

**FIGURE TYPES AND DEFECTS: IMPLICATION FOR FEMALE CLOTHING SELECTION****<sup>1</sup>O. E. AKINYOTU <sup>2</sup>N. I. NWABAH <sup>2</sup>L. E. OSHIO**<sup>1</sup>Department of Home Economics, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo City<sup>2</sup>Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Benin City

\*Corresponding Author: oseakin@gmail.com

**Abstract**

*Clothing is meant to cover, beautify the wearer's body structure, build self-confidence, creates cultural, social identity, enhance styles, reflect the culture and hide part or parts that have defects. This paper aimed at educating the public and clothing designers on figure types and defects and their implications for female clothing selection. This paper reviewed the concepts of clothing, figure, figure types, defects, figure defects, ways of identifying related figure types, standard women's clothing conversion, specific clothing for women, among others. The female gender is specifically classified into four figure types from which there can be several derivatives. They are straight figure, pear-shaped figure, apple shaped figure and hour glass figure. The effects of figure types on clothing design and how clothing can be used to hide figure defects were specifically discussed. Factors affecting good apparel fittings such as appearance, comfort, design, fabric among others and the strategies for hiding figure defects were highlighted and discussed. Furthermore, constructing patterns for different figure types to hide their figure defects, good understanding of one's figure type and defect to expose an individual to the mistakes in taking darts, pleats and joining the balance marks in clothing construction among others are some of the implications for Home Economics Education. The paper concluded that every figure type is beautiful on its own notwithstanding its defect, hence clothing must be designed to de-emphasize the figure defect but emphasize on the figure details to enhance the appearance of the wearer. Recommendations were proffered to guide female clothing consumers on the type of garments that will help disguise figure faults, female youths should have a good knowledge of their figure type and defect and should endeavor to select outfits that suit their figure types.*

**Keywords: female, figure types, figure defects, clothing selection****Introduction**

Clothing articles are fundamental needs of humans used for covering and beautifying the body. Clothing simply refers to any garment, accessory, ornament and apparel placed on the body to adorn, protect, project or communicate intent. The kind and nature of clothing used by individuals portrays or reflects the economic status, role(s), religion and most times beliefs in a particular society. In other words, clothing includes make-ups, hair-do, jewelry, shoes and most importantly dresses. The way and manner of dressing goes a long way to tell the kind of home or upbringing of a person. According to David (2018), clothing is one of the basic needs of man which influences individuals' health, wellness and status. The way people dress can tell a lot of things about them. The different socio-economic classes typically dress differently as a matter of class identification to impact the information to other members of the class, family or community. Stone (2011) defined clothing as a major aspect of personal appearance that often bears cultural shared meaning. Cultural shared meanings are learnt from birth, and it is expected that every female through her interaction with others have learnt these behaviours. Clothing has been identified as an essential need for every human existence all over the world.

However, four major theories have been used to explain the reasons behind individuals' clothing choices and decisions, such theories include modesty, immodesty, protection and adornment theories. Modesty theory is based on the fact that clothing is worn to conceal the private parts of the body. According to Patrick, Duut and Agaasa (2018), modesty theory alludes the concept of respectability, properness and suitability that certain body parts are dishonorable and ought to be consequently secured. Immodesty theory explains that

clothing can be used as a sexual tool to highlight private parts of the body, that is clothing is worn to attract attention rather than to conceal. Adornment theory refers to the decorative nature of clothing which reflects a holistic approach to fashion for beauty purpose and to improve appearance. Protection theory suggests that clothes protect humans from dangerous elements and against extreme climatic conditions. Clothing is meant to conceal the body parts, beautify, improve appearance, protect and hide part or parts of the body figure.

Figure is known as the outline or shape of a person's body that comprises of the lines, points or planes that form a closed boundary. Anikweze (2013) refers to figure as the shape of an individual human body particularly with regard to its slimness or attractiveness. Figure is the physique of an individual that comes in different types and is often determined by the chest or bust, waist and hip. Eyisi, Bala, Bello and Akanbi (2007) refer to figure as the way an individual's body is shaped. Body figure can also be referred to as the molding of skeletal structure as well as the distribution of muscles and fat. Figures are shaped as either on disproportionately wide in any one place, or full at the bust and small at the hips (top heavy) or they are small in the bust and big at the hips (hip heavy type). Figure shape determines the garments design for proper dress sense and good color combinations for females.

Females are fashionable in nature and always desire to look their best at all times. Females tend to have more fat mass and be curvier due to a combination of larger breasts, wider hips, larger buttocks and bigger thighs (Richardson, 2022). However, a person's figure is the fundamental shape which constitutes the foundation of patterns, clothing designs and clothing selections. Hubpages (2019) classified the female gender into four figure types from which there can be several derivatives; they are straight figure, pear shape figure, apple shape figure and hour glass figure. No two individuals are exactly the same in terms of body measurements, although certain individuals fall within a certain range and these ranges define the different figure types. Igbo and Iloje (2012) state that the straight figure, pear-shape figure, apple-shape figure and hour-glass figure are the four major figure types for female gender.

Figure type is based on the height, width and depth of the figure. In analyzing an individual's figure type, the body proportions and shapes would be compared with the descriptions of the standard figure types. Simone and Sullivan (2019) explained that human body's figure types come in all different shapes and sizes, some are curvier, and some have narrower hips or broader shoulders among others. The straight figure type has almost similar busts and hips measurement with no defined waist. This body type is quite common and sometimes regarded as the ruler or rectangle body type. The pear-shaped figure type is also known as triangle or A-shaped body type which is defined by narrow shoulders and small waist extending to significantly wider hips that is it has large hips wider than the bust and shoulder. Pear-shaped figures do have a well-defined waistline and maintains good curves. Most adult women's bodies are pear-shaped because they gain lower body weight, especially after marriage, as a result of middle-age spread.

The apple-shaped figure type is also known as inverted triangle or V shaped figure type and is characterized by a body shape with bigger proportions on the top than on the bottom that is wider bust measurement, relatively flat buttocks and a nicely defined waist. Most women gain upper body parts in their teens as well in the early 20s, and those who maintain this condition into later life often have nice slim legs. Finally, the hour-glass figure type is characterized by exact width for hips and shoulder, reasonably defined waistline, rounded buttocks, full thighs but slimmer than the lower hips and rounded and titled shoulders (Salameh, 2022).

From the four figure types described in the foregoing, there can be several other derivatives such as column-straight and briquette-straight figure types, skittle-pear and bell-pear figure types, top cello-hour-glass and vase-hour-glass figure types, spoon figure type, diamond figure type, oval figure type, petite figure type, athletic figure type, thick athletic figure type, and muscular figure type. However, it is important to note that none is critically bad, individuals in the world of art, fashion came up with standard figure and termed it Figure "8" good and acceptable figure type and expressed dissatisfaction with certain details of their figure that they perceived to be defective. The areas of defect are called "Figure Faults". For instance, dresses with

fullness control, square neckline among others are unsuitable for fat ladies because it adds fullness to the fat figure, also vertical stripes garment are not meant for tall figure as all these are often regarded as body defects.

Defects are imperfections, deficiencies or faults that impair the quality of something or of a person's figure. Defect in clothing is an imperfection which can manifest itself in the shape or outline of a person's figure that spoils the appearance of such a figure. A defect in a person's figure reveals the flaws in such a figure which may be highly pronounced in some and mildly pronounced in others. It is the focal point in figure type that spoils the appearance or outlook of an individual especially if it is easily recognized or hid. These defects are referred to as figure faults. The faults in a particular figure type, similar to beauty, actually exist in the mind of the person and subsequently in the eyes of the beholders. In other words, when a person is significantly concerned (worried or conscious) of the perceived faults in her figure, people pay attention to such undesirable details.

Figure defect refers to body features that are not balanced or regularly arranged either on opposite sides of a line or around a central point. Such body features create unequal appearance or disarming in the person's figure. Bodies with figure flaws are characterized by disproportionate parts of the body such as flat chest, large bust, short neck, long neck and large hips. They also manifest abnormally plump, obese and heavy proportions of body fat distributed around the waist and the abdomen presenting unequal appearance or disharmony in the person's figure. These figure defects can cause difficulties in wearing and removing of garments except where appropriate adjustments have been made to obliterate the figure problems though correct body measurements among others.

Body measurement is a veritable tool in excellent fitting of garments both for locally or foreign made garments. It is expedient for a seam mistress, tailor and fashion designer to get the accurate body measurement for the client they are sewing for. Inaccurate body measurements will result to unfitted garment or badly constructed garment which will further expose the figure defects of such an individual.

People seem not to know their body figure type and not conscious of body defects, therefore the choice and use of clothes that do not match their body figure type and hide their body defects are seen worn by a good number of the female gender. Therefore, the researcher is worried that if this awareness is not created, people will continue to use clothes that do not fit their body figure and hide their body defects which are seen as an indecent dressing. It can therefore be deduced from the context of this paper that each figure type has its own unique beauty and figure defects which can only be de-emphasized through correct clothing selection. It is against this background that this paper aims to identify the different figure types and defects and its implication for female clothing selection.

### **Identification of Related Figure Type**

According to Phyllis (2014), the following ways could be used by an individual to identify related figure type. First, a figure type of about someone's height is the person's figure type and the patterns designed for that figure will fit such an individual. Two same figure types with same measurement of bust, waist and hip measurements as well as the back-waist length is a figure type nearest to such an individual.

If a person's exact measurements are not listed for any figure types, decisions should be made on measurements, figure description and height. The closer one comes to a person's measurements and proportions, the better such garment will fit. In clothing, clothing size represents the label sizes used for both male and female garments in the selection of clothing items for one's size that is clothes that fit an individual's figure type.

Below is the Standard Women's' Clothing Measurement Conversion Table that show size differences in American, United Kingdom, Europe, Italian, Australian and Japan.

**Table 1: Standard Women’s’ Clothing Conversion**

UK	USA	EU	ITALY	AUSTRALIA	JAPAN
6	4	32	38	6	7
8	6	34	40	8	9
10	8	36	44	10	11
12	10	38	46	12	13
14	12	40	48	14	15
16	14	42	50	16	17
18	16	44	52	18	19
20	18	46	54	20	21
22	20	48	56	22	23
24	22	50	58	24	25

Source: Kiwi Sizing (2023)

**Specific Clothing for Female Figure Types**

There are various types of specific clothing for female figure types. According to Dress magazine (2022), there are straight figure type, pear shape figure type, apple shape figure type and hourglass figure type.

1. **Straight Figure Type:** This female body type has a much heavy bottom. A straight body type woman can wear any tube dress with a wide belt on it. The belt will define waist and will make a little hourglass look.



**Figure 1: Straight Figure type**  
Source: Dreamstime (2023)

2. **Pear-shape Figure Type:** Pear shaped body type women should wear clothes with designer tops and upper body accessories. In this way, they can draw more attention to their upper body. A-line, fit and flare or wrap dresses that highlight the natural waist and flow out below the hips should be chosen. The hips also can be slimmed by wearing dark-colored skirts that are wide-leg, boot cut or flared. A wide neckline such as boat and scoop necks tops that broaden the shoulders and emphasize the bust is more appropriate for this figure type.



**Figure 2: Pear-Shape Figure Type**  
Source: Dreamstime (2023)

3. **Apple-shape Figure Type:** This figure type is characterized by a top-heavy figure. Women in this category should dress in a way that people do not get much attention on the upper body part. Their clothes should have ruffles, chain or some other designs at the lower part so it will draw people's attention. Loose peplum, soft- shaped fabric shirt are suitable for this figure type. They should wear bright colors on the lower body and avoid excessive fabric around the midsection.



**Figure 3: Apple-Shape Figure Type**  
Source: Dreamstime (2023)

4. **Hourglass Figure Type:** Individuals with this figure type can wear anything simple and classic and it will look good on them. However, the best suggestions for them will be dresses fitted with a V-shape or round neckline; three-quarter sleeves, jeans with high and medium fit, and avoidance of too tight-fitting dresses.



**Figure 4: Hourglass Figure Type**  
Source: Dreamstime (2023)

### How Figure Types Affect Clothing Design

Garments can be worn to flatter appearance; thus, garments should be designed considering the elements of design such as lines, proportion, color and patterns to match the various figure types. The figure variations of people which come in a variety of sizes, shapes and proportions include:

- *Facial shape, for instance, oval, narrow, broad and wide:* Oval shape is seen as the 'perfect' shape. Hence people with this facial shape can wear any shapes as the neckline. Square face should use other neckline shapes to de-emphasize the roundness. While square facial shape need necklines such as round, scooped and 'V' shaped.
- *Neck length and width:* For instance, short, long, wide and narrow neck. Deep necklines look good on short neck figures. Strapped garments and off-shoulders are also good. High neckline cuts of clothes are most suitable for long neck figure.
- *Square shoulders figure:* This type of figure does not need shoulder pads and sleeve heads. V-necks, scoop-necks and collarless blouses hang well on this figure as they divert the attention towards the collarbones and chest.
- *Drooping shoulders figure:* This might be the result of a genetic condition or probably caused by lifestyles habits or by excess weight. It lacks a horizontal plane and slope downwards. The sleeve heads

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of the garment of such an individual needs to be raised and also a slight drop in armhole should be done in the sleeve pattern as it doesn't need as much ease for curving around the shoulder.

- *Large upper arms:* The armholes should be made deeper, the sleeves looser and sleeve length 2.5cm above elbow length. Three-quarter sleeves, long sleeves rolled up and kimono style blouses are more appropriate and fit.
- *Hunch back figure:* This figure type should avoid tight fitting tops, wear collars and add shoulder pads to their garments to help correct the defect. Portions on the figure which have grooves should be noted, located on the garments and padded to reduce visibility of the hunch. (Phyllis, 2014)
- *Hollow chest:* This is a posture problem characterized by a depression in the upper chest area above the bust line and often accompanies round back and shoulder problems. It causes clothing to fall in horizontal folds across the chest and causes the grain line to drop at the centre front chest. To correct this, the neckline gap should be smoothed out, V-necks tops or dresses fit well.

### Using Clothing to Hide Figure Faults

Good knowledge of the figure type and figure fault will assist an individual in the choice of garment that will cover up her figure defect and prevent it from being pronounced. Use of standard measurements in clothing construction gives the proportion on the parts measured and better indication of shape. Ezike and Bob (2019) assert that dresses sewn on standard measurements based on average body measurements for various sizes do not normally fit individuals with figure faults. Hence, there is the need to make necessary alterations to take care of the faults. Furthermore, balance and proportion are essential consideration in designing and constructing garments for women with figure problems.

Hence, every woman wants to appear attractive and presentable and the image a person creates depends partly on apparel. Thus, apart from consideration of comfort derived from dress and the easy movement it confers, women should also be conscious of the type of personality and life-style that a particular dress confers on the wearer. For example, women with tiny figures should prefer small patterns which suit their size and color. If women with tiny figure choose large prints, the dress would appear overpowering and exaggerated for their size. However, confident and sophisticated ladies do not mind how they appear in the eyes of onlookers.

According to Sanchez (2012), Trivedi (2015), Perfectly Basic (2023), correction of sloping or narrow shoulder, fuller arms, small breast, big breast/large bust, flabby belly, wide hip, flat buttocks, full thighs, short legs, long legs, unpleasant knees, short and plumb, tall and thin figure faults can be corrected thus:

1. **Overall Fatness:** If a person has excess fat across her body, it is necessary to avoid baggy dresses. Dress that is not tight to the body, but comfortable and well-fitting will make a huge difference (Sanchez, 2012). Garments with vertical stripes that tend to make the wearer thinner should be worn.
2. **Long Neck:** Though a long neck is beautiful and elegant, a person who wants to conceal it should make sure that the neckline of the dress does not show too much bare skin. Also, long necklaces and short haircuts should be avoided while high collars, short necklaces, scarves and long and full haircuts will correct the perceived defect (Sanchez, 2012).
3. **Short Neck:** People with short necks should avoid high collars, lots of jewellery, scarves and long haircuts.
4. **Broad Shoulders:** In the occasion that the shoulders of a person are broader than deemed appropriate, bat or raglan sleeves with deep and narrow V-necks should be chosen. This will break the broad shoulderline. Shoulder pads, epaulettes, puffed sleeves and scoop or shallow necklines should be avoided.
5. **Sloping or Narrow Shoulders:** For shoulders that appear narrower than normal, raglan sleeve and bat sleeves, bare shoulders and deep and narrow V-necks should be avoided. Adequate and just enough shoulder pads, epaulettes, puffed sleeves and a boat neck or shallow neckline should be used.
6. **Fuller Arms:** In a situation where there are fats in the arms such that they are flabby, sleeves chosen should not dare be too tight, but a little too loose. Puffed sleeves, cap sleeves, and sleeveless tops should be avoided, while tops with loose, wide sleeves and half or long sleeves should be chosen.

7. **Small Breast:** Although small breasts look very beautiful in a lot of garments, there are certain ways to give them a little more volume. Additional details should be added at the height of the bust are stunning. Ruffles, pockets, prints or sequins should be used while necklines that are too open should be avoided.
8. **Big Breast/Large Bust:** Open necklines, a deep V-neck and loosely draped tops will give air to the top part of the body, covering the obvious largeness of the breast. The use of wrap tops and cardigans will help divide the bust and this is what makes them appear less large. High necklines, details at the height of the breasts and skirts with a high waist are not desirable. Generally, dresses should be looser on the top and more form-fitting at the lower part of the body.
9. **Flabby Belly:** Tops with an accent on the side should be chosen for a striking closure. Pants and skirts with light pleats and tops that loosely fall along the curves will hide the love handles. Fabrics that cling to the body, tight tops and wide belts are less attractive. High-waist skirt with prints will cover the defect elegantly.
10. **Wide Hips:** Wide hips should be balanced out by putting the emphasis on the shoulders with epaulettes or shoulder pads. Pockets at hip height, hipsters, tight pants, skirts and pants with outstanding pleats and clingy fabrics should be avoided. Pants and skirts with a high waist line or flat pleats will help conceal the defects more. Trivedi (2015)
11. **Flat Buttocks:** More volume should be added by choosing peplum tops, catchy pockets, details at the back and heavy fabrics. Clingy fabrics, fitted skirts and pants optically will make the buttocks flatter.
12. **Full Buttocks:** Pants and skirts that loosely fall over the behind and a blazer that reaches to the hips will look on a person with full buttocks, as well as a dress that is form fitting at the waist but flowing under. Short jackets and shorts should be avoided. The goal should be how to keep the dress flowing and not baggy. A tighter fitting top will help show off the top part of the body and take attention away from the full buttocks.
13. **Full Thighs:** Pants with stretch will make a person with full thighs more comfortable. Emphasis should be put on the shoulders with epaulettes and shoulder pads, thus bringing the fuller half of the body into balance. Jackets and tops that stop just above or just under the widest point of the body should be chosen and unwanted accents should not be placed on the downsides. Lighter colors at the top and darker colors at the bottom are preferable.
14. **Short Legs:** Heels will give the body more length and enable upright walking. Pants should always reach a little over the shoes, and not too short, else the legs optically become shorter. Pants or skirt and shoes should be in the same color to ensure a flow.
15. **Long Legs:** Long cardigans, tunics, pants and skirts with a low waistline should be chosen. Pumps with fine heels will look beautiful with long and slim legs. However, a contrast in colors at the bottom will reduce perceived length of the legs.
16. **Unpleasant Knees:** Sailor trousers will help conceal dark, wrinkled or undesirable knees. Palazzo with a plain crop top and print are better alternatives than ordinary top and jeans (Trivedi, 2015).
17. **Short and plump figure:** People who are short and plump need to choose garments that give the illusion of height. Lots of vertical lines give an impression of height as well as slimness. A sheath dress which is long, straight and sleeveless with belt gives an illusion of height. Fabric patterns with vertical designs, straight cut dresses and one color suit with matching vest are good choices. Turtle necks are hence discouraged for this figure types.
18. **Tall and thin figure:** This is an ideal shape for wearing clothes by European standards. Gathered or pleated full skirts, flared or wide-legged trousers and horizontal stripes or seams should be chosen. Multicolored outfits with bright, large patterns are also good. Double breasted jackets and coats can be worn. The reduction of height works well if the top and blouse are of contrasting colors. Tight, high turtle necks, sleeveless styles and small accessories should be avoided to de-emphasize slimness.

#### Implications for Home Economics Education

In relation to Home Economics Education, the understanding of different figure types and faults call for the following:

1. Special patterns for different figure types and defects should be developed and taught to students in Home Economics classes.

2. Home Economics prepares learners for latter lives therefore its programmes should be designed in a manner that students think beyond getting scores for cognitive development, but also receive feedback for the way the knowledge of recommended clothing articles for different figure types and faults are demonstrated in their daily clothing choices.
3. Home Economists should engage female and male youths such as colleagues, family members and friends informally about the need to play down the defects that are easily identifiable with their figure type.
4. In order to improve the services and goods used by the family and for individuals to derive maximum satisfaction, Home Economics will impart and give opportunity to both boys and girls to make and adjust their own patterns to suit the figure types.
5. The study of figure types and faults will enlighten Home Economists on the advantages of taking accurate measurements and use of drafted patterns before cutting and sewing of dresses in order to suit the person's figure.
6. Good understanding of figure types and faults will expose individuals to the mistakes in taking darts, pleats and joining the balance marks in clothing construction.

### Conclusion

This paper concludes that every figure type is beautiful in its own right and has its own figure fault or defect. There is specific clothing for different female figure types which automatically covers the defects, hence clothing must be designed to either emphasize the figure details in order to enhance the appearance of the wearer, raise an individual's self-esteem and build the confidence. Dressing to suit one's body type is more important than trying to force an outfit to keep up with a trend. Hence, it is pointless to be worried or anxious over one's figure type or perceived defects. However, observed faults can be corrected. Also, the importation of foreign clothing especially second hand clothes has significant effect on the choice of female clothing without considering if the clothing article actually fits their figure types. Clothing should be made to cover figure defects and the road to actualizing this will start with determined effort of both the garment designer and the consumer to sew and wear the appropriate garment for a figure type. It is therefore pertinent for females to either appreciate their figure type or correct the perceived defects through the right choice of clothing.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are given to assist female youths in clothing selection:

1. Female youths should have a good knowledge of their figure type and defect and should endeavor to select outfits that suit their figure types.
2. Nigerian female youths should appreciate their figure types and have a good knowledge of figure faults.
3. Informed clothing choice should be used to correct perceived faults in a figure type instead of plastic surgeries and use of mercury-dense makeovers
4. Female youths with pronounced figure defect should learn to sew their own clothes and avoid imitating styles seen on other figure types.

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