The Napoleon Complex

Short Man Syndrome Explained
By Stanley C Loewen | Psychology |

'Short man syndrome' is a condition in which a person has to deal with a feeling of inadequacy which can come from a lack of height – or a perceived lack of height. This is particularly common in men who gain a lot of confidence and status from physicality and who often gain pleasure from being able to feel physically imposing.

Short man syndrome is an informal term and not a medical or psychological condition and goes by other names such as 'Napoleon complex'. Technically it is a form of inferiority complex in which the person attempts to overcompensate for their perceived shortcoming. The term is often used as a derogatory term also to describe those who are perceived as acting this way.

Symptoms

Thus the stereotype is that the smaller male with short man syndrome would be aggressive, likely to shout and talk loudly and seek attention and eager to prove themselves. Many people compare the typical short man complex to that of a smaller dog – which many note are often noisier and more aggressive than larger more docile dogs. Other personality traits have also been linked to Napoleon syndrome – for instance risk taking and jealousy.

The term 'Napoleon complex' is used in reference to Napoleon Bonaparte who many believed conducted his tyranny and invasions as a form of overcompensation for his short stature.

Note: Interestingly however the term 'Napoleon complex' may well be a misnomer. While Napoleon is widely believed to have been very short, in fact historians have calculated his height to be around 5'6' which was average for the time period. It is believed that the confusion stems from miscalculations caused by the difference in English and French measuring units, and from the fact that Napoleon was often portrayed alongside his guards – who were all taller than average.

Causes

Of course the primary cause of short man syndrome is the aforementioned overcompensation. This is one of the ego defense mechanisms as described by Freud, the idea being that the individual could this way protect themselves from the belief that they were smaller in size. At the same time the lack of confidence regarding their height might cause them to try and distract from it by proving themselves able to 'mix with the big boys'.

Short man complex has also been linked to evolutionary psychology – which looks at our psychology as a race and how it could have developed through evolution due to the survival value of particular behavioral traits. In the case of short man syndrome it may be that in the wild smaller individuals needed to make more noise and act more aggressively in order to compete for food and mates. Indeed studies have demonstrated that in the wild, smaller creatures often do attack first.

Other Explanations

Another interesting theory turns this evolutionary idea on its head however. This is the theory postulated by research from Ohio University in which psychologists suggest that larger combatants delay actual combat as much as possible in the hope that the smaller party will recognize the odds are stacked against them and back down. Meanwhile while the smaller individual might stand to gain from the confrontation, the larger half is likely already in a strong position (the 'desperado effect'). Smaller individuals also require fewer resources and are less hindered by injury (due to their smaller body weight). Thus it might not be that smaller males are more prone to attack first or act noisily – but rather a case of 'gentle giant syndrome' where the larger individuals are more reluctant to engage in confrontation and the smaller individuals look more aggressive as a result.

There are other possible explanations for short man syndrome however. For instance the mere fact that someone who is shorter may have more difficulty getting attention in general. They then may have developed louder behavior as a necessity and as a way to get others to take notice. If this brought positive reward, that would then be a form of positive reinforcement that could condition them to behave this way. The very stereotype of short man syndrome meanwhile might lead their behaviors to be perceived as stemming from their insecurity.

Studies

Some studies have failed to prove that shorter individuals are more likely to act aggressively however and more likely to initiate aggression. In one study students were made to fight using wooden sticks. A cohort in the experiment would constantly rap the participants on the knuckles, and the elevation of the participants' heart rates were then measured. This found that those who were shorter were actually more calm and more likely to maintain a steady heart rate.

However what this study neglects to take into account is that short man syndrome is used to describe a specific and unusual level of overcompensation. In other words there wouldn't necessary be a correlation between height and aggression in all cases, rather just one or two outliers who have the 'condition'.

Note: http://www.healthguidance.org/entry/15851/1/Short-Man-Syndrome-Explained.html
The Napoleon Archetype in Film

- Lord Farquaad from *Shrek*, who takes great lengths to appear taller, such as by attaching false legs to his stirrups.
- Mr. Huph, Mr. Incredible's boss at the insurance company, in *The Incredibles*. He's extremely short and short-tempered and looks even smaller next to Bob.
- Chef Skinner in *Ratatouille*.
- Mr. Sykes from *Shark Tale*. He's a short-tempered pufferfish who rules the Whale-Wash with henchmen Ernie & Bernie.
- Yao from *Mulan* is one of the more fierce and Blood Knight-ish soldiers on the heroes' side... and is also the shortest of them.
- Aloysius O'Hare, the vertically-challenged Corrupt Corporate Executive from the movie version of *The Lorax*.
- P.T. Flea, the circus bugs ringmaster in *A Bug's Life*.
- Vizzini from *The Princess Bride* hires the strongest giant and most deadly swordsman he can find, but feels no fear in constantly browbeating and threatening them.

---http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheNapoleon---

1. Explain 5 reasons Curley acts the way he does based on the psychology article on page one.

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<th>Information from the article:</th>
<th>How does Curley fit this information?:</th>
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2. Describe a character from a book, play, film, or T.V. show that has the Napoleon Complex:

   Who is it, what is he/she from, in what way does he/she fit this archetype?