shorter cadets at the back reflect their decreasing status in the uniformed hierarchy.

Criminology is one of the most popular courses in Puerto Princesa’s universities. At the Palawan State University, the College of Criminal Justice Education is the third largest college, despite only having Criminology as the offered degree program. In my *Francis Liit*, *Francis Laki* surveys among elementary and high school students, being part of the uniformed services was one of the leading career choices (i.e. to be a part of the police force, a member of the coast guard, or the navy) and consequently Criminology was a popular choice for a college degree. This popularity is very understandable, in light of the presence of the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ Western Command (WesCom) stationed in which makes the armed forces a more visible power, and allows city residents to have a military career close to home.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, some of the high schools students I met were children of military servicemen, and they wanted to follow their parents’ footsteps. As China (13, 5’1), a Grade 7 student says:

*Gusto kong maging kasingtangkad ng papa ko dahil matangkad sya kaya nakapag-Navy sya. Gusto ko ring maging Navy o pulis. (I want to be as tall as my father because he’s tall, and that’s why he was able to get into the Navy. I also want to be [in the] Navy or police.)*

But even without the Western Command based in the city, the appeal of being part of the uniformed services extends throughout the archipelago. For instance, while the base pay of a starting police officer (Police Officer 1) is a modest P13,492 (280 dollars) per month, one has a clear and definite track for advancement and promotion. Moreover, there are various benefits, as advertised in the Philippine National Police website.<sup>89</sup>

- Insurance and healthcare benefits
- Billeting and housing privileges
- Job security
- Leadership and other skills training
- Opportunity to serve for UN Peacekeeping Operations
- Opportunities for post-graduate studies within the country and abroad
- Awards and Recognition
- Meritorious Promotions
- Scholarship/Educational Assistance

<sup>88</sup> The Western Command combines army and air force elements in a military complex in Brgy. San Miguel. Given the ongoing dispute between the Philippines and China on the Spratlys (Kalayaan) islands in the South China Sea, the strategic role of Palawan has risen, and a naval base is also being planned in Puerto Princesa).

<sup>89</sup> Available: <http://pnp.gov.ph/portal/index.php/pay-and-benefits>

- Retirement Program
- Memorial Park (*Himlayan ng Bayaning Pulis*)

Note that these benefits are not just for police officers alone, but for their families: there are scholarship opportunities for their children, health care benefits for the whole family, and housing, retirement, and burial benefits that will benefit the family as well.

Moreover, belonging to the uniformed services today carries prestige and a sense of security for one's family; and among the males, boosts their sense of masculinity and attractiveness. This brings us back to the theme of beauty, which, as I have shown throughout this book, goes beyond the male and female beauty pageants, but permeates, together with height, various institutions and contexts.

Importantly, belonging to the uniformed services is useful in various day-to-day situations. I saw this at play in an altercation between an agitated woman and an airline representative at the Puerto Princesa airport. As they were arguing, one of the woman's most forceful statements — indeed, threats — was “*May kamag-anak kaming pulis!*” (“We have a relative who is a policeman!”). In a country where *koneksyon* (“connections”) are very important, belonging to the uniformed services provides a measure of security and social mobility for one's self and family, even as we saw how height is a precondition to this belonging.

### **Height requirements in the tourism sector**

As in the uniformed services, height requirements appear for tourism-related jobs, but it is often one of a more implicit kind. My informants — hotel and restaurant owners and managers as well as tourism students — explain these height preferences as catering to the demands of the public for attractiveness and “pleasing personality”, and boosting the prestige of the establishments. However, there are also pragmatic rationales for tall bodies, such as the need for waiters to be more visible to customers inside a restaurant. These overlapping rationales favor tall bodies in Puerto Princesa's tourism sector, one of the most important sources of employment at my field site.

In the past two decades Puerto Princesa has sought to be the “premier tourist destination of the Philippines”, and its claims to tourism fame are not without basis. Two of the Philippines' six UNESCO World Heritage Sites are located in Palawan: Tubbataha Reef in Sulu Sea and the Puerto Princesa Underground River within the city self. In 2007, the Underground River was chosen as one of the “New 7 Wonders of the World”. For two consecutive years—(2014 and 2015) Conde Nast Magazine picked Palawan as the “World's Best Island”, the latest in many similar accolades.

In many ways, Puerto Princesa's thrust towards tourism mirrors the Philippine aspiration to become a major tourist destination in Southeast Asia. In 2012, while neighboring



Thailand and Malaysia attracted 22 and 25 million annual visitors, respectively, the Philippines received 4 million tourists: a small fraction of these figures. A succession of tourism secretaries have come up various campaigns—from “Wow Philippines” to “It’s More Fun in the Philippines” in a bid to increase tourist arrivals, but this has been marred in the past by security concerns owing to secessionist rebels on Mindanao island in the Southern Philippines. Even Palawan was not spared of this threat. In May 27, 2001, members of the Abu Sayyaff, a Muslim terrorist group, crossed over from the Sulu Sea to Honda Bay in Puerto Princesa, kidnapping 20 people, including three American citizens in what ultimately ended in the deaths of five of the hostages (see Tan, 2009:211-212). Fourteen years later, however, this episode has been largely forgotten, and Palawan is one of the bright spots in Philippine tourism map.

Tourist arrivals have increased dramatically: from 7,107 visitors in 1991, there were 654,033 in 2012, and a projected 1,276,000 in 2015. These figures have spurred construction of hotels and other establishments, and a planned expansion of the airport. In 2012, the first full-service mall, Robinsons Palawan, opened, providing several hundred jobs, and at the time of writing, SM (the country’s largest mall chain) is constructing its first mall in the province.

Airlines, too, are a growing presence in the city. From just one daily flight to Manila in the 1990s, there are now 19 flights daily from Puerto Princesa to three major cities in the archipelago: Manila, Iloilo, and Cebu. In 2015, a service to Taipei is expected to commence, and in 2017, a bigger terminal is expected to open, and flights to Hong Kong and Singapore — major regional hubs in this part of Asia — are mullied. The airport is right in the city centre, bisecting the two major commercial areas—Rizal Avenue and San Jose. Perhaps this close proximity of the airport to the city is one of the reasons why, as I found in my *Francis Liit* surveys (see Chapter 4), being a flight attendant is a common ambition of young people, particularly among those who are taking a HRM (Hotel and Restaurant Management) degree, which is seen as a good background for applying as a flight attendant.

With a starting salary of 33,000 to 40,000 pesos (700 to 850 USD) a month, flight attendants get much higher salaries compared to hotel clerks (10,000-12,000 pesos) and it is certainly much higher than the minimum wage given by Robinsons Mall and its tenants to most of their employees (amounting to 8000 pesos a month). Moreover, being a flight attendant has the important benefit of having a secure job, complete with the protection of labor laws, not all of which are available to a majority of young people, as in those who work in the malls: many of them are hired “contractually”, their employment renewed every five or six months.<sup>90</sup>

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90 Labor unions have waged a protracted campaign against what they have termed as the “contractualization” of labor in the Philippines (Azucena, 2016), and several bills have been filed in Congress to end this practice across different industries, but as of the time of writing, none of these bills have passed.



In addition, the opportunity to travel remains a big motivation, doubtless inspired by the tourists who come from different parts of the world. Owing to its being a tourist town, Puerto Princesa's youth are among those who encounter foreigners on a much higher frequency than those in other parts of the Philippines. One of my interlocutors, Hadrian (19, 5'11) hangs out at the Tiki Bar to make friends with female tourists, some of which routinely appear in his Facebook page as his "girlfriends".

Wales (19, 5'8) is an aspiring flight attendant. A national finalist of a beauty pageant sponsored by a whitening lotion, he is confident about his looks and his height. Asked about the physical attribute he's most proud of, he points to his nose, which is *matangos* (sharp). However, he is insecure about his teeth, which he describes as "*hindi pantay-pantay*" (not aligned). He fears that this will prevent him from becoming a flight attendant. "If only I had money, I would get braces!" he mused. For now, his goal is to have a regular job so he can save up for braces and eventually still be able to apply to be a flight attendant.

I looked up the requirements for being a flight attendant in the Philippines. Philippine Airlines (PAL) is the country's flag carrier and "Asia's oldest airline", being in operation since 1949. Financial woes, starting with the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998 but precipitated by a longer history of mismanagement, has caused the airline to decline, and budget airline Cebu Pacific has since overtaken it as the country's largest airline. However, PAL retains its prestige and remains the airline of choice of businessmen and international organisations. The airline requires its pilots to be at least 5'4 [162 cm] in height. Interestingly, their subordinates in the aircraft, the male flight attendants, as well as 'inflight Chinese interpreters' must be at least 5'6 [167 cm]—even taller the pilots—while the females must be at least 5'2 [157 cm]. A 'rider' goes: "Weight must be proportionate to height."<sup>91</sup>

Its main competitor (and the Philippines' largest airline by number of passengers), Cebu Pacific, was more explicit in saying that the height requirement is 'barefoot height' — elevated shoes won't count. Again its requirements stipulate that "weight must be proportional to height."<sup>92</sup>

One blogger, whose blog "Be a Flight Attendant" narrates her experiences in applying for various airlines in the Philippines, shares her experiences in a Cebu Pacific job screening:

First step: there was 5 of us, we were asked to stand near a wall, on the wall there is

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91 en from a career vacancies posting from the Philippine Airlines website: <https://www.philippineairlines.com/en/~media/pal-palex%20vacancies.pdf>

92 One Cebu Pacific ad mirrors many of the things mentioned in our initial example of a job advertisement: "Interested female applicants between 18 and 25 years old with good eyesight, a pleasing personality and at least a height of 5'3" and weight proportional to height may apply" (<http://cebupacificairlines.ph/job-vacancies-hiring-needs-250-female-flight-attendants/>)

a line at 5 ft. 3 inches [160 cm]. Then we are asked to smile our biggest smile. Right there and then if you did not reach the line you are asked to leave. Saying thank you for your time but sadly you did not meet our requirements.<sup>93</sup>

I asked a Manila-based recruiter of flight attendants, herself a former flight attendant at Philippine Airlines, about the need for these height requirements. She offered a practical reason: “Cabin attendants need to be tall so they can reach the overhead bins and assist the passengers.” But then she offered a rejoinder: “Of course, height enhances the appeal. The flight attendants are the image of the airline so they have to be attractive.” Again we see here that the height preferences of employers cannot easily be explained by a singular advantage. Rather, it is the combination of advantages — function, attractiveness, prestige — that make it desirable, even if there would be an “official discourse” that justifies height requirements.

As for Wales’s predicament of having ‘bad teeth’, Ms. Tina had these words for him: “Having a good set of teeth is really important. A good smile can make an angry passenger happy.”

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Dining at Ka Lui, the restaurant that as of November 2014 was the highest rated on Trip Advisor, one cannot help but notice its barefoot staff, all males from their 20s to early 30s, most of whom are taller than average. Some people have speculated that Ka Lui was being practical, as young women get pregnant and their maternity leaves can cause unnecessary burden to the business. But this does not explain the attractiveness or the tallness of the waiters.

In nearby La Terrasse, the staff was also largely male, but they didn’t seem taller than usual. One of the owners, a middle-aged woman who was married to a Frenchman, was not that convinced about the importance of height. “There are people who do not look tall, even if they’re tall. There are also people who can say, ‘I’m taller than myself.’ It’s also in your attitude, how you conduct yourself.” (Curiously, though, there is a platform behind the restaurant’s bar that makes the staff look six inches taller, something I’ve seen behind reception desks in many parts of the Philippines).

Julita (58, 5’3), a restaurant owner, explained to me that height has an advantage for food attendants: they get spotted easily by customers, and they, too, can easily see customers. Moreover, they can carry trays on a higher level, making them less likely to hit tables or chairs. But he admits that another strong reason is to attract customers: “Filipinos love beautiful waitresses and handsome waiters.”

Puerto Princesa hosts over 200 hotels, inns, and pension houses, which collectively

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93 Taken from <http://beaflightattendant.blogspot.com/2013/01/domestic-airline-application-experience.html>

employ a few thousand people. One manager of a pension house along Rizal Avenue said that what's important is being *masipag* (hard-working); looks are secondary. He explained:

Some people say that Palaweños are *tamad* (lazy) and I have seen this myself. Sometimes, an employee would be absent just because it's his girlfriend's birthday. So those who I can rely on really stand out and for me that's what matters most.

On the other hand, an employee of one of the luxury resorts in Sabang says that:

*Ang kinukuha talaga nila lalo yung mga matatangkad, lalo na sa mga security guard at mga nasa reception. Mas kagalanggalang kasi yung hotel kapag malakas ang dating nung mga frontliners. Pero yung mga driver, chef, yung mga nasa kitchen, kahit anong height pwedeng makapasok.* (What they get are those who are tall, especially the security guards and those who are at the reception. This is because the hotel looks more respectable if its 'frontliners' have a strong impact. But the drivers, chefs, those in the kitchen...any height will do.)

In the same hotel where he worked, I once accompanied one of the beauty queens so we could watch the "Swimwear competition" of the Miss World-Philippines, a beauty contest for Filipinas all over the world. While we were having refreshments at the beachfront restaurant, she mused: "Someday I will build a hotel and all the staff will be tall and beautiful. It ruins the view, if you see someone who looks like a monkey!"

This remark, and others that I (over)hear in casual conversations, begs the question of whether the physical requirements of height and "pleasing personality" are truly the preferences of the owners alone, or customers too — that is, the general public, and with it come the expectation that a good restaurant or hotel must have good-looking and tall personnel. If so, then we are all participants in making height a requirement for jobs. As McFerson (2002:14) notes in her book assessing the impact of the American colonial encounter in Philippine society:

Height and size also determine attractiveness for both men and women...Service employees, especially in upscale hotels and commercial establishments, are typically much taller than the average Filipino. It is common in help-wanted ads to specify height and other physical requirements. For some occupations, this may be justified by the specific job requirements; in most cases, it simply reflects the aesthetic preference of the wealthier Filipino customers. This internalization of an imported beauty image different from that of the Malay majority highlights the man-made nature of socioracial constructions and categories.

In Chapter 1, I argued that while tallness has always been seen by Filipinos as desirable and attractive, it was during the American period that it acquired economic value by figuring in requirements, starting with admission to the military. My ethnography

demonstrates that these height requirements and preferences have persisted to the present day, and it is not just, as McPerson says, the preference of wealthier customers, but one that is shared by many others, including the young people I have interacted with.

### **Height requirements in other sectors**

In the above I focused on two distinct domains of the job market—the uniformed services and the tourism sector—where height has a clear influence, but height requirements can also be found in various jobs. Confining my survey to Puerto Princesa, I saw height requirements for cooks (“must be 5’3” [160 cm]), caregivers, seafarers, and workers in a offshore drilling company. When I asked restaurant owner Julita about height requirements for cooks, she laughed it off, saying that no one cares how you look as long as cook good food, but later added that you cannot be too short:

*Nasa pagluluto yan, hindi ko tinitingnan yung tangkad o itsura. Pero syempre sa kusina kailangan naaabot mo yung de lata at kung-ano-anong nakalagay sa mga drawer! (It’s in the cooking, I don’t look at height or physical appearance. But of course in the kitchen you need to be able to reach the canned goods and everything on the drawers!)*

She went on to joke that someone with hands that are too short could get seared by the oil from the frying pan, but her point is clear: one must meet the physical demands of working in the kitchen and its physical configuration.

As for caregiving — another key profession for export overseas — a PESO official explained that there is a demand for taller males because they can easily lift or assist their mostly-elderly patients if necessary. Here we see how a traditionally female job can have room for males because of their height advantage, as well as the strength that is assumed to go with it. The same can be said for nurses. As one male nurse (Jeff, 23, 5’9) who works in the operating room in the Adventist Hospital in Puerto Princesa said: “It’s a big advantage for the nursing team if there are male nurses because we can reach the supplies, hang the IV fluids, and lift patients if needed.”

Beyond jobs with explicit height requirements, many of my interlocutors think that there is an implicit advantage to taller applicants, even in call centre jobs, in which the employee would be completely invisible from the customers. As Ellen (49, 5’1) said:

*“Kahit na walang nakasulat na height requirement, sinong pipiliin nila? Yung matangkad o yung pandak? Syempre yung matangkad!” (Even if it says there is no height requirement, who will they choose? The tall or the short? Of course the tall!).*

Perhaps this assumption that height is a consideration in most jobs is one of the reasons

why it is customary for young people to put their height in their resumés—alongside their pictures, weight, age, and educational background.

I raised this question of implicit height requirements to Jan (33, 5'6), a Human Resources manager in one of the biggest cosmetics company in Manila, and he says that they evaluate people based on their qualifications. He admits that coming from the top universities has an advantage. And while he denies that they are looking for physically attractive or tall applicants, he concedes that it's possible that, all things being equal, he would be more impressed by those whose bodies are "*may dating*" (with impact).

Again, it is worth reiterating that there are many jobs where height is not a concern. Mr. Richard Rebote, the head of the provincial PESO, said that for blue-collar jobs, height is not important, but because the pay in those jobs are even lower than that of the service sector, often it is the "pandak" (short people) who end up in these jobs. In this sense, even though these jobs don't have a height requirement, the existence of requirements in other sectors means that they too are affected by them.

When I asked Dr. Arnaldo Favila (34, 5'11), an orthopaedic surgeon who practices in the Adventist Hospital, whether height is a consideration in surgery—he was definitive in rejecting any such notion, saying that he has many colleagues who are short. In the operating room theatre, he adds, the tables are of a fixed height that is too tall for some of his female colleagues, but they use a footstool to prop themselves a bit and then there's no problem. For her part, Celine (24, 5'1), a law student at the University of the Philippines who hails from Puerto Princesa, dismissed the idea of height being a factor in legal practice. She admits that she gets teased about her height by her peers but she never felt that it would be a problem in the professional realm.

What is notable, however, is that these careers is that they are not readily available for the youth of Puerto Princesa, where there is neither a medical school or a law school, primarily for financial reasons. It is in the service sector and the uniformed services where opportunities lie, and it is also in these sectors where height is often required.

### **Ergonomics and the verticality of the workplace**

Nurse Jeff's example of the need to be able to hang the IV fluids, just like the flight attendants needing to be able to push the overhead compartments on airplanes, is a reminder that tallness exists not only as a preference of employers, but as a real component of the spatial configuration of the workplace itself and the things that are used as part of the job. These objects and their verticality, in a way, shape the "rules of the game" much as the specifications of a basketball court structure the game itself.

This may also figure in the rationale in the military for their height requirements. Reflecting on US Army standards, Friedl (1990:35) writes: "Today, the best rationale for current height standards is practical: to limit the range of sizes for uniforms,

protective ensembles, and workspace dimensions.” Again, our ethnography points that these requirements are often informed by multiple rationales but the attention to the physical environment itself (i.e. guns, uniforms) must also be considered.

I interviewed Dr. Jinky del Prado-Lu, an ergonomics expert at the UP College of Public Health, about the role of height in various jobs and she responded by raising concerns about the occupational injuries that many workers face due to a lack of fit between them and the machinery that they use. Tables, for instance, must be of a certain

height for textile workers, otherwise they would present with back pain. According to Dr. Lu, the role of ergonomics is to come up with anthropometrics for certain groups of workers (i.e. farmers, fishermen, textile workers) that will then inform the design or modification of equipment in the workplace (see del Prado-Lu, 2007).

But even as ergonomics relies on anthropometry to make certain equipment ‘fit’ their users, we can also interrogate the ergonomics and the architectures which informed the original designs. Why, for instance, is the interior of a Boeing 737 cabin 2.20 meters [7.2 ft] in height, and 1.68 meters [5.5 ft] up to the overhead bins (Boeing, 2007)? Why the dimensions of kitchens, operating room tables, IV line hangers, and guns? Ultimately, this line of questioning will lead us to issues of a lack of manufacturing industry in the Philippines, the reliance on imported equipment, and so on. We need not go that far. I just want to make the point that while we can say that the material conditions of the workplace play a role in the demands for height requirements, these objects did not arise *de novo*—they were fashioned after a *normative* body (i.e. the average airline passenger, the average American soldier), for which one must either conform (i.e. meet height requirements) or suffer the consequences (i.e. occupational injuries). Simply put, many workplaces are not built for ‘short’ people.

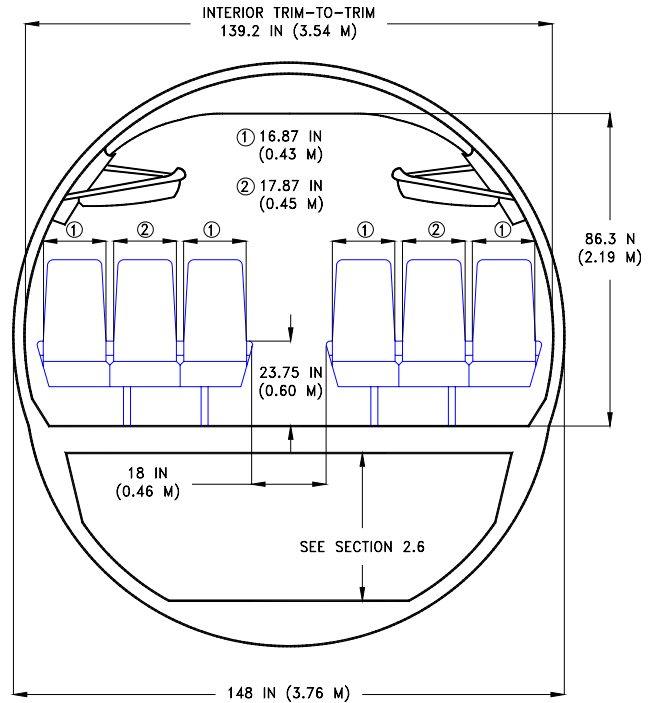


Fig. 3 - Cross-section of an airplane passenger compartment with various measurements. (Source: Boeing, 2007 p. 63)



## **Beyond job requirements: Height as a cumulative advantage**

How else does height matter? My fieldwork shows that more than just a number (i.e. 5'8) that employers see in their resumés, it also confers a cumulative advantage that leads to favorable employment prospects for the same reasons that height opens doors for opportunities in schools.

For example, in the beauty pageants I referenced in the introduction and the previous chapter, candidates get free “personality training”, and are even coached in English speaking to perform better in the pivotal “Question and answer” portion. They are given the experience of hosting events, and speaking in front of large crowds.

Amina (18, 5'7) is the recently-crowned beauty queen of her university, and is part of a group of “models” handled by a single manager. She says that she “cannot be a beauty queen forever” and looks forward to being a flight attendant, stating that she wants to focus on her academics as a Hotel and Restaurant Management student. However, she believes that being involved in beauty pageants can help her career because of the free trainings, as well as the experience and “confidence” that she gains from joining those competitions .

Male youths also join beauty pageants, but a bigger opportunity for them lies in sports, particularly basketball. Members of sports varsities get to travel around the country for regional and national competitions, broadening their horizons. They also expand their social networks by becoming known in the city. In a country where “connections” and “contacts” are just as important in getting a job as one’s academic record, these social networks can help. More directly, basketball can be their ticket to college education in Manila, a privilege usually available only to those who are well-off. In turn, a Manila education translates to better job opportunities. This was likely on Eric’s mind when he, at 5'3 [160 cm]the smallest member of the city basketball team, lamented that if not for his height, he would have been sent to Manila for an athletic scholarship. “If only I were 5'8 [173 cm], maybe I wouldn’t be here...you would be interviewing me in Manila!”

Thus height does not only exist as an instantaneous advantage at the moment of the job application or interview. It may very well be cumulative advantage forged by opportunities that come through the years.

## **Counter-narratives: Compensation, resistance, and indifference**

All of the above points to height as a significant factor, but that is not to say that height is the all-important determinant of employment. Just like the basketball games that can be won by speed and style, work and income is also a matter of hardwork and *diskarte*. Tricycle drivers in Puerto Princesa, for instance, feel that can earn more than formal employees because of the various opportunities they have for referring tourists

to tour packages, hotels, van rentals, and so on. “*Boses lang ang puhunan mo,*” (your only capital is your voice).

Even laws that institutionalise height requirements can be circumvented or ignored, and there are many security guards that fall short of the 5’4 [162 cm] cut-off mandated by law. The waivers for the police show that even at the level of institutions there are certain provisions that allow for these requirements to be negotiated.

Looking at how young people come to terms with their heights, what I often hear are narratives of compensation rather than contestation; of “making up” for what is perceived as a lack. Jasper (21, 5’4), a senior college student and the son of a hotel owner, says: “I don’t feel bad because I can make up for it. I can speak very well, and I have good looks.” Some high school students mention “small but terrible” a lot, and “*maliit pero cute*” (small but cute). Then, there are those who observe that the intelligent kids in high school tend to be short, and they would say that

In a thesis that looked at height in sports, Cameron (2012) argued that these “ambivalent” (i.e. short-but) statements that figure prominently in sports commentary involving short athletes actually “undermine or neutralize the words conveying power and strength” (Messner et. al as cited in Cameron, 2012:54). Similarly, the *language of compensation*, while boosting the individuals, likewise affirms the importance as height as something that needs to be overcome.

Lizette (19, 4’5), one of the shortest girls I interviewed, gave me an insightful reflection on her height in relation to her everyday life and prospects for work:

*Normal naman ako. I have friends, I close friends. I can easily make acquaintances dahil sa social skills. At okay naman din ako sa studies. Para sakin, height is just a structure. Pero ngayon, third year na ako, at mag-oOJT sa Makati sa summer. Nagkakatanungan na kami, like, pano yun, papaniwalaan ba tayo na mag-oOJT tayo? baka mamaya tanungin tayo. “Neng, baka pinabili ka lang ng suka ng nanay mo!”* Yun, ngayon lang talaga nagsisink in sa akin, na oo nga ‘no, reliable or credible ba yung height ko, papaniwalaan ba nila ako? (I am normal. I have friends, close friends. I can easily make acquaintances because of my social skills. And I’m okay with my studies. For me, height is just a structure. But now, I’m already in third year college and I am about to go on an on-the-job training in Makati this summer. We ask ourselves: will they believe us, that we’re trainees? Maybe they’ll ask us: Girl, maybe you’re just being sent by your mother to buy vinegar! It’s only now that it sinks in to me, is my height reliable or credible? Will they believe me?)

But the importance of height may also depend on the young people’s socio-economic circumstances, and the nature of the jobs that they are aspiring for. Most of the young people I have met who have good educational background, and those who come from

affluent families, are indifferent about height. or at least, less forceful in their opinions about it.

Sheena (25, 5'1), for example, says that she never felt that height is important. The daughter of a high school teacher and and a government official, she managed to get a scholarship at the premiere science high school in the Philippines and a college degree at the University of the Philippines. She says she had no problem finding a job with a NGO based on Manila focusing on climate change and environmental issues, and alongside her job she is currently taking up a Bachelor of Law degree also at UP.

Yasmin (24, 4'11), studied at the Palawan State University, then managed to get an 18-month training in the United States as an environmental advocate and trail builder. She now works for Centre for Sustainability, a non-profit that seeks to document the flora and fauna of Palawan. Unlike Sheena, she acknowledges that her height is something that people always notice, and as a student her classmates sometimes teased her about it. But she talks of the matter with a levity that suggest that she is clearly unaffected, and not insecure about her height. She jokes that she still jumps every New Year's Eve, hoping to get taller, but she doesn't really expect to. Later, I found out that she, too, joined in a beauty contest and even won, adding that the people were impressed with her English, which was why she trumped the other candidates who were taller than her. She articulates her disdain for beauty pageants, however, saying that reinforce a singular beauty standard. Hers is an example of a resistance to the hegemony of height that does not preclude the desire to be tall. Indeed, one may be perfectly content with his or her height, but still wish to be taller, given the chance.

John (24, 5'7), said that he never thought about height until I mentioned it to him. But his own background may have made him oblivious to the importance of height. As someone with above-average height, he never had to deal with being short, and as the son of a restaurant owner and entrepreneur, perhaps he never thought of having to apply for jobs that require a certain height. After all, he too, studied in San Beda, one of the universities in Manila.

Theirs may be different views on height, but what Sheena, Yasmin, and John have in common are academic credentials: college degrees in good universities, training in the US, good family backgrounds, and other qualifications. Perhaps these have allowed them not to place too much importance on height, or else, gave them the confidence to ignore it. Perhaps their own heights also figure in their consideration: John would surely have a different view on height if he were 5'2.

Tellingly, in my *Francis Liit*, *Francis Laki* surveys, it is among public schools students—and out-of-school youths— where the connection between height and employment is emphasized the most. Perhaps with diminishing academic credentials, family wealth,

and social connections, the body and its distinctive features emerge as a last resort of capital.

## DISCUSSION

### **Making sense of the ‘height premium’**

Numerous studies in economic history and psychology indicate that at the level of populations, height does confer an advantage (i.e. higher income, better positions) in diverse occupations, from skilled vocations (i.e. agriculture) to white-collar jobs (Steckel, 1995; Case and Paxson, 2006). As early as a century ago, Gowin (1915) had already presented survey findings showing that people in top leadership positions, including governors, senators, chief justices to railway company presidents, business executives, and even bishops—are taller than their subordinates, as well as “average men” in the United States. Using the UK National Childhood Development Study, Schick and Steckel (2015:108) suggest that taller men are “relatively more likely to select into white-collar occupations than their shorter counterparts... a 1-inch increase in adult stature is associated with an 18 percent increase in the odds of attaining a white-collar occupation over a skilled vocation.”

There is a dearth of similar studies in the Philippines but in a notable exception, Haddad and Boius (1991) surveyed an agricultural community in Bukidnon province, Southern Philippines and found that taller adults earned more than shorter ones.

Given this seemingly well-established relationship, scholars have turned their attention to explaining the mechanism of this “height premium”, with some attributing it to cognitive skills acquired in early childhood through better nutrition (Case and Paxson, 2008), others to non-cognitive skills i.e. adolescent experiences that are more positive for taller youths (i.e. Persico and others, 2004). Using NCDS data, Schick and Steckel (2015) posit that it is a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

Haddad and Bouis (1991:64) also propose mechanisms of the “height premium” in the agricultural sector in the Philippines:

The most likely productivity-increasing effect of height is increased strength which allows taller individuals to perform more work per unit of time for tasks which require strength (e.g. ploughing with a carabao or cutting and loading sugarcane which are often paid on a piece-rate basis). Is it possible that height is intrinsically valued (e.g. fruit picking), or is a screening mechanism for employers? The first possibility is discounted because there are no agricultural tasks in our sample for which height per se is desirable, while the second point is only convincing if employers are not well informed about the available labour pool; however, we do not have the requisite ‘starting’ wages to examine this possibility. One further possibility, that height is a proxy for human capital, is discounted by the small

change in the estimated coefficient on height between the panel and non-panel estimates.

My ethnographic sketch speaks to this body of work by demonstrating the advantages of tallness in the job market. I depart from them, however, by looking beyond individual (i.e. cognitive and non-cognitive) factors in explaining the height advantage and presenting the institutional and social contexts where height materialises. While other scholars propose to explain a more pronounced height premium among developing countries in physiological terms<sup>94</sup>, the complex ways in which height operates in my field site (i.e. through explicit and implicit requirements, beliefs and assumptions) suggest that height advantages cannot be attributed or reduced to individual factors alone (i.e. increased strength, better cognitive skills). There is no single “height premium”. Instead, it is the particular meanings and materialities of height in a specific field that make it an advantage in the job market, even as the job market itself reinforces these meanings, and perpetuates these materialities.

In what follows, I return to the notion of capital to discuss how exactly height figures in different sectors of the job market.

### **Height as “body capital”**

The height requirements are a very clear example of height’s convertibility to economic capital: if you’re tall, you can land into better jobs. But height is valued differently in different fields. In the uniformed services, height has a more instrumental/physical role, even as it is also symbolically potent, projecting strength and power that that police officers and security guards need to command respect and intimidate would-be offenders.

In the service sector, on the other hand, height is valued for its attractiveness which also translate to the prestige of the institution. However, height also has clear usefulness in situations like flight attendants pushing overhead compartments, and waiters needing to be more visible in a restaurant. We can therefore not pinpoint any single advantage of height. Rather, it has multiple, intertwined advantages in different situations.

What may be more useful, then, is to look at how height is capitalised not just for the individuals themselves for whom height is embodied, but for their families who stand to benefit from a member’s economic advancement, as well as for the companies that hire them. “Strong family ties” are a trait of most Filipinos (Jocano, 1997), and in Cuyunon, it is hailed as a paramount virtue. When children graduate, they are expected to give back to their family by paying for their siblings’ education, and contribute to their parents’ upkeep if necessary.

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<sup>94</sup> For example, Schick and Steckel (2015:112) conclude: “Because poor populations are shorter, their gain in physical growth generates relatively more neural growth and thus a greater stature premium.”

As for companies and institutions, there are instances when height offers practical advantages (i.e. the ability of flight attendants to close overhead compartments in planes), but there is also a broader value that stems from the distinction that it confers, and this is particularly true for the service sector: For hotels and restaurants, tall staff and waiters are a mark of prestige, just as tall security guards are a projection of power for banks and upscale establishments.

Applying this to the Philippine context, we can see that the notion of height as a form of capital has a particular resonance in an economy in which the service sector has been the main driver for growth. As mass communications scholar Ronaldo Tolentino (2009:79) notes:

The global trend in economic growth focuses on the service sector, an amalgamation of quasi-industries that include entertainment, medicine, fast food, tourism, education, and other service-oriented endeavours—“quasi” because they do not produce commodities other than the McDonaldized services they provide. These are also “body-positive” because the body of the young worker—the majority of service sector employees are young—should be pleasant looking, have a pleasing personality, and be able to do 3D jobs.

Indeed, many Filipinos, particularly those belonging to lower and middle income brackets, rely on service-related jobs, both in the country and abroad, as their primary means of social mobility and inclusion into the formal sector. Lacking the qualifications to avail of better opportunities, their youthful bodies become their resumé. In fact, we can take this literally to a certain extent: as we have noted earlier, the typical resumé I have seen contains a 2x2 face picture, weight, and height. Rightly or wrongly, the numbers that are placed in these fields are seen by many young people and their parents as decisive in their chances.

## Coda

My final point is to stress that the existence of height requirements do not merely *reflect* the advantages of tallness; they also *reinforce* them for society at large. Whenever I talk to young people, they already bracket their aspirations with the caveat that they are only possible if they were to reach a certain height, as Sheryl (15, 5’3), a Grade 9 public high school student says:

*Gusto ko po sanang maging flight attendant pero hindi ako sigurado kung aabot yung height ko. Gusto ko pong maging 5’9 dahil required po ang matangkad na height as pagiging flight attendant.* (I would like to be a flight attendant but I’m not sure if my weight will reach [the requirement]. I want to be 5’9 because it’s requirement to be tall to become a flight attendant.)

The role of height in the economic realm is also chief among parents’ concerns when they



speak of making their children grow taller and buying them confidence (see Chapter 3). While most of the young people I interacted with spoke of the many roles of height in their lives—giving them confidence, making them more attractive, boosting their performance in basketball—most parents, especially those who belong to low income, see height as an important advantage in jobs, a sentiment that is only reinforced by the job advertisements. “*Kung matangkad ka malayo ang mararating mo*” (“If you’re tall, you will go far”), parents would often say. By specifying what an ideal applicant must be — young, college graduate, tall, with ‘pleasing personality’ — job advertisements do not just inform the public about their available positions: they communicate the image of what an ideal applicant to the job market, and therefore, an ideal youth, looks like.

Consequently, these ideals are then *embodied* by tall youths. That is, they enact the advantages of tallness in the way they interact with the job market and negotiate their entrance to it. Illustrating this point is an episode involving one of my interlocutors, JB (20, 5’9), who was accompanying in the jobs fair that I had mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Himself a graduating college student about to look for jobs, I suggested that he also apply to see his chances. A winner of one of the model searches, JB visibly impressed the secretary who interviewed the candidates, and instead of the perfunctory dispensation of forms that needed to be filled up, JB was treated differently. At the end of what turned out to be a 10-minute interview, the secretary invited JB to come back the next day, enticing him with the promise of better job opportunities.

Even at the level of job facilitation, I saw how height can give an advantage.

## CONCLUSION

### **Vertical bodies**

There are reasons why young people know and pay attention to their heights; there are many reasons why people's heights are measured more often than many other possible measurements of the body. There are reasons why height shows up whenever beauty pageant contestants are presented on stage, or whenever basketball players are introduced or discussed. There are reasons why children want to be tall, and why the owners of hotels and restaurants want their employees to be tall. And there are reasons why, even in situations where height is not explicated, it *matters*, and a few inches can make a big difference.

These reasons came to the fore in both my episodic history and ethnography, which entailed, methodologically, looking at humans as **vertical bodies**, and reflecting on what this verticality has meant for human experience. This approach showed that height is a recurrent motif in various domains in society, and there is one overall insight that my study can offer, it is that *we cannot take height for granted in Philippine society where the body has always held a central place as the framework for relating with one another; as bearer of value; and as a site of modification.*

In what follows, I summarize the cross-cutting themes in my chapters: (1) How height is a way of relating for people to relate with each other and the environment; (2) how, given that these relations are unequal, tallness acquires value and becomes a form of capital in various domains; and (3) how height is a body project for young people and their families, one whose limited "malleability" gives rise to new forms of efficacy, and at the same time points to the structural inequalities that height both reflects and reinforces. I will then reflect on my return to Puerto Princesa a year after my fieldwork as a starting point to discuss the changing nature of height, both for individuals and populations, and sketch directions for future research.

#### **The relationality of height**

The social and physical natures of height are always related to the social and physical environment they are located in. Bodies, then, must always be seen in relation to other bodies, as Gilles Deleuze once said, "a body affects other bodies, and is affected by other bodies" (1992: 625). Looking at this *relationality* of height shows us different ways in which *people do not just relate their bodies to each other; they also relate to each other with their bodies.*

We saw this, in the first place, during the American period, when height differences between the Americans and the Filipinos underwrote the terms in which they saw one another—and their own selves. There were indeed actual height differences between

the Filipino “natives” and the American soldiers at the turn of the twentieth century. But the act of making this height differences visible entailed, in the first place, physical anthropology and anthropometrics to give it quantitative form—and photography, which not only exaggerated the height differences (by choosing the much shorter “wild tribes” to be juxtaposed against their taller officers) but also allowed it to influence the way America imagined its colonial subjects. Superimposed with prevalent notions of scientific racism and physiognomy, this physical framework made it possible for the Americans to look at Filipinos as “childlike” and needful of nourishment; “uncivilized” and needful of political and social tutelage; it made it possible for them to call their colonial subjects their “little brown brothers”.

We also saw this relationality in my contemporary ethnography. In a very physical sense, schoolchildren relate to each other with their bodies as they arrange themselves in the flag ceremony. While the childrens’ heights keep changing and there is a constant *measuring*, again against each other, what is constant is the fact that height is used as an organizing principle.

Beyond the flag ceremony, height also figures in peer interactions, influencing who gets to bully—and who gets to be bullied, as well as figuring in the choice for romantic partners and friends. The notion of *bagay* articulates a desire for one’s height to “fit” the other aspects of his own physical appearance as well as the bodies of his significant others. Ways of relating are structured by societal and gender expectations, but are also contingent on the bodies themselves. A boy must be taller than a girl, but they should also be not too different from each other so that they are *bagay*. Likewise, girls want to be of (*saktong tangkad*) “just the right height”, desiring to stand out, but not too much.

As the young people begin aspiring and search for jobs, they learn that the labor market, too, calls for being physically “fit” for the job in terms of explicit and more often implicit height requirements, which are informed by institutional rules and regulations (i.e. the law mandating security guards to be at least 5’6 [167cm]), societal expectations real or imagined (i.e. the hotel manager saying that customers are impressed by tall staff), and the very material configurations of the workplace itself (i.e. the restaurant owner rationalizing the demand for tall waiters by pointing to the need for them to be visible to the diners). This points to the fact that relationality is not just with bodies, but also with the environment.

In all these ways of relating with one another, one inescapable observation is that height differences *seemingly* mirror power differences: Men are *generally* taller than women (because of sexual dimorphism), the rich are taller than the poor (because of differences in nutrition), adults are taller than children (by the mere consequence of natural human development), Westerners are taller than Asians (through various factors including genetics and nutrition), and executives are taller than their subordinates (Lindqvist,

2012), something that finds resonance in a Tagalog riddle that hint at the *unusualness* of a servant being taller than his master: “*Meron akong alipin, matangkad pa sa akin*” (“I have a servant, even taller than me”)<sup>95</sup>.

On the other hand we also saw that height provides a way to challenge power structures. While the above generalizations can be made at the population level, at the level of individuals, height is much more indeterminate: brothers—like Kent (18, 5’10) and Kurt (15, 5’6)—can have the same upbringing, but have different heights. One does not have to be rich and privileged in order to be tall, and a tall youth can potentially overcome the shortcomings of her economic and social background to advance her prospects—as we saw in the story of Tiffany in the introduction. Like Alex Edmonds’ beauty, height is “unfair” in that “it can also grant power to those excluded from other systems of privilege based in wealth, pedigree, or education” (Edmonds, 2012:20). But while beauty can more readily be attained through plastic surgery, *height is unfair not only in the unequal access to the resources required to attain it, but in the unequal outcome even with all the available resources*. This element of uncertainty is a fundamental property of human height makes it irreducible to other domains of power.

These uncertainties notwithstanding, my ethnography, as well as demographic and epidemiological data, shows that despite these contestations and the ever-present possibility of subversion or resistance, the odds remain stacked against those who are underprivileged. Stunting remains attributable to poverty, and conversely, tallness is often (but not always) more readily achieved by those who have access to better nutrition, genetics, and quality of life. Thus we see the ways in which people relate to each other with their heights gives rise not just to differences, but also inequalities.

### **Height as capital**

Throughout this work, looking at height as a form of *bodily capital* allowed us to make sense of people’s attention to it, and to situate it with other forms of capital (physical, economic, symbolic, social) which we can simply define as other things that matter for young people and their significant others. The qualification of this capital as “bodily” gives attention to its embodied nature; the inexorable materiality of experiencing it, and its developmental character. As young people grow (and change), so do the meanings of height and therefore the different forms of capital it leads to.

The value of capital, in Bourdieu’s conception, depended on a field where the volume of capital is unequally distributed (Bourdieu, 1986). This notion of capital fits height perfectly in a very physical sense, as it is an attribute of the body that, as I discussed earlier, will always be unequally distributed. During the American period, the relative shortness of Filipinos limited the number of people who were eligible for the jobs which

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95 Answer: saklob (hat)

had height requirements, and thus height had economic capital. Furthermore, tallness during the colonial times also had symbolic (or political) capital of being associated with foreignness and superiority, something that Americans mobilized to legitimate their rule, and for Filipinos themselves in their claims for self rule.

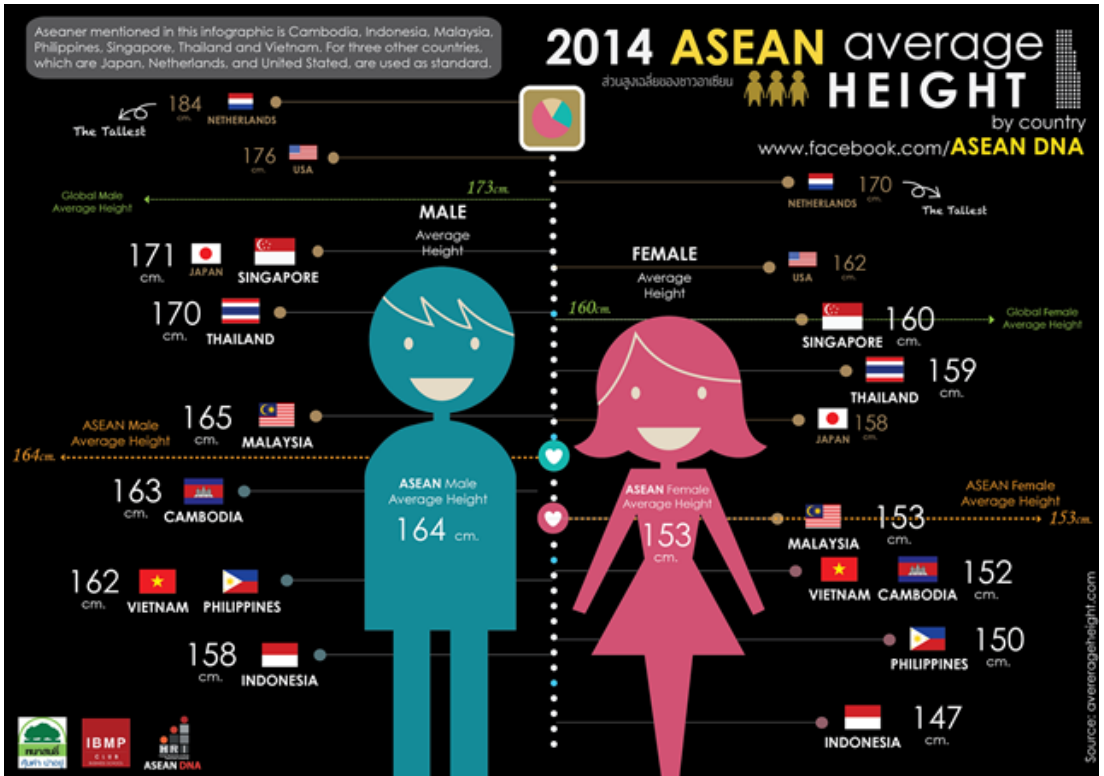


Fig. 1 - This infographic of the average heights of adult males and females in ASEAN nations went viral in 2014, provoking anxiety among Filipino nutrition officials in the wake up the unwanted distinction of Filipinos being the “second shortest in Southeast Asia” (Source: face-book.com/ASEANDNA/)

The idea that height is a measure of progress continued in the contemporary era, and thus height has capital for various levels of government, who see the height of children as an index of development. Transformed into data sets and averages, children’s heights are compared with those of other provinces, regions, and even other countries as part of the comparative paradigm of global public health. When a Facebook page called “ASEAN DNA” released an infographic comparing the average heights of countries in Southeast Asia in 2014 (see Figure 1), it went viral, and was picked up by mainstream media outlets. Showing that the Filipinos were the “second shortest” in the region, it was misinterpreted as an official ASEAN study, producing anxiety among the nutrition officials I talked to and reigniting a conversation about height and Filipino identity in the public sphere. With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including the eradication of ‘stunting’ as one of its goals, this geopolitical salience of height is likely to continue in the future.

For the young people in my contemporary ethnography, we also saw how tallness represented physical capital in social interactions in which the bigger child bullies, and the smaller one gets bullied. Though not always the case, children's bodies undeniably have capital in ways of relating with one another.

As they grow older, tallness also becomes a form of social capital that gives them opportunities like membership in varsity teams, and participation in beauty pageants. Finally, as young adults, tallness gives access to jobs and therefore can be seen as a form of economic capital.

From being required in the military and civil services during the American period, height today has become a pervasive requirement in various jobs, from nursing and caregiving to being a chef, bellboy, or flight attendant. There are different reasons for preference for tallness in various markets. One is the very materiality of the workplace (i.e. the cabins of aircraft), and another is the fact that companies, too, capitalize on their employees' heights, seeing it as a projection of their prestige and stature, thereby also becoming a form of symbolic capital. Seen in the context of a service-dominated economy, the lack of educational credentials, the trenchant aesthetic standards rooted in the country's colonial heritage, young people entering the labor markets are often left with 'body capital' (Tolentino, 2009) as their sole asset, which includes having a "pleasing personality" and as we have seen, an above-average height.

Like the students called up front during the flag ceremony for various achievements — from winning quiz contents and singing competitions — there are other forms of capital. But while academic achievements are difficult for those with difficult socio-economic circumstances, *height is seemingly within reach*. When there is nothing else that they can offer in the competitive labor market, young people turn to the body as the "capital of last resort", and a big part of this capital is height.

### **Height as a body project**

The fact that height has value, and is a form of capital, allows us to make sense of people's attempts to modify it, or pursue tallness as a "body project". Chris Shilling (1991) underscored the centrality of the body in the consideration of various forms of capital when he said that "the management and development of the body is central in its own right to human agency in general, and to the production of cultural and economic capital and the attainment and maintenance of status." (ibid.: 654). Indeed, in these height-making projects, we see that it is not just height converted into other forms of capital; we also see how, in the process of buying vitamins and supplements, families and the government are also making use of their own economic capital in the hope — despite much uncertainty — of converting it to something that they can derive value from: a successful child.



In borrowing the notion of “body projects” (Shilling, 2012), I am relating the pursuit of tallness with other such projects like body building, working on a fit body, and improving one’s physical appearance through cosmetic surgery (Edmonds, 2012). Shilling (ibid.) sought to explain these practices by suggesting that the body has emerged as the site of self-identity in late modernity. From the mass mediatization of pharmaceutical advertising that has given rise to supplements like CheriFer to the globalization of sport and beauty ideals that have structured and heightened the stakes for young people’s engagements with basketball and beauty pageants, it can indeed be said that the conditions of late modernity have engendered an attention of tallness.

But our episodic history also shows that there is a genealogy to the emergence of height both as something of value, and as something that can be worked upon. Indeed, height-making practices emerged from a confluence of historical factors, including a public health regime that problematized stunting, and a colonial milieu that saw tallness as advantageous and desirable (see Chapter 1). Instead of viewing body projects solely as a modern phenomenon, we should also approach them with a mindfulness that the body has always been historically contingent, and amenable (and subject) to modification and tinkering.

Shilling, like Bourdieu, saw the body has having different roles depending on different socio-economic classes. For the working class, the body is an instrument to perform manual labor (i.e. physical capital) while for the affluent classes, the body is an end in itself: a project to be pursued for physical well-being and the pursuit of an improved self-identity. What we saw in the field, however, is that the *instrumentality* of the body also informs the pursuit of body projects; and this instrumentality goes beyond the body as physical capital, but as a form of capital that leads to others: from economic (employment) and social (inclusion in various activities) to symbolic (enjoyment of high esteem from peers) to physical (being able to use one’s height in everyday life). Viewed in these terms, body projects transcend socioeconomic classes and defy simple explanations. Height-making projects, far from the province of the elite, are equally important for the underprivileged — or perhaps even more so than others, as they see as the body as the only means (or one among few) for social mobility.

What further distinguishes height from other body projects is the fact that the investment made on ‘body work’ is uncertain: height is not as malleable as the nose or the breasts, which can be modified through surgery (there is, of course, leg-lengthening in China, but that too, requires a dramatic cost in terms of time, money, and effort) or muscles that can be built through time and exercise.

We can also say that height-making is a different kind of body project in the sense that it involves whole families, and even generations. Indeed, body projects have originally been conceived as “individual projects” (Featherstone, 2000), the project of height-

making is social not just in the sense of the *sociality* of people working out together in fitness centers, but also in terms of what is at stake in the body. Various parties, from families and sports teams to companies and governments, all participate in the making of height by prescribing certain practices and products. For young people's bodies do not just signify their own identities, but that of their families, companies, and communities. Writ large, the 'body project' of height becomes a matter of governance, and youth's bodies reflect on the body politic, rendering average height as a cause of anxiety and concern at the level of policymakers and popular discourse.

Given the uncertainty and the long-term effort that is required to make children taller, we see that the young people, parents, and even the public health system engage different kind of efficacy in their height-making practices. There is "political efficacy" when the government is able to talk stunting in terms of the activities they are doing to address it, just as there is "social efficacy" when mothers are able to give something to their children to boost their appetite and make them grow.

Finally, for children themselves, as with their families, there is the "symbolic efficacy" of reaching for tallness: but one that rests not on *certainty*, but on *possibility*. As the children of better-off families and the youths they look up to on television get taller with better nutrition and quality of life, the pursuit of height-making practices at least offers hope. And as I have learned from my young interlocutors, it is a hope that is far more desirable than simply watching their peers grow tall while they are left behind.

### **Returns, cycles, and future directions**

When I went back to Puerto Princesa in July 2015, I was reminded of the things I first noticed when I started my fieldwork 14 months before: The in-flight magazine still contained an ad for the shoe with a height boost, and growth supplements continued to be advertised in Metro Manila billboards. In Puerto Princesa, the rains of July heralded the coming of the *Baragatan* festival and once again, candidates for a beauty pageant (*Mutya ng Palawan*) were being advertised on Rizal Ave. and the National Highway.

For an ethnographer, the idea of a "return" is often laden with a search for cycles and symmetries: alongside the nostalgia of coming back to what was your temporary home, there is a romance in showing how life goes on. But revisiting one's fieldsite also oftentimes reveals changes, and allows the ethnographer to see the field in more historical terms. The change I saw in Puerto Princesa was in my interlocutors themselves—or their bodies: Aaron (15, 5'6) was Aaron (14, 5'4) when I first met him, and Stephen (18, 5'8) has become Stephen (19, 5'9). These young people, I was reminded, are still in the process of growth, and assigning them ages and heights such as I have done throughout this dissertation (i.e. 14 '5'4) is to fix them in an ethnographic present, but they do change in a very material way. This *temporality* deserves emphasis as what animates the attention about height for and among young people.

But growth stops at some point. “*Tatangkad pa ba ako? Hindi na siguro.*” (Will I still get tall? Maybe not): One year after I first met VJ (20, 5’7), he confessed that the Cherifer tablets that he has tried had no effect. “My growth plates have closed,” he lamented, echoing what he had researched on the Internet. The refractoriness of height’s amenability of modification is as much as reality on the field as it is in the consensus of scholars.

Growth, indeed, stops in one’s early twenties. By the time young people reach this stage, they would have been made aware of their final height, as well as what height means and what it does in society. But the materiality of height doesn’t stop there. High heels for females, and hidden heels for males, continue the performance of height in everyday life. Of course, for my informants themselves, when they have children of their own, the project of making height continues for the next generation. The ethnography of height among children is just as much as ethnography of whole society because everyone is involved in its reproduction.

Mirroring the changing heights of my interlocutors is the changing heights of populations. In my history chapter, I showed how height differences between the Americans and Filipinos helped give rise to the identification of Filipinos as “short”, but it happened at a particular moment in which Americans and Filipinos were of a certain height difference. The heights of populations, however, change through time, serving as a reminder that even one’s ethnography is contingent on the current *field*. Likely, given the secular trend in the Philippines, a future researcher would find the youths in Puerto Princesa to be taller.

Even so, people do not compare their height with that of their forebears, but with their peers. Even as height changes among populations and generations, “tallness” and “shortness”, being relational terms, would appear to be perpetual categories. *But we also do not know that.* We do not know whether there will be limits to “height-making practices”, nor whether, at some point, height will cease to have the same meanings and materialities that we can observe today. *Will tallness itself become problematic?* The case of the Netherlands, for instance, in which growth-suppressing hormones are being given to girls, could provide an interesting comparison with my Philippine case study. There, we see that a set of practices surrounding height is intended not to make children grow taller, but to prevent them from growing *too tall*. As in the Philippines, this practice draws on a certain kind of bodily normativity, one that is contingent on a certain temporal context (the post-industrial Dutch society) and bodily field (Dutch men that with an average height of 6’0). Like the colonial encounters that brought different kinds of bodies together, the increasing mobility and flow of populations around the world are creating cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic realms in which living together also means relating to different bodies, and these ways of relating remain and uncharted and should be pursued for further research.

Another avenue we can take is looking at how modernity itself has engendered an attention to the vertical, not just in ushering in a better quality of life and nutrition and therefore taller stature—or in bringing people together and therefore creating more “bodily encounters”—but in its very physical (or material) constitution. One minor theme throughout my work, one that I was not able to fully explore, is the role of the physical environment in structuring the materiality of height. From the Dutch tourist in Puerto Princesa who always hits the roof of the jeepneys and tricycles to the Filipino flight attendants who must be screened if they are tall enough to reach the overhead compartments, we can see that human height is not merely a ‘social construction’ that has meaning in certain situations; it is in fact a material experience.

Viewed in this lens, that is, of looking not just at the *corporeality* of the human body but its *spatiality*, perhaps we can see verticality itself as a feature of modernity, and of urbanization in particular, with humans inhabiting vertical spaces more than in any other time in history. From condominium units where people live to high-rise buildings where people work—as well as the elevators and escalators that people take en route to these places—there is a *verticalization* of urban space that we mostly take for granted, even as it may help us reflect on cultural evolution itself on a different register.

Mass production (another feature of modern and postmodern societies) can also be implicated in the ever-growing reliance in normative bodies in the *fashioning* of the material environment, from the dimensions of vehicles and plane cabins to the sizes of clothing one could buy in retail stores. Ergonomics, which seeks to make people and things *fit* together well, seeks to counter the modern notion of “one size fits all”, but my ethnography hinted that there is a *politics* to this turn, given that marginalized bodies will always be at a disadvantage (as in the basketball court). The dialectic between different bodies and the material environment, and the way they interact with each other in a very spatial sense, deserves further attention: one that can come from material semiotics perspectives. Law and Hetherington (2000:38) for instance posit that “a semiotics of materiality suggests that objects, materials, information, and people and (one might add) the division between big and small or global and local, are all relational effects.” Viewed in this lens, will the rise of the virtual world, which flattens spatialities, be liberating—as call-center agents in the Philippines experience when height is not required of them?

Finally, we can make a backward (and inward) gaze into the philosophical and historical imbrications of *verticality itself* and how it has literally oriented our worldview. From metaphorical language (i.e. “*mataas ang tingin ko sayo*”; “I look up to you”) to spirituality and religion (i.e. the *location* of heaven and hell and above and below, respectively), the vertical orientedness of our value systems and cosmogony invites a major rethinking of how the dimension of the vertical has structured human experience (and imagination): a rethinking that can be accomplished by cross-cultural surveys, cultural histories, and

further, more in-depth ethnographies.

These are just a few of the research directions we can take towards an “anthropology of the vertical”.

## POSTSCRIPT

It was a Sunday morning in Puerto Princesa's City Coliseum, and thousands of people, including the mayor and city officials, have gathered in front of a huge TV screen to watch Manny Pacquiao fight the American Chris Algieri. As the undercard fights dragged on, people started to be impatient, but eventually the coliseum crowds swelled, approaching the capacity of 8,000: this was after all one of the few venues where they could watch the match live for free. When a choir began to sing the "Lupang Hinirang", signalling that the fight was about to begin, the crowd too, rose up in reverence to the Philippine National Anthem, and I could feel the crowd's excitement.

Manny Pacquiao, dubbed as the "Pambansang Kamao" (National Fist), is revered in the country and his matches are virtual holidays, glueing people to their TV sets and bringing traffic and crime rates to all-time lows. Pacquiao's status as national icon comes as much as from his boxing prowess as the only eight-division world champion as from his compelling rags to riches tale from a poor boy in the Philippine South to a global celebrity.

People had been discussing the match for weeks, and some of the people I spoke to were concerned that Algieri, being taller (5'10 vs. 5'6) and had longer reach (72 vs. 67 in), had a strong chance of winning against Pacquiao, who, while still the heavy favourite, has had his sheen of invincibility shattered by a knockout defeat the previous year in the hands of Mexican archrival Juan Manuel Marquez.

During the fight itself, however, people reacted differently, as Pacquiao lost no time in showing his dominance. "Sometimes height can be your friend or your enemy, if you don't know how to take advantage of it," one Twitter user said. "Sick combinations by Pacquiao. Just brushing off Algieri's height and reach advantage," tweeted another. In twelve rounds, Algieri suffered a total of five known-downs, each eliciting a frenzied cheer in the coliseum, and at the end of the match the judges' decision was unanimous, in favour of the "Pac-Man".

"Height doesn't matter!" the people declared after Pacquiao's win. "*Walang sinabi yung tangkad ni Algieri.*" (The height of Algieri couldn't "say" anything), I overheard one of the spectators in the Coliseum say.



Fig. 1 - The "tale of the tape" presents various physical measurements of each boxer, including "height" and "reach", before the match. (Source: <http://abs-cbn.com>)



Reflecting on the match, I realize that what made Pacquiao a “people’s champion” was not just his boxing skills. Like the national hero Jose Rizal (5’2 [157 cm]) and the former UN General Assembly president Kurtos P. Romulo (4’11 [150 cm]) before him, what he shared with the Filipino experience was not just the aspiration of success and recognition, but the belongingness in the state of being a physical underdog, which made his life story resonate with people who in their political infancy were defined by their physical characteristics. His victory over Algieri—who bore the flag of those who once called them “little brown brothers” — was thus also a symbolic victory in the Filipino’s long struggle with and against their own height.

But as I made my way out, I was easily reminded of the reality I have taken pains to document and analyze: Growth supplements sold and featured prominently in a pharmacy just outside the coliseum declare that “height is might”; and as in the very first public schools set up by the Americans, children in Puerto Princesa’s public schools are measured regularly by nutrition officials for their weight and height; they arranged according to height in flag ceremonies; and if they were tall they will be chosen to represent the school and the town in basketball games and beauty pageants.

Right inside the coliseum where the match was shown, a security agency has a large poster on its door that reads: “Minimum 5’7 [170 cm] for males, 5’4 [162 cm] for females” as if to deter those who fall short from even entering. Manny Pacquiao himself (35, 5’6)—one of the greatest boxers in history—wouldn’t make the cut to be a security guard were he to apply.

Like the “tale of the tape” between two boxers that prefaces—but does not determine—each match, the measuring of height in Filipinos’ everyday lives continues.

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Grade 3–Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Unit 2 p. 43

Grade 4–“Mga Bansang Nakipagkalakalan sa Pilipinas”, p. 1-6

Grade 4–Mga Unang Pilipino, p. 1-4

Grade 6–Hekasi 6, Unit I: “Yaman ng Pilipinas”, p. 21

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Grade 7–Aralin Panlipunan I, Module 12: “Ang Pananakot ng Mga Amerikano”

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Grade 7–Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 1, p. 39

Grade 7–English Literature, “Dahong Palay” by Arturo Rotor

Grade 7–Panitikang Pilipino, “Ang Kura at Ang Agwador” by Rogelio Sikat

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Grade 8–Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 14, “Karahasan sa Paaralan”

Grade 9–Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao, Module 3, “Pagkakapantay-Pantay”





**APPENDIX A: SMALL FRANCIS, BIG FRANCIS**  
*Translated from the Tagalog “Francis Liit, Francis Laki”*  
by Gideon Lasco

Once again, it’s the start of the summer vacation, and Francis has just graduated from the Elementary School of San Pablo. The celebration dinner with his family was very special: there was crab, beef stew, mango juice, and ice cream.

“Why do you look unhappy son?” asks Mercy, his mother. She had thought that the dishes—all of her son’s favourites—would enliven her youngest son—the fourth among 2 boys and 2 girls.

“I’m thinking of the high school I’m going to enter. They might tease me again.”

Mercy understood what her son was referring to. Because he was the smallest in the whole Grade 6 class, Francis was often teased as a “midget”, and because there was another Francis who was taller than him, he was called “Small Francis”, while the other one was called “Big Francis”. Like many Filipino boys Francis loves basketball, but despite this passion, he hardly gets invited by his classmates to play with them.

“Don’t think about the teasing of others. Think of your studies because that’s what’s important,” admonished his mother.

“You will grow tall too! Look at me, I was also small when I was in elementary but I grew tall in high school and now they can’t say a word,” interjects his big brother Patrick, who is a member of the basketball varsity team in his college.

“I sure hope that I will be as tall as you,” responded Francis. Although he was in the “honour roll” as one of the brightest students in his class, he felt that he was ready to exchange this honour for an additional few inches of stature. “If only I were tall, I’m sure they will look at me differently.”

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Even before he started schooling, his mother already gave Francis various vitamins and supplements that according to TV commercials will make kids grow taller. When he was older, he tried other things like stretching every morning that his peers say can enhance his height. But none of them worked.

During that summer break, however, Francis felt pain in his bones and joints, and in just a span of a few weeks, he felt his trousers getting shorter, and his t-shirt getting smaller. Suddenly his two older sisters were shorter than him!

“Im getting taller!” he told himself excitedly. After one month, he could already reach

the top of the door in his room. His older brother Patrick . When it was time for school again, he was the tallest in the whole of Grade 7 in San Pablo National High School.

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“So this is what it feels to be tall!” Francis told himself. He sensed that his classmates looked at him differently. After just a few days, he was already invited to join the tryouts of the basketball varsity team. The team captain said, “You’re so tall you’re surely be accepted!”

Francis kept growing tall. But if he thought that because of this he will no longer get teased, he was wrong. Because there were also two Francises in his class, he was called “Big Francis”. And sometimes he got teased by the older students whenever he would encounter them.

And while he got accepted in the varsity team, his classmates themselves don’t want to play with him. “You’re too tall, it’s unfair,” they told him. And in the rare times when he got played with them, whenever he would make a good move—a great shot or a timely block—instead of acknowledging his talent, they tell him: “It’s just because of your height!” Finally, although they say it jokingly, his friends tell him: “We don’t want to be with you, you’re making us look like midgets!”

“Whatever my height is, there will be good things and bad things that go with it,” Francis realized.

He added: “But this is still me, Francis. I don’t have to think that I’m big or small, tall or short. From now on, I’ll just focus on being diligent in all my activities—whatever they call me.” ?

**APPENDIX B: CONVERSION TABLE (FEET AND INCHES TO CENTIMETERS)**

Feet and inches	Centimeters
4'5	135 cm
4'6	137 cm
4'7	140 cm
4'8	142 cm
4'9	145 cm
4'10	147 cm
4'11	150 cm
5'0	152 cm
5'1	155 cm
5'2	157 cm
5'3	160 cm
5'4	162 cm
5'5	165 cm
5'6	167 cm
5'7	170 cm
5'8	173 cm
5'9	175 cm
5'10	178 cm
5'11	180 cm
6'0	183 cm
6'1	185 cm
6'2	188 cm



