

WHAT·U·WEAR

by Jerome Ryckborst

Everybody hates their body. At least 70% of women think they're too fat. Most men would like to be more muscular.

What's going on here? What exactly is it that we want ourselves to be, and what can we wear to emphasize the right stuff? First of all, here's a summary of what exactly the *right stuff* is.

Our cultural ideal for men's bodies is a tall, muscular physique. Women like men with a "somewhat large" chest. As a matter of fact, they think the chest is sexually the most stimulating part of a guy's body. I guess that's good news for all the half-inch Henry's out there. I know what most men consider to be their most stimulating part — it ain't the chest.

The chest area does rate big on the ideal woman. Studies show males prefer larger breasts than the typical woman has. (Yes, how do they conduct these studies?) Men and women disagree over the ideal female physique. The male view of the ideal woman is softer and rounder than most women believe it is.

Funny thing is, women are always fighting their bodies, trying to lose weight. About three in four women want to be thinner. Hips and waist are their biggest worry (but not their busts). Men are typically busy with push-ups, chin-ups, and weights in the pursuit of the perfect V-shaped torso.

All this dissatisfaction with the body affects self-image. The result is a lot of anxiety and feelings of not being liked. In short, a poor self-image means low self-confidence. People have a tendency to attribute meaning to the visual clues of the people they see or meet. A certain set of characteristics is associated with a given physique. Short people are seen as more sensitive (men too), more fearful, and passive. Fat people are considered lazy or tacky. Only thin, tall, beautiful people are automatically seen as warm, pleasant, successful people.

The fashion industry traditionally reinforces these stereotypes. In spite of all this bad news, the apparel industry is slowly responding to the demand for special sizes and styles of clothing. For example, petite sizes are now available more often, and in more stores.

Market studies show that one quarter

of the population is considered "short". One-fifth is "petite". That's a lot of people with money to spend, which explains why manufacturers are making more smaller sizes.

Further, there is a growing social trend to accept physical differences. On T.V. we are seeing more short, pregnant, black, and fat people than we did ten years ago.

Modelling agencies are changing with this trend. Shorter models can now find agents in the larger cities like New York. Some agencies, like PETITE, specialize in short models. The initial idea was to supply models to art directors and photographers who were promoting petite designer lines. Agencies expected short, small models would work mainly with shoes and petite catalogs. The response was greater than expected. PETITE keeps 25 models working constantly. These girls do everything tall models do — beauty, fashion, television, magazine editorial work — everything except runway work. For the actual fashion shows, tall models are still preferred because they look the thinnest.

The amount of fashion work for petite models surprised agencies which offered petite models. Photographers prefer smaller girls for lingerie and swimsuit ads because they have better proportions. Also, clothes made for the average consumer fit shorter models better.

Of course, what's short for the modelling industry is actually still quite tall. Five foot three inch to 5'7" girls are what the PETITE agency considers "short".

For petite people — the 20% of the population that *really* wears size 5 — the future looks promising. Changes are underway.

Finding clothes that fit, and finding them with ease, does wonders for a person's self-image. People who can find things in their size know they have a "normal" sized body. But people who can never find anything fashionable that fits only have their negative self-image reinforced: "I'm not a normal size body type."

As the market expands to fit the whole range of sizes people come in, we will see more happy, confident people. Because, to your self-image, it does make a difference **What-U-Wear**.



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