

AVH80 and the body perfect

Many aspects of 21st century society promote the idea that having a "perfect body" is a guaranteed way to command the admiration and approval of others. A perfect body is promoted as the key to attracting a romantic partner, to landing a good job (disregard experience or intelligence), to having good health and to achieving popularity, success and self-confidence. A perfect body is often seen as the passport to all that is good in life.

And what does this perfect body look like? For women, the ideal is either a very thin supermodel/waif look, or an impossibly voluptuous figure. Men, on the other hand, may have to contend with ideals that demand muscularity or extreme thinness or both. Some may be nodding their heads in agreement at this point because you are aware of these ideals. If you are 'lookist', or you are in close contact with someone who is, you may have criticised others - or been criticised yourself - for being too fat or too thin, too tall or too short; for simply not fitting the "standard".

Research suggests that required images for women are much more restricting than what is acceptable for men. Not surprisingly, therefore, women far outnumber men in terms of preoccupation with body shape, size, and weight. Dominant standards emerge from Caucasian culture, generally from the middle of the socio-economic structure, that include a number of contradictory messages about what is and isn't acceptable. To offer some examples, it is suggested that women should be thin but curvaceous, delicate but demonstrably strong – and preferably all at once.

Keep your footbeds dry

The beauty industry, supported by the media and the health and fitness sector, is generally regarded as being responsible for Western society's messages about body image. The physical definitions, as epitomised by the photography on the style pages, received a hard knock in the British press recently when it was revealed that a considerable number of glamour photographs are digitally enhanced to ensure that perceptions are matched to the ideal. At best, such 'perfect' figures may be natural for only a small percentage of the population.

The politics of image

A negative aspect of the media coverage of the subject is the implication that unless the reader's physique conforms to the supplied 'norms', then all is not right with that individual's world. Of

even more concern is the supplied premise that it is the reader's responsibility to tell friends and family members when they too do not conform. Another version of George Orwell's '1984', but with kid gloves.

The suggestions might be, for example, that a woman is not supposed to have hips, that a male physique should be a muscular triangle – and none should presume to carry any fat. The message is, 'You are not perfect as you are; you will only be happy when you are perfect'.

A research paper published in 2000 cited the existence of 'The Body Police', a group that can consist of friends, family and other 'well-wishers' and which supports size oppression. The paper continues: 'Size oppression occurs when a person is harassed or discriminated against simply for being, or not being, a certain size. For the most part, the desired size is one into which less than five percent of the people in a Western country will fit. At a time of great progress against other forms of prejudice and discrimination, we remain steeped in size oppression, denigrating ourselves and each other because of our body sizes.'

AVH80 - clarification and classification

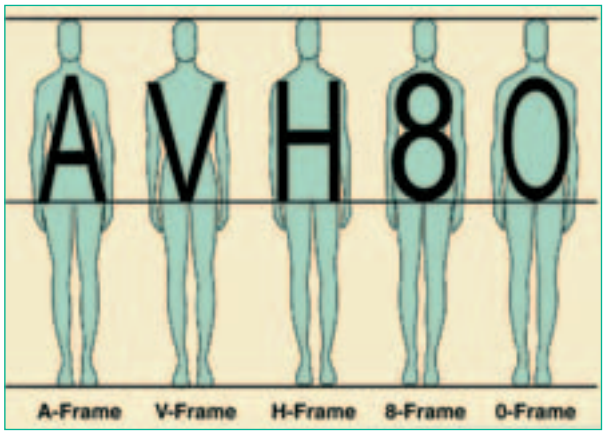
In the past this publication has dealt with aspects and development of mass customisation, citing the ability to provide a set of highly personalised measurements as the means by which sportswear manufacturers can produce activewear and leisure garments tailored to the individual, but at very close to mass market prices. The theory, and some of the practice, is good. But the impact on the personal shopper is, one suspects, not so simple.

Two years ago a headline in the fashion columns of the New York Times asked ' If that's me in the E-dressing room, why doesn't this fit?' Stepping into a mass customisation booth in the full and certain knowledge that the measurements obtained can be translated into personalised garments' fails, it is suggested, to take into account two aspects of clothing purchase in this market sector.

First, the question of immediacy. By far the majority of shoppers want to take their purchases home with them – now. The suggestion that one should wait even a couple of days for delivery is quite often the trigger for a move to the next store.

Second is that almost indefinable factor 'feeling right'. The garment looks great on the hanger. Colour just right. The style meets the latest 'social credibility' norms, but when it is tried in the fitting room it just does not feel right. Inexplicable, but understandable.

All of which brings us to a recent contact with two students reading for a Masters degree in Sportswear Design at Derby University in the United Kingdom. Li Zhengxia is a proponent of mass customisation, basing her theories on the fact that size does not, of necessity, equate with shape and fit. Her final research project is the development of 'a range of active wear for the active grey female market'.



Nicola Trigg's AVH80 which classifies five general female body shapes.

It is to the other student, Nicola Trigg, that we are indebted for the mnemonic AVH80 to classify the five general shapes of the female gender:

A frame - known as Triangle or Pear shape

V frame - Invert Triangle or Cone shape

H frame - known as Rectangle or Ruler shape

8 frame - the classical Hourglass shape

0 frame - Diamond or Apple shaped

Nicola's final presentation was of a range of exercise wear developed around the average characteristics of four nationalities: British, Japanese, French and North American, using the body-shape theory and indexing the varied performance requirements by the application of appropriate textiles. Her newly acquired knowledge is currently being used by a major



Li Zhengxia's body shape range plan showing 'O', 'A' and 'H' shaped tops.

international sportswear brand in the development of a new range.

Ageing sub-plot

Not surprisingly Li Zhengxia's body shape classification is very similar to that of her colleague, with only the substitution of 'X' for '8' creating dissimilarity. It was her work on the age-developed female shape that gave her final presentation a subtle edge. She had realised that sportswear companies suffer from tunnel vision in their worship of youth and the youthful body. But as women move gently into middle age and later, their body types are determined by diet, lifestyle, level of fitness and age, rather than genetics. In general, most women are getting rounded into the '0' shape or sagging into 'H', but they rarely lose their desire to look good and they are prepared to remain physically active in the pursuit of their goal.

Women's breasts sag after menopause due to fatty tissue loss, and therefore there is a need for extra support in order to give protection as well as keep good shape. As Li pointed out: 'In relation to ageing, there are still many other issues that need to be considered for developing a sports bra that readily adjusts to the changing shape, give better protection and support without limiting movement and finally providing maximum comfort for the ageing wearers.'

The analysis by a previous women's wear market survey had shown that choosing the right length is also one of the major criteria for modern female consumers buying garments. But Li's work showed that height slightly decreased with age due to a combination of genetics and bad posture. According to medical research, "the bone mass density (BMD) peaks between 25 to 30 years of age after which there is a decrease at an average rate of 1% per year." *(Medicine & Science; Sports & Exercise 2000. Humphries B; Newton R U; Marshall S; McBride J; et al)*

Women begin to lose calcium after 25 and then the speed of loss accelerates during and after menopause. Low BMD, which is one of the major factors in progressive height decrease, is also responsible for the greater incidence of low-impact bone fractures, but it can be counteracted to a marked degree by regular exercise. And women of all ages want to wear garments that flatter their dispositions during that exercise.

Li Zhengxia's designs and the rationale that accompanied them have doubtless attracted a great deal of attention in her native China. Watch the market.

Derryck Draper



Li Zhengxia's body shape range plan showing 'V' and 'B' tops with shaped trousers.