A Experimental Ready-to-Wear Sizing Range for Men of Modest Height

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Men whose height falls below 5’ 8” are out of luck if they want to consume fashion products (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). Sleeves, pant legs, and shirts are always unflatteringly long. Ties, belts, and shoes look disproportionally odd, while fabric prints, buttons, and pockets are ever too large. Such is the shopping experience of approximately 33 percent of the consumer market in North America (Mak, 2016). The lack of size inclusion in menswear for consumers bellow the 5’ 8” average height, has social and emotional impacts for a significant number of the population (Mishkind et al., 1986 and Mak, 2016) as well as ethical (Melamed and Bozionelos, 1992) and economic implications for the fashion industry. The practice-led research outlined here, proposes an experimental apparel sizing range for men of modest height (5’ 8” or under) by taking into account the diversity of body types found within that height group.

Each of the tentative classifications for the experimental RTW sizing range will use the XS acronym with an added letter and number. Thus, the proposed sizing range will be divided into three body-type subcategories – XSS, XSM, XSL, each including three height variations, for a total of nine standard sizes. The added letters – S, M, L, correspond with the most general body types found in human populations; S for slim, M for muscular, L for large (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). Each of the aforementioned body-type size sub-categories will then be accompanied by a numeral representing height variations; 3 for heights between 5’ 7”- 8”, 2 for heights between 5’ 5”- 6, and 1 for heights between 5’ 3”- 4”. This classification order will guarantee compatibility with current apparel sizing systems.

Standard sizes are a key aspect of modern apparel manufacturing and a contentious issue in fashion consumption (Nancy, 1997). Clothes made into conventional sizes made possible the rise of the now prevalent ready-to-wear fashion model. However, while the purchasing of garments pre-made to fit specific body dimensions makes fashion more accessible, it does so insofar as consumers’ sizes fall within the fashion industry standard sizes (Otieno et al., 2005). For consumers whose body dimensions fall outside of the average sizes –big and tall men, and curvaceous or petite women for example, those standards are a barrier. Size exclusion hits men exhibiting a height below the 5’ 8” average particularly hard. There is a double whammy of social perceptions of masculinity –specially for heterosexual men, virility, success, and attractiveness are generally associated with tall statures (Blaker et al., 2013, Walster et al., 1966) and manliness of character is symbolized by stoicism and suppressed emotions. This creates a situation in which a large social group, which would benefit the most from garments that fit them properly, is ignored by the fashion industry, yet they are also less likely to voice their frustration.

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1 The terminology ‘short’ is been avoided intentionally, as one of the topics that come up in discussing dress, style, and fashion consumption for men bellow the industry’s standard (Shim et al., 1990) is the negative social connotations of short as a classification.
The project will use data collected as part of an ongoing apparel sizing study for men of modest height (5’ 8” or under), been conducted by the principal investigators. In the aforementioned, study Rahman and Navarro Delgado are collecting the actual measurements and proportions of a group of male consumers whose height is 5’ 8” or under, by means of a 3D body scanner. Those data sets will complement previous surveys and interviews capturing the social and emotional experiences of those consumers as well as their practical needs in terms of apparel.

The proposed experimental sizing range would provide a unique practical tool to demonstrate the social and economic benefits of expanding menswear’s current ready-to-wear size offerings. The researchers believe that having basic apparel cutting patterns (blocks) appropriate for of men exhibiting a height of 5’ 8” or under, could facilitate the design of prototype ready-to-wear garments targeting the style needs of that demographic group. After all, counting for approximately 33 percent of the total fashion market in North America alone, men under 5’ 8” represent millions of unsatisfied costumers and millions of dollars going to waste.


