

## “There’s Nothing Wrong With My Size”: Examining Students' Attitudes Towards Self-Measurement and Body Self-Image in Apparel Design Courses

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**Significance and purpose.** Introductory apparel design classes teach students how to construct garments and often require this in product development and merchandising coursework. Students work to dress people of all varieties, but most apparel designers have not been trained to design for alternative markets (Kosinski et al., 2018). Many introductory design courses require students to self-measure to understand pattern adjustment and fit needs. The fashion industry has an excessive promotion of thin ideals, leading to body dissatisfaction (Vartanian and Dey, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to examine students' attitudes toward the use of self-measurement and body types and their experience with inclusivity in an introductory apparel design course.

**Literature review.** The current representation of women in apparel design-related course materials lacks diversity in body sizes. Reddy-Best et al. (2018) found that fashion illustration textbooks only featured women in sizes 1-3 for white and people of color. Thus, inaccurate perception of the “average” body is featured in current course materials. Christel (2018) found that dress forms reflect a small, hourglass figure, further ingraining an inaccurate belief of how bodies “should” look.

In contrast, Martindale (2018) found that self-sewing can create positive feelings towards clothing due to improved fit and quality. The study posited that women felt more confident in their body size and shape due to the customization of their garments. Additionally, many students have positive feelings toward inclusivity in apparel design classes (Morris et al., 2019). Thus, there is a disconnect between the limited diversity of apparel design course materials and the actual diversity and empowerment of custom sewn clothing. Therefore, this research study examined students' attitudes toward the use of self-measurement and their experience with inclusivity in an introductory apparel design course.

**Research Questions & Methods.** This exploratory research examined students' attitudes toward the use of self-measurement and body types and their experience with inclusivity in an introductory apparel design course. To address this aim, three research questions were proposed: (1) How do current apparel design course materials affect students’ self-image? (2) How do self-measurement and self sewing affect students’ self-image? (3) How can the inclusivity of apparel design course materials be improved?

The researcher used a qualitative method approach (Saldaña, 2016) and conducted semi-structured interviews regarding apparel design course materials, self-measurement activities, garment construction experience, and inclusivity in the classroom. Participants were

recruited from an introductory apparel construction course. See Table 1 below for details regarding participants. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The data was coded, and four themes emerged: (a) positivity on self-measurement, (b) self sewing encouraging confidence, (c) increasing body diversity, and (d) utilizing inclusive design in intro coursework.

**Table 1. Participant Details (n=7)**

Age	18-21; median age 19
Gender	All identified as female
Major	7 textile and apparel management majors (5 for design, 2 for merchandising); 1 journalism major/textile and apparel management minor
Ethnicity	6 Caucasian, 1 Hispanic, 1 African American

**Results. Positivity on Self Measurement.** Students felt positive about self-measurement, especially compared to typical apparel industry sizing. One student said, “The measurement activity actually was helpful for me. It was good to just know what my measurements are.” (Participant 2). Another stated, “At first I felt like, kind of ‘eh’ about it. But it’s just my measurements. After we did it, I actually felt better. It’s my body, and there’s nothing wrong with my size” (Participant 5). Several participants stated that this would assist them in making informed decisions about purchasing clothing in the future. One participant indicated, “Sizing is so weird. But my measurements are there, so like I can use that to buy stuff that fits” (Participant 7). In response to measuring others, students felt others assisted with the process. A student stated, “Yeah, it was really helpful to have someone guide me and make sure I did it right. I couldn’t really see what was level with the floor, but [my partner] could” (Participant 1).

**Self-Sewing Encouraging Confidence.** In addition, students felt that making apparel products for themselves helped improve their confidence and gave them a sense of ownership over their work. One student said, “I’m so excited to wear the skirt I made. When people ask me where I got it, I get to just be like ‘I made that!’” (Participant 3). Another student said, “The skirt we made fit me a lot better than skirts I usually buy. So I like that, I’m excited about it” (Participant 4). This was not the case for all students though. As one participant indicated, “Yeah, I’m glad I made the skirt, but I wouldn’t wear it. It’s just kind of baggy. But I’m still glad I made it; I think I might adjust the pattern and make a different one” (Participant 1). This indicates that self sewing can increase students’ confidence even without wearing the ending product.

**Increasing Body Diversity.** Finally, students indicated several suggestions for improving the inclusivity of apparel design course materials. One of the main suggestions was about dress forms, with seven out of eight students mentioning the lack of diversity in sizes. One student said, “All the dress forms just seem...really small. I didn’t see any plus size forms in there. Or what about disability forms? Do they even make that?” (Participant 2). Another said, “I want to design for lots of different body types, but there’s only a few dress forms. They don’t really look

like me either, which is like...not great” (Participant 3). In addition, students found it beneficial to be provided a variety of different patterns to choose from to suit their personal style or body shape. One student indicated that “I liked having pattern choices. I chose one that I thought fit me the best” (Participant 8). This can assist instructors in accommodating the body types or preferences of many students.

*Utilizing Inclusive Design in Intro Coursework.* On the other hand, students found many positive aspects of other course materials, specifically about using inclusive design in classes. Six out of eight students mentioned an inclusive design project from another class, and all of those students indicated they developed skills they will use in the fashion industry. “I liked that project. I feel like it will help me keep in mind more types of people. I want to design for everyone, and those people probably feel left out. Why not design for them? (Participant 3).”

**Implications, Limitations, & Future Research.** This research can assist apparel design instructors when teaching methods to create a more positive relationship between apparel construction and the fashion industry. Some limitations faced were a small sample size due to the size of the class. Additionally, there is a lack of gender diversity due to a limited number of male students in the class interviewed. This research provides insights into students’ views on the inclusivity of coursework. Future research could be conducted with male students, students at other institutions, or on the merchandising side of apparel academia.

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