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## Does Size Matter? Short and Tall Officers Policing the Streets

**Abstract:** The importance of physical characteristics is rarely addressed in the literature on professional competence and authority. In police work it is almost taken for granted that height is advantageous in police work, despite a lack of research on the topic. This study examines how height may affect police interactions with the public and how short and tall men and women experience the importance of their height in patrol work. Results show that being tall was perceived as beneficial in patrol work. Furthermore, the authority of short police officers is challenged more often by the public, and short female police may have a particular focus on verbal communication. Tallness will probably be perceived as beneficial in fields in which physical conflicts arises.

**Keywords:** height, size, patrol work, verbal communication, law enforcement, professional competence

It is important to clarify what characterizes the professional competence of a police officer doing patrol work. Patrolling is a very common type of police work and is performed by almost all recently graduated police officers. Many professional skills are associated with the overall ideals for a knowledgeable and cooperative police force. Research on professional competence normally focuses on theoretical skills, practical skills, and values and attitudes. The importance of physical characteristics is not considered. Although height and size are personal traits that can influence the development of specific skills, research on professions has been more concerned with personal characteristics related to communication. A previous study investigated the correlation between height and physical skills (Lagestad, 2012), but very few studies have investigated the significance of height in patrol work. More knowledge about this issue will contribute to the body of professional knowledge and forms the basis of this study.

Traditionally, the Norwegian police force has consisted of relatively tall officers. Before 2003, the admissions committee at Norwegian Police University College set minimum height requirements for entry (Brandi, Hildebrandt, Nordhaug, & Nordhaug, 2004). Men had to be at least 175 cm tall, and women had to be at least 165 cm tall. In 2003, the height criterion was removed from the admissions regulations because of a complaint from an applicant with a Sami background who did not meet the height requirement. The complaint was upheld by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Norwegian Police University College no longer re-

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quires a minimum height for entry, and shorter students have since entered police education. Height is something that distinguishes men from women. A previous study has found that the average height of female police students was 12 cm shorter than that of male police students (Lagestad, 2011, p. 104). The proportion of women enrolled at Norwegian Police University College is almost twice the proportion of female police officers in Norway (Lagestad, 2011). This, along with the loss of the height criterion, will lead to a police force in which gender and height will vary more among officers doing patrol work. In the future, the Norwegian public will increasingly interact with police officers who are shorter than the police of today, thus making further studies of police officers' height relevant.

When does size matter in patrol work? Willoughby and Blount (1985, p. 228) point out that "height has always seemed a central issue within law enforcement." However, the research that has been carried out in this field was conducted during a limited time period (from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s) in the United States (Lester & Sheehan, 1980; Sheehan & Lester, 1980; Talbert, Ronan, Anderson, Feehan, & Rogers, 1974; White & Bloch, 1975; Willoughby & Blount, 1985). These studies show small differences between short and tall police officers, and the results are somewhat contradictory. The research is relatively old and from police cultures that may be different from that in Norway. Furthermore, the studies do not capture police officers' own experiences of being short and tall in police work. The previous studies were based solely on questionnaires with predefined problem areas, recorded police work and police officers' opinions about other police officers.

One may also question the degree to which earlier studies captured the importance of police height among the public. Some studies of the Norwegian and Swedish police forces have indicated that size may matter in patrol work in the Nordic countries. A literature review suggests that height has always been a part of the assessment of suitability in the Norwegian police culture (Brandt et al., 2004; Lagestad, 2012; Larsen, 1946; Ulvedal, 1995). Carlström (1999, p. 103) mentions how some Swedish police cultures seem to emphasize the ideal image of a police officer as a "powerful, well-trained and tall man," and Lauritz (2009, p. 121) comments that one of his informants describes the ideal police officer as "a tall man." In some police cultures, there seems to be an assumption that short police officers are less suited for physically demanding police work. Professionalism is based on trust between professional practitioners and the public. The article focuses on authority and trust when the police must handle problematic situations. How professionals appear to the public is important, and in patrol work it is a main challenge how to express authority and at the same time maintain trust.

Engen (2009, p. 41), a Norwegian police officer, expresses concern for future police officers with "extra small leather jackets," as he puts it. It is obvious that Engen relates the capability to do satisfactory patrol work with height. Brandt et al. (2004) points out that Norwegian Police University College has received complaints from the police about short graduates, in which the police reported that these officers were too short to function satisfactorily in patrol work. However, a previous study has shown that the physical skills of short male and female police students were better than those of tall police students (Lagestad, 2012).

In a study by Aas (2009, p. 290), a tall Norwegian police officer states that short police officers compensate for their lack of strength by acting aggressively toward the public. A lack of height seems to be a central factor in this assessment. According to Aas, the male police officer explains that tall policemen are more qualified to act in a calm and restrained manner because they have little to fear from a physical confrontation with the public. This reasoning is closely related to the “Napoleon complex,” as Talbert et al. (1974) explains it. This complex identifies a pattern of behavior in which short police officers try to overcompensate for their self-perceived height deficiency by attempting to perform heroic or exceptional feats. This leads to authoritarian and conflict-escalating behavior with a lot of verbal force. A verbal approach seems to be the direct opposite of the authoritarian Napoleon complex. Short female police students may strive more than short males to accomplish their mission through the use of verbal communication, according to a previous study (Lagestad, 2011), who reports that female police students have a greater focus on employing a verbal approach.

Community-based policing, which ensures proximity to the public and good conditions for problem-solving and teamwork in the community, is central in *The Police’s Role and Tasks*, White Paper No. 42, 2004–2005. This document describes and discusses the police in Norway, their roles and responsibilities, and the direction in which the police force should be developed. The *Police Strategic Plan 2010–2015 in Norway* points out that police problem solving requires a good relationship with the public. Many police studies describe the relationship between the police and the public as a “collaborative project” (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; Finstad, 2000; Rønneberg, 2009). A verbal approach would seem to be favorable in this encounter; a special awareness of verbal communication and its use seem to be particularly in line with this approach. Given the responsibility of professional police officers to resolve conflicts with minimal physical force, the divide between verbal communication and the Napoleon complex is an important issue. Such knowledge may also be relevant for other professions in which physical conflicts with the public might arise and in which a verbal approach is preferable. With this starting point, “the Norwegian case” is also relevant in an international context.

This study attempts to illuminate how height can affect police officers’ interaction with the public. Size might also matter in situations involving the assertion of authority, the use of physical force, or self-defense. Whether or not short police officers are characterized as having a Napoleon complex or a special awareness of verbal communication is a central question. How gender may affect interaction with the public is another. The study aims to illuminate how height affects authority and how height is perceived by tall and short police students. The results are presented and discussed in relation to the empirical data.

## Methods

This study relies on a methodological orientation referred to as mixed methods (Creswell & Clark, 2007) in which a phenomenon is studied from various perspectives (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2003). The purpose is to increase the quality of

the results by gathering more information than would be possible with only one method.

### ***Subjects***

All 360 police students who finished their three-year police training in Norway in 2008 were invited to participate in a survey at the end of their studies (June 2008). Of that group, 304 subjects answered the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 83% (183 men: age  $27.3 \pm 3.2$  years, body mass  $86 \pm 11.4$  kg, height  $1.83 \pm 0.06$  m; 121 women: age  $27 \pm 2.9$  years, body mass  $66.2 \pm 7.3$  kg, height  $1.70 \pm 0.05$  m).

Regarding research on the importance of height in police officers, Talbert et al. (1974) points out that “the best possible experimental design would be to match newly hired police officers into two groups according to height” (p. 110). This design makes it possible to study the importance of height in police officers who are not yet a part of the police culture. The current study has taken this advice into account in some of the analyses. Short men were defined as those less than 176 cm tall, whereas tall men were defined as those over 190 cm tall. Short women were defined as those less than 166 cm tall, whereas tall women were defined as those over 175 cm tall (39 tall men: age  $27.2 \pm 4.5$  years, body mass  $97.9 \pm 6.7$  kg, height  $1.93.8 \pm 0.04$  m; 44 short men: age  $27.7 \pm 4.2$  years, body mass  $77 \pm 8$  kg, height  $1.72.4 \pm 0.03$  m; 27 tall women: age  $28 \pm 4.1$  years, body mass  $72.2 \pm 6.1$  kg, height  $1.78.1 \pm 0.02$  m; 26 short women: age  $27.1 \pm 2.6$  years, body mass  $59.7 \pm 3.7$  kg, height  $1.62 \pm 0.02$  m).

The data also consist of observations, informal conversations, and interviews with three tall male police students, three short male police students, three tall female police students, and three short female police students in the Norwegian police education program – all chosen from the same sample according to the height definitions mentioned previously. The subjects were fully informed about the protocol before participating in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all subjects in accordance with the recommendations of the local ethics committee and current ethical standards.

### ***Procedures***

Some of the quantitative analyses included all the respondents, whereas other analyses included only tall and short police students according to the definition mentioned previously. Twelve of the police students were observed during their 180 hours of fieldwork at the end of their police studies. During the police students’ entire second year, they work as police, mostly doing patrol work. Although they also do other police work, patrolling was selected for the focus of this study because it is the most common task, and in such ordinary police work, the officers interact with the public. Police officers who attended the same patrol were also observed, and informal conversations were conducted with them about their experiences of being tall or short in police work or of working with tall or short fellow officers. The police students reflected on police work and physical skills with “fresh new eyes,” whereas the experienced police officers’ thoughts

incorporated their considerable work experience. The same 12 police students were interviewed in their third year at the police education, and these data are important in illuminating how short and tall police experience the importance of their height in their work. According to Goodson (2003), people's lived experience can be used as starting points of larger structural analysis of professional knowledge.

### ***Analyses***

To analyze the quantitative data, it was used chi square and nonparametric binomial tests. All results are presented as mean. The level for significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS software, version 19.0 (SPSS, Chicago, IL).

The interviews lasted one hour. The observations, informal conversations and interviews were recorded, and all the recorded data were transcribed and analyzed within the tradition of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, interpretations of the text determine categories. This approach is used to provide a thorough description and understanding of the phenomenon (Johannessen, Tufte, & Kristoffersen, 2006). The analysis was performed in MAXQDA for Windows.

## **Results**

### ***Being tall is perceived as beneficial in patrol work***

Analysis of the interviews and informal conversations during fieldwork revealed that all the tall police students of both sexes found it beneficial to be tall in relation to patrol work. A male police officer stated the following about a tall male colleague who was big and strong: "You resolve the most by being big, strong, and ugly. Had all been like him, it would have been quiet here in town." This quotation indicates that physical strength, together with height and weight, is an advantage among police officers, and other police officers confirmed this interpretation. Height, physical strength, and weight are all factors that were included in the police description of size – a concept that police officers and police students view as positive.

The interviews showed that the tall police students perceived that they were confident in policing because of their height and felt that it made them better able to use physical force and to defend themselves, even though these situations were rare. A tall female police student, claiming that her height was beneficial in relation to patrol work, stated, "I used physical force on a 15 year old. I would not use much force, but she was quite strong and completely wild. Fortunately, I was bigger than her, so it went well." When she gave an account of her assumptions in relation to physically demanding police work, she pointed out, "It is clear that me being strong and heavy is an advantage."

Analysis of the interviews indicated that tall police students of both sexes felt that their height instilled them with confidence because it gave them a natural authority when dealing with the public. A tall female police student made the following statement:

I would never have applied for police training if I had been short in stature. I am certainly very happy that I am tall. ... One thing is that you can stand and look someone straight in the eye; you do not have to look up. ... When you stand there and are a little bigger, you can say, "Now you had better listen!"

This clearly exemplifies the valuation of height: Being tall is seen as beneficial in operational policing. This valuation was also emphasized in another interview with a tall female police student. She stated, "With regard to authority, I think I might have advantage. ... Short police officers can probably achieve the same, but you get an extra bonus being tall." During the interviews, a female student talked about a physically demanding arrest in which she participated actively. As a follow-up question, she was asked if she had been afraid at any point. She replied, "No ... but that was because he was so short. When I managed to get my hand around his arm, I felt that I was stronger than him." When a male police student was asked to explain why he had categorized his abilities for conflict resolution with physical skills lower than the average, he wrote, "I am 171 cm tall and weigh 70 kilograms, in other words, a lightweight." This answer illustrates how height and body size influence confidence and the experience of physically demanding conflicts.

Analysis of the informal conversations and interviews indicates that the police have experienced that being a tall man can reduce conflicts in encounters with the public. Tall women do not seem to be tall enough to have the same physical presence as tall men. An experienced male police officer claimed that "the biggest bulls we have, they never fought, because they were usually so confident in their body language." Another conversation between two police officers exemplified this. A tall male police officer said that he rarely used physical force, indicating that it had happened between five and ten times in the past six years. A male police officer of medium height had the following response:

It is clear [that] you are somewhat larger than most of us, both in height and ... [weight]. So that's prevention in itself. It takes a lot more to have a go at [you] than me quite simply because of the difference in our physical size. This seems to have a preventive function.

This quotation indicates that weight is important too. A female police student who acknowledged that her height gives her natural authority also pointed out the advantage that her weight gives her, stating "If I had been really thin, I don't think it would have been good. ... My size and my weight give me self-confidence, and the two factors are related." Although height can have a positive effect in police work among the public, an analysis of observations, informal conversations, and interviews suggests that tall policemen have a physical appearance that may be viewed as threatening to the public. If tall policemen are not conscious of the impact of their physique, it may result in increased fear among the public. A tall male police student, reflecting on the impact of being perceived as tall by the public, stated the following:

When you are in contact with the public as a police officer, then I do not think there is any disadvantage in looking so big, so long as you are relaxed. ... It is

clear that if you are tense, you can certainly be perceived as a threat. But as long as you're relaxed, the public will lower their shoulders. I think it has to do with how you "carry the height." If you're being arrogant in addition to being tall, then you will send the completely wrong signals, and I believe people will be provoked. But if you show humbleness as well as being tall, I think it is very good for the public. I think it creates calmness.

A tall female police student, 183-cm tall and fairly muscular, viewed her situation as being in contrast with that of her tall male police partner. In an interview, she explained that she got a lot of positive feedback from women, stating "People often said: 'It was really comfortable. I am so glad that you were here.' But that is maybe because we were opposites, me and my partner, who is very tall. He might seem a little terrifying." She was then asked whether she felt that her police partner had this effect because he was a tall man. The following is an excerpt from this interview:

Interviewee: Yes. In connection with the woman I was talking about, who was brought to the police station and who was very aggressive towards him. But then he had to go to fix something or write a report or something. So I was sitting, talking to her. Then she calmed down and said that she thought he was scary and "police-like."

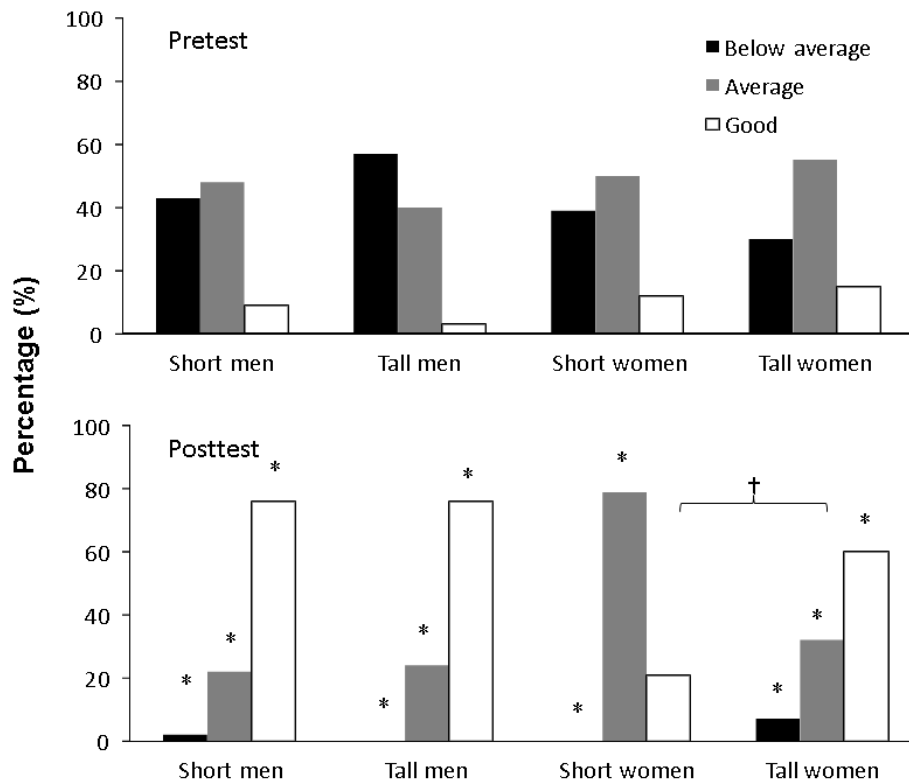
Interviewer: Was that because he was tall or because he didn't act humbly?

Interviewee: It's probably both. The combination is certainly wrong. She sat down on a bench, and he stood talking to her, a man of 1.90 centimeters weighing over 100 kilos. Then you become a little bit "okay" [mimicking the woman].

A central issue is how height influences confidence and the experience of one's own physical skills regarding physically demanding conflicts. Short and tall police officers' assumptions about their own abilities for conflict resolution with physical skills are presented in Figure 1.

Short women differed from the other three groups by being the only group in which their physical abilities were not experienced as being substantially better at the end of the police education than at the start. At the end of the police education, only 21% of the short women reported having good physical abilities, whereas 60% of tall women and 76% of men reported having good physical abilities. Among the police students, the tall women were approximately the same height as the average men, whereas the short men were about the same height as the average women. Given this, both tall women and short men can be categorized as medium height. For this reason, it can be argued that height in the police force is all about tall men and short women because they differ by an average of 32 cm in height and almost 40 kg in body mass.

A previous study has shown that among police students, a belief in the ability to resolve conflict with physical skills increased with increasing height (Lagestad, 2011). This finding supports the results in Figure 1. Another study has also shown



*Figur 1.* Assumptions about own abilities for conflict resolution with physical skills by short (N = 44) and tall (N = 39) men, short (N = 26) and tall (N = 27) women at pre-test and post-test. † indicates significantly difference between short and tall women at post-test on 0.05 level. \* Indicates significantly different from pre-test to post test at 0.05 level.

that the performance of short male and female police students in four physical tests related to endurance and strength was better than that of both genders of tall police students (Lagestad, 2012). It was suggested that height itself was advantageous in arrests when the police used physical force. This finding is also in line with the current results. Short women's substantial height difference from the other groups may explain why short women differ from the other three groups regarding abilities for conflict resolution with physical skills. It can be argued that Figure 1 supports the interview result – that being tall is perceived as beneficial in patrol work. However, many police officers emphasized that when they met unpredictable, irrational counterparts who were psychotic or affected by alcohol, or both, it was often a nonnegotiable situation in which size did not matter.

### ***The authority of short police officers with the public***

Size also seems to matter in situations involving the assertion of authority. Such situations are common – they are more or less a part of everyday policing. This study's observations indicate that the public tried to negotiate more often with short police women. This finding was also expressed in interviews and informal conversations. One short female police student described her experiences with the public as follows:



The public do as they are told to faster if they talk to my partner, who is much larger and has a totally different physique than I have. And he sounds much more determined even when he talks, so they listen. With me, they might negotiate more. It is very much like that. So I think they might be more likely to negotiate with a female officer or someone who was shorter in height.

Police officers stated that members of the public do not seem to challenge male police who are “tall and strong.” The observations also revealed that short male police officers were more likely than others to be challenged by men. This finding supports one short male police student’s observation that young people on a late Saturday night were more likely to try to have a go at him than at someone who appears to be bigger and stronger. During the fieldwork, a short male police student politely stopped a young man who had stepped out of a taxi with a beer in his hand, which is not legal in Norway. The police student told the young man to empty out the beer. This young man was substantially taller than the police student. The following conversation reflects what was said in this encounter:

Young man (arrogant voice): Hey! Get yourself a star before you say something. [Police officers have stars on their shoulders. Police students have numbers. The young man said this while challenging the short male police student by getting very close to him and looking down at him.]

Young man (sarcastically): I have no idea what you’re talking about. Why are you standing here talking to me?

Short male police student (authority in his voice): Do not play dumb.

Young man (triumphantly): Playing dumb? I do not know what you’re talking about. Have I done something wrong that you are going to detain me for or what?

In the patrol car afterward, the short male police student was questioned about the incident. He said that “the young man stood all up in my face and looked down at me. Presumably, it was to try to gain an advantage over me.” In a subsequent interview, the police student was asked about this situation, an event he remembered very well. He pointed out that the man had “ten inches extra” and that made him stand looking up at the young man, a situation he was often in because he was not tall. He felt that the person had a mental advantage. In situations like this, his strategy was to ask people who were taller than him to sit down because “when people sit down, they are usually all right, and things calm down when I sit down with them.”

### ***Shortness may increase tendency to use a verbal approach***

The interaction between the police and the public is an important aspect of patrol work. The police must often deal with negotiation situations in which size and physical strength are less obviously important than in physical conflicts. Based on the present study’s observations, short females used verbal communication to a greater extent than tall police did and seemed to be more willing than tall police to invest time in interacting with the public. The interview analysis supports this idea.

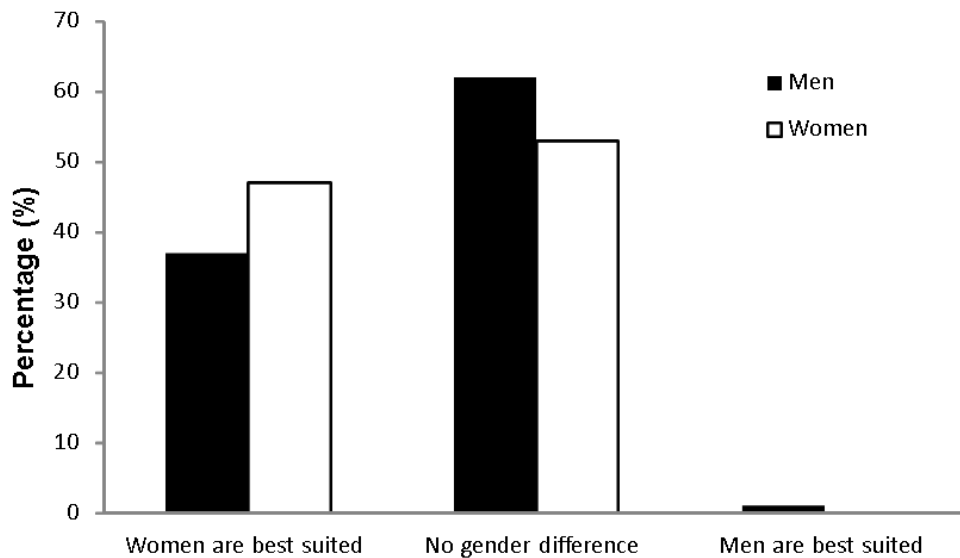
Short police students felt that their height put them in an inferior physical position, and for that reason, they tried to be particularly conscious of verbal communication in encounters with the public. When a short female police student talked about using physical force in police work, she said, “I am not one of the biggest, you know, and I have to be aware of my limitations. Mostly, I resolve the conflicts with verbal communication.” This approach is described in the following interview excerpt:

Interviewer: You will probably meet confrontational people who are bigger than you out on the street. What do you think about those situations?

Short police student: You come up with a different approach in the situation, I think. I would probably have a go at communication more than maybe others would before resorting to physical force.

It is important to emphasize that the qualitative results are based on the observations of only a few tall and short police students. For this reason, one should be careful when drawing conclusions and generalizations about short police officers’ approach to the public. However, the larger number of respondents participating in the questionnaires may support these findings.

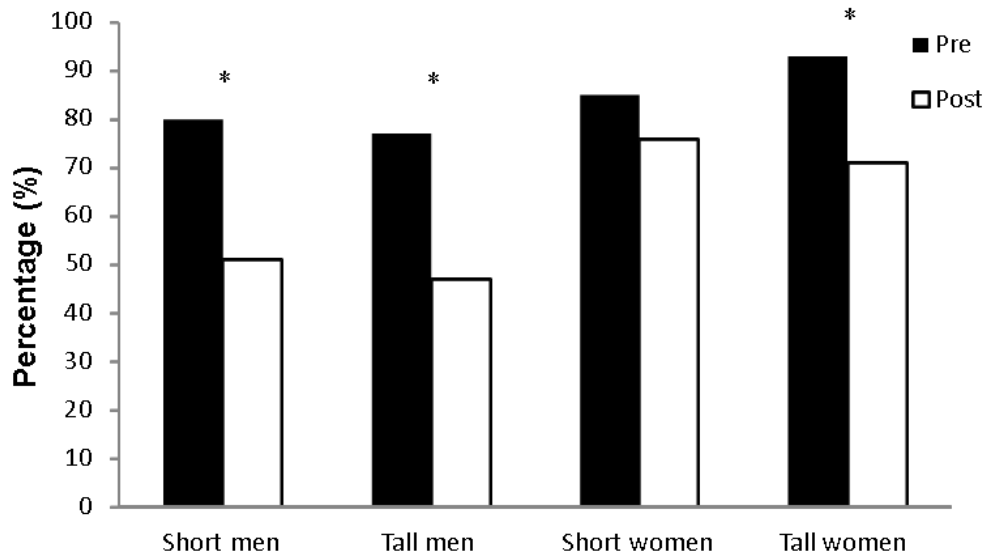
In the beginning of this article, the question of whether short police officers are characterized by a special awareness of verbal communication is posed. The questionnaire included some variables that may help answer this question. There is reason to point out that policewomen are shorter than policemen and that “being short” therefore applies to women. Figure 2 shows that many police students of both genders point to women as being better suited to use verbal skills to bring about conflict resolution.



Figur 2. Assumptions about verbal skills for men (N = 183) and women (N= 121).

Figure 2 shows that both male and female police students seem to perceive women as better able to use verbal skills to resolve conflicts. However, the data in figure 2

only reflect police students' understanding of the phenomenon. One variable actually measures verbal strategies in front of the public. Figure 3 shows how the four groups (tall men, tall women, short men, and short women) chose to act in front of an aggressive man with a pan raised threatening in the air. In this scenario, they could choose between two solutions: Use physical force to arrest the person immediately, or use verbal communication before eventually using physical force. The proportion of each group that chose a verbal solution is presented.



*Figur 3.* Verbal approach to an aggressive man by short (N = 44) and tall (N = 39) men, short (N = 26) and tall (N = 27) women at pre test and post test. \* Indicates significantly different from pre test to post test at 0.05 level.

Figure 3 shows that short women differ from the other three groups by being the only group that persists in using a verbal strategy during the police education and by having the greatest proportion with a verbal approach. It can be argued that the results in figure 2 and 3 contribute to clarifying whether short police officers, and especially short women, strive to accomplish their mission through the use of verbal communication, as previously mentioned in the Introduction section.

## Discussion

By using mixed methods, this study shows that height is perceived positively by police officers. Because of their height, tall officers have more self-confidence and feel better able to undertake physically demanding policing. Swedish police studies support the idea that height is perceived as positive in police cultures and given recognition by colleagues (Carlström, 1999; Lauritz, 2009). The results shown in Figure 1 may be a product of experiences in a police culture in which height is associated with physical abilities, as described in another study (Lagestad, 2012). According to a previous study based on analysis of data from surveys of police students, confidence in one's abilities to resolve physical conflicts increases with height (Lagestad, 2011); this finding fits with the current results. The same study

shows that 90% of the surveyed police students highlighted men as better suited than women to resolve physical conflicts.

Talbert et al. (1974) points out that when tall police officers have a more “impressive” body, they may not often end up in situations in which they are forced to use physical force. This harmonizes with the interview results, but tall policemen have to be particularly conscious of how they “present” their bodies among the public. According to the findings of the present study, a clearly “authoritarian” approach may seem threatening, especially from a tall policeman. Looking “harmless” can actually be an important aspect of patrol work (Hoel, 2010). The results indicate that all policemen have the physical resources and physical appearance that make them more able to resolve a situation by using physical strength and to be as perceived terrifying. It is particularly important for tall policemen to reflect on the effect of their physical appearance when encountering the public. Sheehan and Lester (1980) find that taller recruits are more satisfied with their work than short police recruits, and Willoughby and Blount (1985) report that short officers give many more warnings than tall police officers. These results may support the finding that being tall gives authority. However, it is important to emphasize that the fact that police in Norway work in pairs makes individual officers’ height less important overall in physical conflicts. They never have to be alone in situations that can be volatile and dangerous such as police officers in the UK have to (Fenwick, 2012).

Because of a political decision, the height criterion was removed from the admissions regulations in 2003. The results indicate that there seems to be a tension between this political argument and the professional views of certain police officers and police students. This could be related to a general conflict between professional and political judgment in the professions. Such political decisions can confront prejudices as the derogatory comment on “extra small leather jackets,” as mentioned in the introduction. This provides an illustration of how professional development sometimes has external sources. The importance of height in this study appears among police working in the patrolling division. It may well be that police working in other divisions do not experience the importance of height in the same way. Carlström (1999) reveals that being “powerful, well-trained, and tall” is considered a disadvantage while doing detective duties because such characteristics make recognition as police officers more likely.

The figures support the qualitative results: Being short may increase the tendency to use a verbal approach. Willoughby and Blount (1985) point to the Napoleon complex to explain why short police officers have a higher potential for aggression than tall police officers. In addition, Lester and Sheehan (1980) find that supervisors tend to see short patrolmen as more aggressive law enforcers and believe that short police officers receive more complaints from citizens. Contrary to those findings, the current results indicate that short police officers take great effort to resolve conflicts with verbal communication. The reason that the current findings do not agree with the previous findings may be that those studies took place in different police cultures in another country, 30 years earlier. Furthermore, neither of those studies took gender into consideration in their analysis.

In some patrol work, it is important to act heroically and with authority, but a study has shown that most police work in Norway is about talking with the public,

using verbal communication rather than verbal force (Lagestad, 2011). This is in line with the abilities of short female police students. This study shows clearly how acting with more authority and more verbal force than necessary promotes conflicts, whereas a less authoritarian approach moderates the conflicts. The results indicate that because of their “physical limitations”, short police officers seem to strive to accomplish their mission through verbal communication. Other studies support these findings. Talbert et al. (1974) find no relationship between height and complaints of police brutality, and White and Bloch (1975) find no relationship between height and department complaints. Finstad (2000, p. 189) points out that it is not uncommon for male police officers to praise their female colleagues for their ability to find solutions that do not involve physical force. Policewomen expect to be treated with respect and dignity. As women, they have fewer choices of action than male police officers have. Because most women are physically weaker than most men, they more often have to rely on other control strategies, Finstad writes. Verbal skills may play a central role in these strategies, which can contribute to explaining the results in figure 1, 2, and 3 and the interview and observation results.

It has been argued that “being short” thus far applies to women, and the results indicate that women communicate more than men before resorting to physical force (figure 3). A previous study shows that female police students use physical force less frequently than male police students during their police practice (Lagestad, 2011), which also supports the results in figure 3. That study also shows that women are particularly conscious of the use of verbal skills. There seems to be an understanding that women are superior to men regarding verbal skills (figure 2). These findings indicate that gender is more important than height in terms of whether a police officer adopts a verbal approach. However, height is something that distinguishes men from women. Verbal communication is a preferred strategy according to White Paper No. 42 (2004–2005). It can be argued that female police officers’ special awareness and use of verbal communication seems to be particularly in line with this strategy, because such an approach creates the best possible conditions for collaboration and co-production in practice, as Fenwick (2012) states.

Verbal communication plays a major role in a public friendly process, and it is important when the police have to act with authority and also maintain the trust of the public. Confidence and trust are key concepts to understand the profession’s role in society. According to Egge and Ganapathy (2012), authority and confidence are closely associated with each other in police work, and how to project authority is a central issue. Confidence legitimizes the use of power. While keeping order was the preferred strategy for the Norwegian police two decades ago, creating confidence and maintaining trust is the preferred strategy today. The growing awareness of legal rights affects all societies and professions. For every professional this is a huge challenge for the professional’s practice, because people are more aware about their legal rights (Lagestad & Rønning, 2010). Individuals in the professions, in this case the police, have options in their work and are able to choose different strategies that require more or less use of verbal and physical force. The results indicate that short women strive to accomplish their missions with less use of verbal and physical force. They seem to compensate for the lack of

physical height by working towards a communicative approach. It is essential that police officers work in collaboration with the public. When the public has bad experiences in an encounter with the police, this naturally affects the trust the public has to the police negatively (Egge & Ganapathy, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

In an era when communities demand proximity, dialogue, and collaboration, the need to recruit police and consider the best applicants for the police force has never been more urgent. There are many professional skills in line with the overall ideals for a knowledge-based and cooperative police role. The present study, however, takes a different approach and examines the effect of height. The results suggest that short police officers have a more verbal and public friendly approach. It seems that the lack of height requirements has brought about a new generation of short police officers in Norway with verbal strategies and a particular awareness of verbal communication, which is in line with the preferred police strategy. The study also shows how short police officers seem to be challenged more by the public and to be involved in negotiations with the public, whereas tall police officers have a physical appearance that may be experienced as potentially threatening by some members of the public. Furthermore, the study highlights how being tall is experienced as positive in police cultures and that height gives superior confidence in a police role. However, only 12 respondents were studied using interviews or observations, and the material has some limitations with respect to what conclusions can be drawn. Yet the quantitative analysis also indicates that short female police officers differ from tall male police officers in terms of their use of verbal communication. Further research with a larger sample of short and tall police officers is necessary to gain more knowledge regarding height, size, and their effects on patrol work.

The results show how height can be a part of a professional competence in line with verbal communication and other practical skills. Tallness will probably be perceived as beneficial in fields in which physical conflicts may arise. The findings shed light on a rarely studied field of research that is relevant for other professions. Physical characteristics such as size and height may also play substantial roles in other occupations. Being a tall employee may be experienced as advantageous in professions in which physical conflicts occur. However, it can be argued that a verbal approach is in line with a professional role in virtually any profession dealing with human beings and that such an approach will be advantageous and preferable in such professions. Short women employed in workplaces where physical conflicts arise (i.e., workers at psychiatric institutions, security centers) may adopt a verbal approach to a greater degree than their male colleagues. The importance of physical characteristics should also be examined among other professions. The results indicate that size sometimes matters; however, in the discussion about women's prerequisites for work in masculine professions such as the police force, bigger is not always better.

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