

# **A Dilemma with Height: A Critical Review of Body Image and Clothing Choice for Men of Shorter Stature**

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Previous research (Andrew, 2005; Markee *et al.*, 1990; Rudd & Lennon, 2000) has shown that many women are concerned about how they are perceived through the medium of dress and adornment by the public in general and significant others in particular. Tunaley *et al.* (1999: 743) points out that female sexual attractiveness is often perceived and judged by a culturally constructed ideal of beauty. With such perspective, it is important to understand the complex relationship between body image and clothing practice in different socio-cultural contexts. However, the majority of existing literature on body image (e.g., Borland and Akram, 2007; Davis, 1985; Howarton and Lee, 2010; Rahman, 2015) is primarily or exclusively focused on women. This could be due to the fact that men are perceived to be relatively less interested in clothing, and thus, less involved in shopping activities. Nevertheless, some studies (McCaulay *et al.*, 1988; Mishkind *et al.*, 1986) have found that male consumers are increasingly becoming more involved in their appearance and body physique. For example, they have expressed dissatisfactions and frustrations with parts of their bodies such as their biceps, shoulders, and chest (Cash *et al.*, 1986; Furnham and Greaves, 1994). Furthermore, a number of studies (Bergeron and Tylka 2007; Martins *et al.* 2008; Tylka *et al.*, 2005) report that muscularity and body fat indeed play a significant role in how men's body images are judged in the United States and Australia. In order to conform to the muscular ideal, men often adopt various appearance-management strategies such as intensive exercise and weight training, cosmetic surgery, dietary regimes and daily grooming (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). All in order to change their present body image.

Other than muscularity, body height is also considered as an important indicator of masculinity, attractiveness, and health (Blaker *et al.*, 2013). There is a considerable amount of research examining the perceived connections between height and various other variables of male attractiveness in different contexts. For example, height is often correlated with authority or social status (Gawley *et al.*, 2009; Roberts and Herman, 1987), worth and leadership (Murray and Schmitz, 2011), political success (McCann, 2001), competence (Cann, 1991), higher income (Judge and Cable, 2004), physical strength (Lundborg *et al.*, 2009), and dating preference (Walster *et al.*, 1966). Nevertheless, although many prior studies have investigated the relational effects of men's height, very little empirical research has focused on relational effect of clothing choices (Chattaraman *et al.*, 2013; Hogge *et al.*, 1988; Oliver *et al.*, 1993). Surprisingly, only two apparel studies (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1991; Shim *et al.*, 1990) have specifically done so but focused on big and tall male apparel shoppers. Thus, the present study attempts to fill the research void by studying the body perceptions, consumer behaviour, and fit preferences of shorter men.

According to several studies, height may be used consciously or unconsciously to judge the ability, competence, and intelligence of an individual male. Indeed, "heightism" or prejudice and discrimination against shorter men, does exist in our society (Melamed and Bozionelos, 1992). For example, taller men

are more likely to be hired or promoted than their shorter counterparts (Keyes, 1980). In terms of clothing consumption, it is a challenge for short male consumers to find a well-fitting and/or desirable garment. Frith and Gleeson (2004) report in their study, "The fact is that physical size imposes limitations on finding suitable clothes [12]. The frustration of trying to fit into average-sized clothing was tangible for unusually tall, broad-shouldered, or short men." In other words, short men have been ignored or underserved by the fashion industry. Thus, it is imperative to understand the needs and challenges faced by this demographic group.

Based on the preceding discussion, a number of questions will be posed to guide and direct this study: Does "heightism" still exist in today's society? Are tall men perceived more positively than short men? Is body height linked to psychological disposition? What challenges do short male consumers encounter when it comes to apparel shopping? What kind of clothing the fashion practitioners should develop to meet the needs of short men?

In order to address the aforementioned questions, visual and textual data will be collected from short men in actual public settings, and also through social media. This study consists of two stages. In the first stage, men who are under 5' 8" (based on Shim et al.'s classification, 1990) will be recruited to participate in this study. With their consent, short interviews will be conducted and "street-style" photographs of them will be taken. These visual and textual data will then be used to create two interactive social media sites – (1) a website, and (2) a Facebook page both named *Sastro Man Circle*. In stage two, articles related to men's height, "heightism," body image, public perceptions of short men, self-esteem, clothing choice and sizing systems will be posted on our website and Facebook to collect public opinions and comments. Readers will be encouraged to post their responses, reflections and comments about the content of our articles. After the process of data collection, content analysis will be employed to code and analyze the interview contents (from stage 1) and online posted comments (from stage 2). Through content analysis, themes will be identified from the data, and the procedure as described by Zimmer and Golden (1988) will be adopted and followed. The reason why we chose content analysis for this study is because this type of analytical method can provide an objective and systematic procedure to code our collected data and form the basis for interpretive analysis.

Through the data collection from stage 1 and 2, some of the concerns and challenges related to men's body height will be revealed, and possibly some practices or suggestions to mitigate the lack of clothing choice for short men will be identified. We believe that this study will provide new insights, meaningful information, and also extend our current knowledge and understanding of the relationship between men's height and fashion consumption. In all, the results of the present study are essential for academicians and practitioners invested in promoting fashion diversity.

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