

EDITORIAL

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Introduction to special collection on fashion and gender

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In this special issue of *Fashion and Textiles*, we are pleased to present research focused on the interplay of fashion and gender. The theme for this issue followed from the fourth annual Fashion and ... Symposium, held in the College of Design at the University of Minnesota in May 2015. The focus of the symposium was the relationships between fashion and gender. Authors of the 17 presented research papers, as well as other scholars from various fields of study, were invited to submit manuscripts of their work related to fashion and gender. This issue consisting of five research studies is the result of this process.

Included in this issue is Matthews, Chaney and Opiri's article, "The Michelle Obama influence: An exploration of the First Lady's fashion, style and impact on women." The authors of this article examine the impact of Mrs. Obama's sartorial style upon US women's fashion perceptions and purchase behavior. Interviews with women revealed that they believed that they could relate to Michelle Obama as a result of her appearance. Furthermore, Mrs. Obama's unique clothing selections encouraged the participants to also follow their own distinctive style when selecting clothing.

Min's article, "Gendered role communication in marketing blue-collar occupational gear and clothing in the United States," presents the results of a visual analysis of websites and advertisements selling blue-collar work apparel and personal protective gear. Min's analysis shed light on the lack of options available for women in these occupations. Furthermore, although gender equality is promoted in the workplace, individuals still express a sense of discomfort when viewing advertisements that portray women employed in blue-collar roles.

The focus of Noh, Li, Martin and Purpura's article, "College men's fashion: Clothing preference, identity and avoidance" is young men, a group of fashion consumers about which little is known. Through interviews, the authors found that undergraduate males preferred to wear comfortable clothing, clothing that gives them confidence, and clothing that is situation- and context-appropriate. This research also revealed a troublesome pattern concerning male undergraduates' strong aversion to certain styles (e.g., gangster, gay). The interviewees held negative stereotypes about the people wearing these styles that are associated with African-American and homosexual men. The authors suggest that universities need to educate their students about the dangers of appearance stereotypes.

Focus group and individual interviews were conducted by Reddy-Best and Harmon in their study, "Overweight boy's and girl's experiences with and perception of athletic clothing and its relationship to physical activity participation." Reddy-Best and Harmon

recruited 21 girls and 14 boys (9–14) from a camp for overweight children. Results showed that children were worried about exposing their bodies when wearing athletic clothing during physical activity; the clothes were often too tight or too revealing. Children were also concerned about having their clothing size revealed to teammates or classmates; this was often a problem when uniforms were issued. About a third of participants actually wanted to quit the sport or activity due to the athletic clothes; some had to special order a larger size than was available and some wore uniforms that were too small. Some children had to wear older uniforms or a completely different uniform than the others. These experiences made the children sad and feel like outsiders. However, a majority of participants did mention at least one positive experience with athletic clothes and all such experiences related to having athletic clothes that fit. The authors recommend that coaches and teachers be sensitized that overweight children have concerns with their uniforms that may be keeping them from increased physical activity. They also suggest working with parents to identify the children's correct uniform sizes in advance of issuing them. Because garment fit was a concern, obtaining well-fitting garments for overweight children may increase their physical activity or sports participation.

The final paper in this Special Collection is "Coping by crossdressing: an exploration of exercise clothing for obese heterosexual women" by Christel, O'Donnell and Bradley. The authors note that while physical activity for adult women is decreasing, women's body size is increasing. These researchers were interested in exploring the types of clothing worn by obese heterosexual women when engaging in exercise. Data were collected via in-depth interviews with 56 women, a majority of whom purchased exercise clothing in the men's department. While they were able to find clothing for physical activity that fit them in the men's department, they naturally were limited in expressing their femininity when wearing that clothing. Basing their research on notions of freedom of dress, the authors concluded that as women's clothing size increases, their perceived freedom in selecting exercise clothing declines. Results indicate that a large majority of participants were dissatisfied with the availability of exercise wear in their sizes. As a result the women felt responsible to lose weight to increase freedom in dress. The researchers believe (a) that regardless of body size, shape, or weight, women should have access to feminine exercise clothing that supports physical activity and (b) that the apparel industry should reconsider the sizing, functionality and overall design of feminine exercise clothing.

We hope that this collection of articles inspire further discussion and research inquiries about fashion and gender.

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