

An explication of the problems with apparel fit experienced by female Kenyan consumers in terms of their unique body shape characteristics

Anne Mastamet-Mason

Thesis

PhD Cons Sc (Clothing Management)

Study leader: Prof HM de Klerk (University of Pretoria)

Co-study leader: Prof SP Ashdown (Cornell University)

November 2008

**An explication of the problems with apparel fit experienced by female kenyan
consumers in terms of their unique body shape characteristics**

By

Anne Mastamet-Mason

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

**In the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Consumer Science
University of Pretoria**

**Study leader: Prof HM de Klerk (University of Pretoria)
Co-study leader: Prof SP Ashdown (Cornell University)**

November 2008



***D**eclaration*

I, Anne Mastamet-Mason, hereby declare that this thesis that I submit for a PhD degree in Consumer Science at the University of Pretoria is my original work and has not previously been submitted for a degree at any other University.

.....

Anne Mastamet-Mason



Dedication

I hereby dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother **Tabutany**, who saw worthiness in me, my source of inspiration for life; my aunt **Mrs Esther Towett**, for taking care of me after my grandmother passed away; and my late loving daddy **Kibunei Kipkoskei Mastamet**, who acknowledged worthiness and value in me, and invested in my education; **Batiem Selly Serser** for her prayers and finally, my beloved children, **Kipng'eno**, **Chepkurui** and **Kiprono**, for allowing me to take up my studies.

Acknowledgements

Glory goes to Jehovah God, the Creator of the universe and all that dwell in it. I owe Him all that I am and ever hope to be (Psalm 103). A large number of people and organisations have contributed in various ways to the completion of this doctoral thesis. My gratitude to them is boundless. There would have been no thesis at all without them. I would like to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude publicly to them:

- Professor Elmarie de Klerk, my Study leader, for her professional guidance, advice, support and encouragement throughout the four years of my study. You were always my friend and my mentor.
- Professor Susan Ashdown, Co-study leader, for her professional guidance, advice and encouragement.
- My beloved children, Kipng'eno, Chepkurui and Kiprono, for allowing me to study, and for their patience, love, moral support and belief in me throughout my studies. Though it was difficult to let me go sometimes, we still agreed that I pursue the studies to the end.
- The German Academic Exchange Service, for their financial support through the four years of my studies.
- Moi University for granting me study leave for four years.
- University of Pretoria, for the bursary granted in support of my data collection.
- Jacqui Sommerville, research consultant, for her friendly advice regarding the questionnaire, appropriate statistics and data analysis.
- Dr G Crafford, statistician, for the advice regarding the questionnaire and appropriate statistics applicable for my study.
- Lorraine MacDuff, Ergonomic Technologies, for training and assisting me on issues related to anthropometric measurements.
- Trudie Erasmus, for editing and refining my photos and formatting my thesis.
- Dr Anna-Mart Bonthuys for proofreading and editing my thesis.
- Thea Tselepis, for her moral support.
- All the staff members at the Department of Consumer Science, University of Pretoria, for their support and encouragement.
- My research assistant Chebet Keter for her help during my data collection.

- All the head teachers and staff members of high schools in Nairobi, Eldoret and Kisumu, for allowing me to conduct my research in their respective schools.
- My mother Tabsabei Mastamet and stepmother Sarah Mastamet for their loving support and taking care of Kiprono, while I was studying.
- My lovely brother Kiplang'at Bunei Mastamet and his wife Jane Bunei, for their sincere love, support and kindness. You acted as parents to my children and me. You patiently took up all my responsibilities and turned them into yours.
- Mr Philip Arap Mason, for supporting and taking care of the children Kipng'eno and Chepkurui while I was studying.
- My sisters, Mrs Chepkorir Bett and Ms Bornice Nyaega and their families, for taking care of Kiprono.
- Dr Rose Otieno of Manchester Metropolitan University for inspiring me towards research in sizing and fit. The clothing anthropometry course you taught me inspired me to undertake this thesis.
- Professor Priscilla Botha for teaching me research methods.
- My friends Professor Ogembo Kachienga, Monicah Cheruiyot, Zakayo Cheruiyot, Dr Chepkuto, Kamanda Mbuthia, Botai Ondego, Sang Mosonik, Dr Otieno Anyumba, Daniel Goon, Rachel Karei, Zackayo Lang'at and many others, for their encouragement and moral support.

List of Abbreviations

AATCC:	Association of Textile Chemist and Colourist
AGOA:	African Growth and Opportunity Act
ASTM:	American Society for Testing and Materials
GOK:	Government of Kenya
ISAK:	International Society for Advancement of Kinanthropometry
ISO:	International Organisation for Standardization
KEBS:	Kenya Bureau of Standards
KEPZA:	Kenya Export Processing Zone Authority
KNUT:	Kenya National Union of Teachers
RATES:	Regional Agricultural Trade Expansion Support Program
RMSS:	Republic of South African Military Standards
UN:	United Nations

***A*bstract**

An explication of the problems with apparel fit experienced by female Kenyan consumers in terms of their unique body shape characteristics

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Anne Mastamet-Mason

Study leader: Prof HM de Klerk
Co-study leader: Prof SP Ashdown
Department: Consumer Science
Degree: PhD in Consumer Science: Clothing Management

Problems related to apparel fit stem from a variety of factors, such as an outdated anthropometric database from which sizing systems could be developed, lack of and/or inadequate classified body forms, non-standardised communication of sizing and fit and non-standardised fit quality management, amongst the clothing industries (Chun-Yoon & Jasper, 1996; Holzman, 1996; Winks, 1997; Desmarteau, 2000; Anderson, Brannon, Ulrich, Presley; Woronka; Grasso & Stevenson, 2001; Ashdown, 2003; Simmons & Istook, 2004).

Anthropometric data in Kenya was taken in 1975 and the measurements were obtained from girls and women of Kenya's learning institutions and organisations (KEBS, 2001). The source of the original data from which the size tables were derived is obscure, to authenticate the quality of the techniques and instruments used for the data collection. Apparently, there is no known research that has been carried out on clothing anthropology, sizing (body measurements) and fit (body shape) for women. In the absence of representative sizing systems, wrong styles and sizes based on estimates and not on the actual sizes and body shapes of women consumers in Kenya, contribute to fit problems. Consumers' lack of knowledge about size (body measurements) and fit (body shape) issues also contributes to the disillusionment, confusion and inappropriate apparel selection. Consumers' fit preferences contribute to fit problems, if the available styles do not consider consumers' body shapes, and even further, if the consumers are uninformed about their shapes and how to dress accordingly.

The aim of this research was therefore to identify and describe distinctive female body shapes of career women in Kenya using body dimensions and photographs, to describe the differences between the emerging distinctive body shapes (measurements and photographs) and the Western distinctive shapes, and to finally describe and analyse implications for the fit of apparel associated with the emerging distinctive body shapes of Kenya's career women. It also intended to assess and describe career women's self-perceived fit issues with the ready-made apparel in Kenya, to determine and describe Kenyan career women's knowledge about the communication of size (key body dimensions) and fit (body shapes), and also to determine and describe career women's fit preferences for differently fitted apparel items in Kenya.

This research is descriptive as an attempt is made to describe and understand body shape(s) and tendencies in consumers' behaviour regarding fit issues. It is exploratory as it aims to obtain insight into a relatively new area of study, namely identification of the most prevalent (distinctive) body shape of Kenya's career women, consumers' perceived size and fit issues, their knowledge about size and fit, and their fit preferences. Various theories were consulted and adapted in this study, while practical training in anthropometry and photography was undertaken to ensure that measurements and photographs were taken accurately and reliably. Traditional anthropometric-related theories and standards of obtaining body measurements were consulted and applied. Photography rules were set and observed while photographing the women.

Phase one of the study focused on the variables in the body characteristics thought to be appropriate for identifying and describing distinctive female body shapes. Phase two applied the quantitative research that focused on the variables obtained from fit problems with apparel, the communication of size and fit, and fit preferences. A structured questionnaire was used to get the broader picture of the respondents' perceived fit problems, their knowledge about the communication of size and fit, as well as their fit preferences for differently fitted apparel items. The questionnaire measured specific dimensions of fit problems with apparel, the communication of size and fit, as well as fit preferences. The body dimensions that were recorded, body evaluations, and the responses to the questionnaire were coded, captured and analysed.

It is apparent from this study that the most dominant body shape is a curvy rectangular shape that differs not only from the ideal (hourglass) body shape, but also from the Western (USA) prevalent straight rectangular shape. The fit problems such as tight hips, crotch, bust

and stomach experienced by Kenya's career women are therefore inevitable, as confirmed by the dissatisfaction with the unavailability of appropriate styles for their sizes and shapes.

It is clear that most Kenyan female consumers are familiar with the non-informative lettered and numbered size labels, but unfamiliar with size label terms that represent established body types. They understand neither the meanings of various size and fit descriptions, nor their own key body dimensions; this leads to confusion as to where the cause of their problems lies.

Apparently most Kenyan career women consumers prefer fitted and semi-fitted skirts and jackets. In the absence of a distinctive body shape in Kenya, it is possible that the available styles do not cater for their curvy rectangular body shape; hence, they experience fit problems. Consumers' lack of knowledge about body shape may also lead to inappropriate fit preferences that do not take into account their distinctive body shape and its critical fit points.

This study makes certain recommendations to the ready-made apparel industry in Kenya and foreign companies that export their apparel items to Kenya, government agencies such as the Kenya Bureau of Standards, and to consumer-oriented organisations. The results contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the theory of apparel size and fit, Ashdown's sizing systems theory, research methodology theory, and consumer education theory.

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