

Style recommendations for female body shape: A case study from fashion stylists

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Introduction: Personal clothing styles are determined by many aspects, such as fit, body shape, personality, and preferences. Well-fitted clothes conceal body imperfections, enhance body shape, and positively impact self-confidence (Grogan et al., 2013). Fit satisfaction is significantly different among different body shapes (Alexander et al., 2015). Historically, the body shape concept was introduced in the 1940s using anthropometric indices to better categorize human bodies (Sheldon et al., 1940). Although multiple body shape categorizations exist, female body shapes are typically formulated into five main categories: hourglass, rectangle, triangle, inverted triangle, and oval (Istook, 2004). In the 21st century, the hourglass shape is identified as the ideal shape among young women in the U.S. (Alexander et al., 2015). Achieving a slim hourglass shape through garments, which can define waistline, balance physical silhouette, emphasize the slender shape, and present proper fit, has been desirable by women (Grogan et al., 2013). Although the preferred body shape seems to be consistent, the preferred silhouette is a trend that changes throughout time, culture, and country (*Alabama Chanin*, 2017). For example, the trend for white-collar women of the 1970s and '80s was power dressing to make the shoulders look broader (Avignon, 2018). There are several studies to suggest a silhouette styling system based on body shapes, such as the H-O-A-X shapes (Duff, 1987), the user profile-based apparel recommendation (Guan et al., 2016), and the celebrity styling data-driven style recommendation (Hidayati et al., 2018). None of these approaches considered professional stylists' suggestions on dressing for different body shapes. Therefore, the purpose of the present research was to investigate style recommendations from expert stylists' points of view to explore: 1) dress silhouette recommended for five female body shapes, 2) dress style detail recommended for each body shape, and 3) body shape context in styling sessions.

Methods: Ten fashion stylists were recruited and interviewed via Zoom to share their knowledge about styling different female body shapes. Interviews lasted one hour, and five body shapes prepared in Clo3D were shown to the stylists to prompt their thinking. The interview sessions were recorded, transcribed verbatim in Otter.ai, and coded in Atlas.ti for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Rabiee's (2004) approach to the qualitative interpretation of the interview data was adopted for analysis. The words used as indicators of recommendation were quantified and categorized in garment details, which included three neckline types (i.e., Scoop, V-neck, Strapless), three waistline types (i.e., natural, drop waist, no waistline), and two silhouettes (i.e.,

A-line, H-line). Each mentioned garment detail with recommendation was numerically coded as (+1), whereas in not recommended were coded as (-1). Neutral and no mentions were counted as (0). Quantitative analysis was conducted in Microsoft Excel by running a frequency analysis. A total score for each style and combination was summed up and sorted in order. Thematic content analysis and narrative analysis were discussed and reviewed between two coders to identify similar styling patterns and contradictory suggestions. Among 45 lines of coded script between two coders, the intercoder reliability Kappa was found as .87.

Results: The interviewed stylists were nine females, and one male from the US, with six stylists having more than ten years of styling experience. The triangle body shape had the most recommended code (23.40%), and the inverted triangle had the lowest recommended code (16.24%). The garment details were suggested for a triangle body shape that showed the highest observed agreement; however, the stylists disagreed most on garment details suggested for the oval body shape. The combination of V-neck (total score=18), natural waistline (total score=34), and A-line dress silhouette (total score=26) were recommended for all body shapes (Figure 1). However, the combination with scoop neck was the top-recommended for rectangle and triangle, whereas the combination with V-neck was the top-recommended for hourglass, inverted triangle, and oval. The importance of the waistline was emphasized throughout the interviews by all interviewees because it was perceived as defining proportion and balance. Drop waistline (total score=-4), no waistline (total score=3), and strapless (total score=5) were the least recommended details by the stylists.

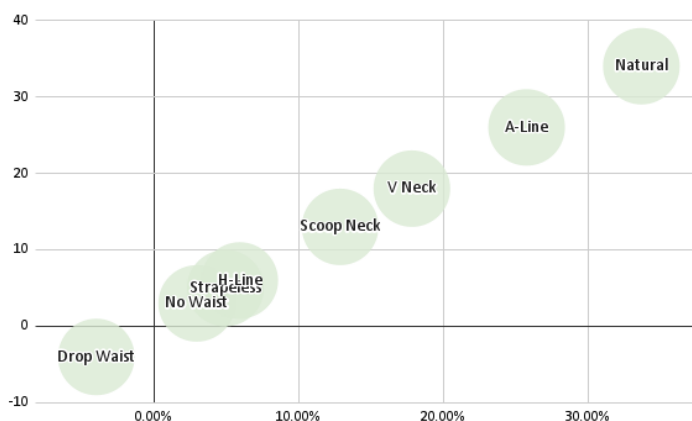


Figure 1. Total score rank of recommended styles

The qualitative results showed that 80% of the stylists perceived the hourglass as a more balanced body shape. Rectangle and inverted triangle shapes presented a more athletic and fit look. Oval and triangle shapes were more likely to indicate maturity and were perceived as mother-like. It was suggested that an individual's body shape changes over time and might have mixed body shapes based on postures. All stylists agreed that building self-confidence and style exploration are more important than trend adaption in styling sessions. Based on the interview

analysis, stylists' style recommendations were not only based on the body shapes but also the height, facial shape, torso length, and preferences. Occasionally, women with the same body shape may select the opposite styles, as "one to conceal and one to celebrate the same body part" (Stylist A). The five body shape categories were also criticized for lacking consideration of "different torso, height, and curves" (Stylist C, E, and H).

Discussion and Conclusion: The present study findings indicated that professional fashion stylists' dress style recommendations were different for each body shape. A natural waistline with an A-line silhouette combination was the most recommended style among all five body shapes, whereas drop waist and strapless shoulder were the least recommended style details. Defining the waistline is essential to start a styling session for all body shapes. Although various combinations of styles were discussed in this research, the study was limited as all interviewees were from the U.S., and not all the garment details and alternative body shapes were covered. Additionally, silhouette and style preferences may vary based on individuals' opinions. The preferred garment styles might vary based on fit, psychology, occupation, and body proportion for the same body shape. According to suggestions from the stylists, the future study may examine trust in recommendations and the preferences of styles, including facial shapes, height, torso length, and alternative body shape categories. Yet, style preferences based on trend, age, location, culture, and gender are worth investigating. To our best knowledge, this is the first study that investigated style recommendations for different body shapes based on fashion stylists' interviews. The results may inspire in-depth investigation of body shapes and fashion style recommendations to enhance individual apparel selection. Moreover, our findings may provide design, manufacture, and retail references for different body shape segments and encourage individuals to understand body shapes and proportions better.

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