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# Fashion Design for Short Male Consumers

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on short male consumers and fashion design. There are two reasons why we chose short men for this study. First, male consumers who are shorter than 5'8" have been ignored by most of the mainstream fashion brands (Brock, 2013). Second, "scholarly research has almost exclusively focused on women, leaving a critical gap in the research on men's fit issues and preferences (Chattaraman et al. (2013, p. 291)." Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to understand how short men perceive, evaluate and select clothing from different perspectives. This research project consists of three phases, however, we only completed the first phase of our study at this stage. Therefore, this article only focuses on phase one, and the results of phase two and three will be presented in the future. In phase one, online posted comments were collected from two fashion blogs in order to understand short men's shopping and consuming experiences. We believe that the results of this study will provide meaningful insights and useful information to fashion practitioners in general and menswear designers in particular.

**Keywords:** Fashion Design, Creative Product, Short Men, Garment Fit

## 1. Introduction

"It's no secret that men 5 ft. 8 in. and under get the short end of the stick — especially when it comes to buying clothes. Pants always pool on the ground, sleeves are way too long and shoes are far too big." (Persad, 2015)

To look good and dress well could be a challenge for short men (under 5' 8") because their body type does not fall into the average ideal norm. As a result, shorter men usually take extra time and effort to find a well-fitted and desirable clothing style in order to look good (Laitala et al., 2011). In some cases, the emotional repercussions of limited clothing choice could further exacerbate a short person's shopping and consuming experience - partly due to the fact that many of them feel like they are judged by their outward appearance (Jackson et al., 1992).

In this study, we adopted Shim et al.'s classification (1990; p. 89) of men's height: (1) "short group" less than 5 ft., 8 in.; (2) "average height" 5 ft., 8 in. or greater; and (3) "tall group" 6 ft. or greater. It is evident that male consumers who are shorter than 5'8" have been ignored by most of the mainstream fashion brands (Brock, 2013; Shim et al., 1990). Even though many brands carry size "small" and "extra small" in their collection, many clothes are primarily catered to taller men with lean body type. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why the clothing proportion and fit often

do not match with those consumers who are shorter than 5'8" (Sindicich and Rutherford-Black 2011). Due to the absence of appropriate sizing system for short men, a sizable portion of the menswear market is currently underserved by the North American fashion industry.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Fashion Design – Function and Aesthetic

Product design is a broad term encompassing functional, psychological, aesthetic, kinesthetic and ergonomics aspects of a product. Creative product plays a vital role in how the product is perceived. It can greatly affect consumers' buying motives and intention. However, a question should be raised – "How do we determine a desirable and well-fitting garment?" According to some scholars (e.g., Sternberg and Lubart, 1996), creative product can be defined as appropriateness and novelty. Appropriateness can be interpreted in different ways, such as functions, usefulness, correctness, suitability, and fitting or fulfilling the needs of a specific situation (Paletz and Peng, 2008). On the other hand, novelty can be defined as originality, newness and authenticity. In order to offer creative products to satisfy diverse consumer needs, it is imperative to engage users in the research and design processes.

The present study attempts to investigate the salient impacts of both functional and aesthetic features of clothing products, as well as to understand the relationships between the body type (short men under 5'8") and fashion design. Fashion product consists a wide array of product attributes including intrinsic cues (e.g., fabric, fit, comfort, style and colour) and extrinsic cues (e.g., brand name, country of origin and price). Some of these attributes are more related to the visual aesthetic of a product such as colour and style, while others are more connected to the functional aspects such as comfort, durability and ease of care. However, it is impossible to investigate the effects of every product attribute. Therefore, the current study is primarily focused on three product attributes: style, fit and comfort. The following questions were posed to guide and direct this study: Would it be a challenge for short men to find clothing with desirable style, proper fit, and comfort? How does the physical stature influence the short male consumers' purchasing decisions of clothing?

In order to offer creative products to address and satisfy consumers' changing needs and concerns, it is imperative to engage users in the design processes. Through this approach, consumers' needs, expectations and consuming experiences will be identified, revealed, and incorporated in the product design processes.

### 2.2 Clothing Style

The term "style" can be defined as the combination of design features within a clothing item that create a distinctive appearance (Kunz, 1998), or the garment's silhouette and structure (Miller et al., 2005), or the lines that distinguish a garment's form or shape from others (Marshall et al., 2004), or the grouping of lines, form, shape, space, colour and texture in a logical way (Hayes and McLoughlin, 2006). Several researchers (Eckman et al., 1990; Fiore and Damhorst, 1992; North et al., 2003) have found that style was the most important indication of quality when assessing clothing products by the female consumers. Indeed, people tended to pay a lot more attention to the style/design than many other product cues when they shop for apparel products. According to a study of college

students in the U.S. and Japan (Kawabata and Rabolt, 1999), style/design was ranked one of the two most important product evaluative cues. In other words, consumers often use compare and evaluative the clothing style among many other similar products or alternatives prior to their purchase. Without a doubt, clothing evaluation is a complex decision-making process, which involves financial, social, psychological and physiological factors. The adoption or rejection of new clothing style is often associated with social approval or acceptance. As Park (1997) suggests that the evaluation of a clothing product is a multi-dimensional construct, including both affective cues (style, design, fashionability) and cognitive cues (fit and comfort). With the preceding discussion, it is reasonable to suggest that it could be a challenge for the short male consumers to shop for desirable clothing products to meet their specific physical need – body height.

## 2.3 Clothing Fit and Comfort

Fit and comfort often consider as the two most significant attributes for clothing evaluation and consumption (Chae *et al.*, 2006; Hugo and van Aardt, 2012). These two clothing attributes are interrelated in many aspects (Alexander *et al.*, 2005). A study of fit preferences of male consumers aged from 19 to 66 years (Chattaraman *et al.*, 2013) found that men with larger body size prefer looser fit for greater ease. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that a well-fitting garment can provide both physiological comfort (e.g., ease of movement) and psychological comfort (e.g., aesthetically acceptable) to the wearers. On the contrary, a poor-fitting garment would lead to consumers' dissatisfaction, return of merchandise, and financial losses for the fashion companies (Abraham-Murali and Littrell, 1995; DesMarteau, 2000; Reich and Goldsberry, 1993). According to a study conducted by Howarton and Lee (2010), many respondents expressed that they were frustrated and disappointed with the apparel industry due to their dissatisfaction of garment fit. Therefore, it is important for the fashion practitioners to understand the relationships between the body type and garment fit in order to produce desirable and good fitting garments as well as to establish a relevant and updated *Size Chart* for today's consumers.

Although the garment fit and comfort are closely related to consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction of clothing, limited research has focused on male population. As Chattaraman *et al.* (2013, p. 291) assert, "Although both men and women experience fit dissatisfaction, scholarly research has almost exclusively focused on women, leaving a critical gap in the research on men's fit issues and preferences." Indeed, there have been relatively few research studies (Chattaraman *et al.*, 2013; Hogge *et al.*, 1988; Oliver *et al.*, 1993) which have devoted to men's body type and fit preferenc

## 3. Methodology

Co-design, meta-design, social design, or other alternative design could encourage consumers to participate in the design process. (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. 147). According to a study conducted by Park *et al.* (2012), the aesthetic response of the users could be quite different than the designers' responses in the conventional hierarchical design process. Thus, it is important to collect users' opinions and responses in order to enhance the aesthetic and utilitarian aspects of a product.

Online posted comments regarding short men's shopping and consuming experiences and challenges were collected from two fashion blogs ([www.themodestman.com](http://www.themodestman.com) and [www.primermagazine.com](http://www.primermagazine.com)) for analysis. Content analysis with both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed for this study. The data were analyzed by performing open coding and microanalysis. This process involved reading the posted comments several times, categorizing and labelling data with codes, and

making notes about emergent themes. An initial categorization was developed and frequency of word count was generated. After the completion of initial coding, authors went through the data again and coded sub-themes within the nodes – e.g., type of consuming experiences, clothing problems (fit issues, limited clothing choice), and overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

In total, 152 posted comments were collected from 114 online posters. Among 114 posters, 77 (67.5%) of them reported their body height, as shown in Table 1. Among these 64 short men, majority of them ranged from 5'4" to 5'8" tall.

Table 1. Online posters' height

Body height	5'8"	5'7"	5'6"	5'5"	5'4"	5'3"	5'2"	5'1"	5'0"	4'10"	4'6"
Number of participants	n = 9 P7, 8, 17, 75, 87, 90, 94, 109, 112	n = 11 P16, 18, 23, 29, 30, 61, 65, 74, 97, 100, 114	n = 13 P1, 15, 31, 43, 51, 66, 71, 93, 99, 101, 105, 107, 108	n = 10 P39, 42, 44, 47, 53, 67, 68, 73, 77, 79	n = 12 P45, 49, 54, 58, 60, 63, 83, 88, 89, 96, 106, 111	n = 6 P19, 40, 46, 62, 80, 86	n = 5 P34, 41, 59, 84, 92,	n = 4 P20, 22, 35, 37	n = 5 P21, 38, 55, 78, 85	n = 1 P50,	n = 1 P113
N = 77											
67.5%											

According to the frequency count of word occurrence (see Table 2), pants were mostly cited, followed by jeans, jacket, suit, and shirt. In terms of their concerns of garment length, sleeve length was most frequently cited, followed by pants/jeans length, and bodice length of shirts, jacket, coat, and sweaters. With such indication, it is not difficult to understand why many posters expressed that they often encountered difficulties in finding a pair of pants/jeans or a shirt in suitable bodice and sleeve length. For example, some of them wrote:

"For me a 5'4" guy it is particularly difficult to find sweaters (pull overs, cardigans, v-necks) that aren't too long. "Small sizes" don't fit in length. Target slim fits are the best I can do, but even so they are still too long." [P6, bodice length of tops]

"Great post, exactly my experience at 5'6". Length is a big problem even when the rest fits." [P15, garment length in general]

"For business clothing like suits, I can find fitted suits without problem 34 or 36 but I always have to alter the length of the arms and trousers. For business shirts, I just buy them custom made from internet like tailor store. ... What's troublesome is the overall length and the arms length for jackets and coats. I spent quite a lot of money altering clothes." [P35, the overall length and sleeve length]

"Don't get me started on sleeve length to shoulder width ratios. ... Result: nothing ever fits quite nice, and you either look like you re dressed one size under or that you stole your older brother's clothes. ... \*sigh\* at least finding shoes is no problem..." [P74, sleeve length]

### 4.1 The Relationships Between Body Type and Garment Fit

According to the posted comments, short men with average body type were easier to find clothing than the ones with slim or muscular/larger body build. In terms of the shirt fit, some posters found

that the neck measurement, sleeve length and body fit of certain brands were out of proportion. This made them frustrated and disappointed when they shop for a shirt.

“The slim pants won’t go on my legs, and the “loose” fits are too baggy around my lower legs or waist. Shirts are better, but often too tight around my shoulders and arms. It is just so crazy that retailers can’t provide more specific choices for different body shapes.” [P27, no response on height]

“I like wearing some baggy/loose fit stuff in the gym and just messing around but not for going out. ... But only thing that makes it harder to find clothes to fit for someone under 5’8 who is of a smaller build, is someone of the same height and bigger in the chest shoulders arms back and legs.” [P97, 5’7”]

“My neck is 18.5 but sleeve length is 32/33. Every shirt I find I can fit 2 or 3 of me in them but the neck is very comfortable. My pants: I am a 36/37 waist – 29 length. I obviously am short and broad. I am so tired of retailers not having anything for me.” [P47, 5’5”]

## 4.2 The Connections Between Sleeve/Hem Length and Brand Name

Some online posters stated that certain brands offer better sleeve and hem length to short men than other brands. Other posters also suggested that Asian or Japanese brands such as “Uniqlo” could be an alternative because they primarily cater to the Asian market, and Asian consumers are usually shorter than the Western counterparts.

“I have known several Japanese raw denim. They also make shirt and their length is just perfect. The cons are that they are pricey and more on the casual side.” [P2]

“In general, It seems that Asian brands (such as Uniqlo) have smaller “averages” for their patterns compared to European and American brands. European ones tend to have the slimness down, but then I feel like they are basing their patterns off of long legged viking.” [P12]

“I think for guys below 5’8” (I’m 5’7”), you do get somewhat better luck from Asian brands like Uniqlo since the average height of men over here is around 5’8” anyway.” [P16]

“I’m 5ft 5in and regularly find I am a Japanese size medium. 80% of my jackets/tops are from Japan. UNIQLO in many countries is not bad; their Western XS is a good fit for me. Their Japanese S is perfect.” [P53]

However, a few posters felt that this may not be a perfect solution because Japanese brands (e.g., Uniqlo) are relatively more expensive than the local brands. In addition to the price, three posters (P5, P56, P67) had some concerns on the overall fit and quality of Japanese clothing. For example, P5 said,

“Uniqlo only fits short guys who are EXTREMELY THIN AS WELL. Not every guy who is under 5 feet 8 has a 28-inch waist. We have 34, 36, 38, 40 inch waists too, and we don’t want to wear skin tight clothing. It’s uncomfortable ....”

Other than buying Asian and Japanese brands, a few posters suggested that looking into children’s clothing could be another option. As illustrated in the following two excerpts:

“I’m 5’0”, I feel your pain. Children’s clothes are one of the few options off the rack that actually fit, but the options tend to be very childish and not good quality.” [P21]

“We have had to recur sometimes to buying children’s clothing and, when you get past the supposed “humiliation” of doing this, it actually works sometimes, ... I understand why this can be difficult to swallow but we’ve gotten great results.”  
[P98]

Although shopping at the children’s section could be an alternative, some people were not satisfied with the designs and quality. For example:

“The problems with shopping in the boys’ department are: poor quality; ‘square pants’ i.e. 27×27, 28×28; and everything is designed to appeal to a 10-year-old.”  
[P90]

Table 2. The frequency of word occurrence in the posted comments

<i>Garment mentioned in the comments</i>	Frequency of occurrence
Pants	38
Jeans	35
Shirt	34
Jacket	29
Suit	26
Sweater	20
Shorts	10
<i>Specific garment length mentioned in the comments</i>	
Sleeve length	33
Pants/jeans length, inseam	22
Shirt, jacket, coat and sweater length	19
<i>Body parts mentioned in the comments</i>	
Waist, waistline	29
Leg	24
Body	21
Arms	18
Shoulders	13
Neck	9
Chest	8
<i>Brand name mentioned in the comments</i>	
Uniqlo	17
H&M	14
Banana Republic	11
Express Men	11
Gap	8
TOPMAN	7
Zara	7
J. Crew	5
American Eagle	4

### 4.3 Is Alternation a Solution?

Based on the following excerpts, it is evident that garment alternation was the most popular method to fix the fitting issues. Regardless of its popularity, many consumers did not consider alternation is an ideal solution due to the cost and limitations (e.g., difficult to alter sweaters and cardigans).

“They can be altered. Usually it’s a question of cost-benefit. A suit, for example, is expensive and needs to look perfect. A t-shirt might cost more to alter than it would to buy.” [P1]

“Is it worth purchasing only to find out it’s not going to look good even after some altering?” [P11]

“Speaking of alteration, just found out from my tailor that he can’t alter a basic merino wool sweater. He said the machine cost \$100,000. □” [P13]

“Altering all your clothes with a tailor is, frankly, the best option always. But, sometimes, you either can’t or won’t afford this expenses and would prefer having the option of carelessly grabbing something off-the-rack.” [P98]

## 4. Conclusion

To summarize, many posters revealed that they had trouble finding *good, fashionable* clothing that *fits*. Sometimes, they found a well-fitted garment but not fashionable, or a fashionable item but doesn’t fit their physical stature. In other words, it is difficult to find a desirable fashion article which can offer both novelty (innovative or fashionable) and appropriateness (fit their body type). As one of the posters expressed,

“I can also recommend boys size Adidas and Nike for track pants as those fit nicely and snug if you like slim fitting joggers. The Adidas ones are usually the same design.” [P68]

In terms of fit and design, fashion designers should offer a wide variety of styles to their customers through customization and transformable design practice in order to meet their needs and aspirations. For example, customers can order a basic bodice of dress shirt according to their body measurement (using custom-made or tailoring method) with two detachable garment parts (cuffs and collar, as shown in Figure 1). We believe that there are several advantages of this proposed design concept.

- 1) *Appropriateness/comfort*: the garment will fit wearer’s body shape better (alternation of sleeve and bodice length becomes unnecessary);
- 2) *Versatility/novelty*: wearers will have more choices in terms of styles (different cuffs and collars);
- 3) *Sustainable practice*: the lifespan of the product will be prolonged (more environmentally friendly).

This modular transformable design does not require any sewing skills from the users. Consumers can order a basic bodice of a custom-made shirt (slim-cut, loose-cut, etc.) with additional mix-and-match cuffs and collars to (re)create a new and refreshing look by changing the garment parts. If the cuffs and collar are torn, stained or worn out, they can be replaced without abandon the entire garment. This design approach does not merely provide a well-fitted garment to the consumers, it also engages them through direct participation in the (re)creation process. As Rahman and Gong (2016, p. 235) asserted, “Transformable design is a practical solution which allow a piece of garment to be transformed into different looks to serve diverse individual needs and purposes.”



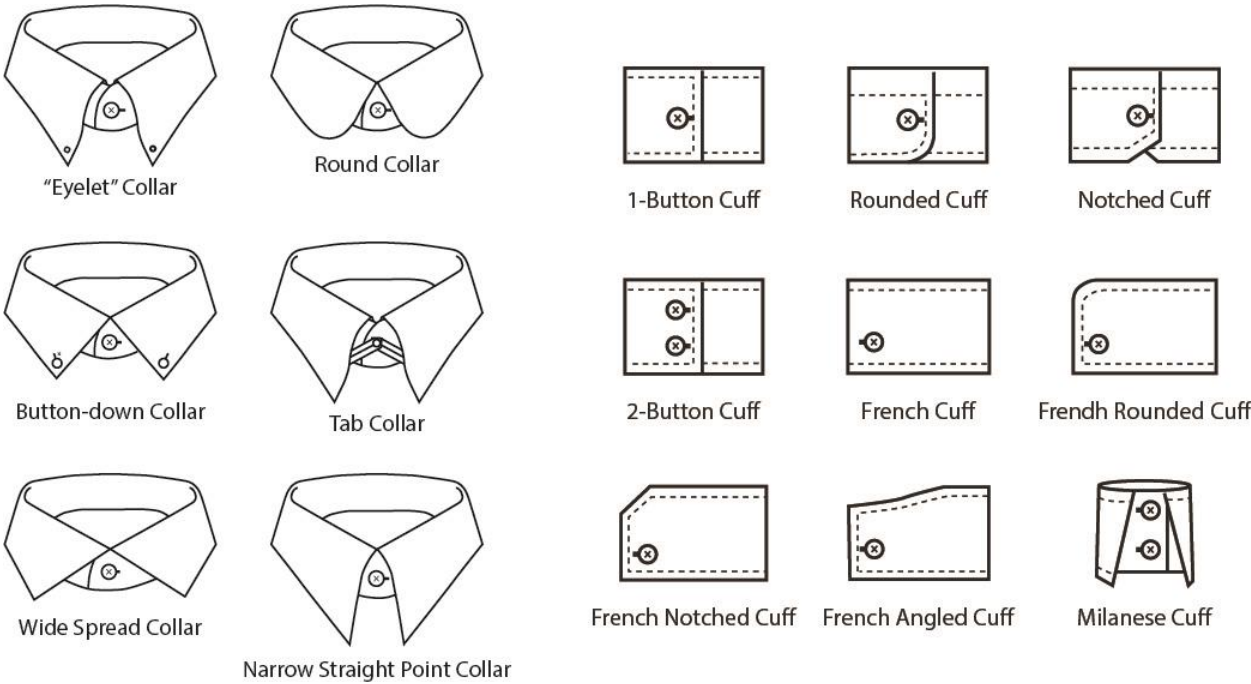


Figure 1. Detachable cuff and collar styles

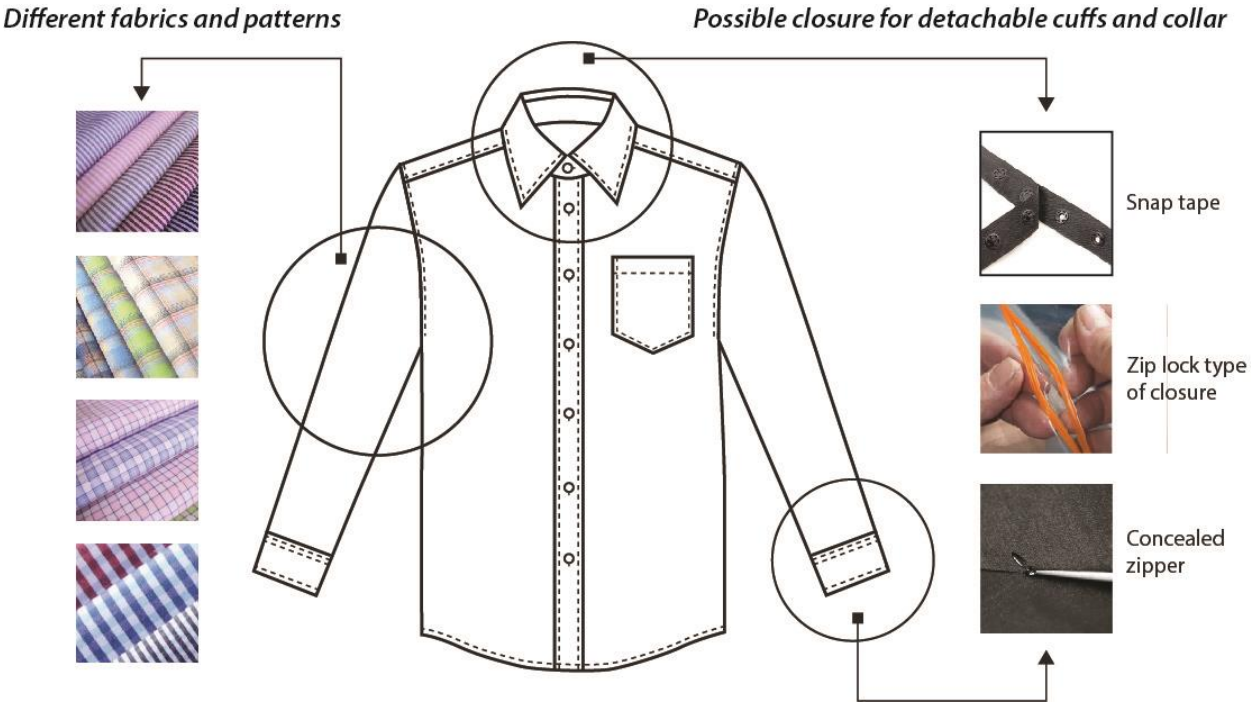


Figure 2. Customization of basic men's shirt – Fabric choices and detachable cuffs and collar

The findings of this study underscore several implications for the fashion designers and pattern makers, including (1) to identify some prevalent body types of short men including the waist-to-height ratio, neck-to-arm ratio, and arm-to-height ratio; (2) to understand the relationships among the Body Mass Index (BMI), garment ease, and perceived body it; (3) to provide a greater variety of garment fits. In order to find out the common body types, BMI, and the ratio of various body parts,

3D body scanner can be used to capture the body shape and measurements of short men for further analysis.

Although the present study cannot fully address all the issues, we are able to identify numerous consumers' concerns, highlight a few implications, and make some suggestions. In addition, we are currently undertaking our Phase 2 study to measure and further understand the short male consumers' body shape and specific needs through body scan and in-depth interview.

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