

## **2015 UGA Library Undergraduate Research Award**

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I started my CURO research with Susan Tanner in the fall of 2014. Since childhood growth is imperative to current and future health outcomes, I was interested in exploring how parents evaluate the growth and size of their infants. My primary objective was to conduct a systematic literature review addressing how clothing size may be a tool that parents use to gauge the development of their infants. Through initial database searches in GALILEO and GIL, I quickly learned that no anthropological research has been specifically devoted to studying the relationship between parents' perceptions of growth and children's clothing sizes. Google Scholar proved unproductive, producing too many results and none that pertained to my research question. I therefore worked to develop a broad understanding of the literature indirectly related to my topic. I adopted a multidisciplinary approach that encompassed articles from the medical field, social sciences, and the garment industry. I also read two medical anthropology books to capture the broader framework of how body size relates to the social environment. I used multiple search engines, especially GALILEO and Web of Science, as well as my mentor's recommendations, to collect these background articles and books. I learned how to use Endnote and started compiling my references in an easy and accessible format.

In late September, I met with Caroline Barratt, Reference and Instruction Librarian. We worked through keyword searches in GALILEO that were slightly more effective, producing one article that—for the first time—presented evidence that mothers use clothing size to gauge the growth of their children. Mothers in the study by

Reifsnider et al. (2000) expressed that their children's ages could be correlated to manufacturer's recommended sizes, and parents felt proud when buying larger sizes for their children. I used the references in this paper as a platform in locating further sources for my research. Using such tools as the "Cited In" feature on Web of Science was the most effective way to gather relevant articles. Nonetheless, all but four articles I encountered made no mention of clothing size as a mechanism by which parents judged the growth of their children. Previous research has simply not addressed clothing as a viable framework for understanding child growth.

I knew very little about the garment industry when I began the literature review. Since the medical and social sciences have largely avoided the topic of clothing, I turned to industry-specific documents. I read reports on sizing systems, peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and periodicals. These came from many sources—in print at the UGA libraries, online, and through inter-library loans. Many of the articles became irrelevant as my topic developed, and a vast majority of the articles focused on adult women. Little attention was given to clothing sizes for children. I also contacted faculty at UGA's College of Family and Consumer Sciences. Unfortunately they had no leads for me to pursue. I was curious to know, if parents do in fact use clothing to judge the growth of their children, are the clothing sizes standardized? Do age-specific labels and their associated sizing parameters match the height and weight standards set by the World Health Organization?

Based on the preliminary research, it was apparent that more research must be done to explore parents' perceptions of infant size and growth trajectories, particularly as they are related to clothing size. In response, I decided to conduct my own investigations

into clothing size. First, I turned to diapers. Since the topic of diapers was similarly absent from scholarly publications, I drew data from company websites. Huggies® and Pampers®, the two leading diaper brands, assign a weight range to each product label. Both Huggies® and Pampers® market their products internationally and have country-specific websites. In directing my research toward the U.S. Latino population, I selected the United States, Panama, and Mexico for comparison. I analyzed how products are labeled, the quantity of products available in each country, and the specific weight ranges that each product is designed to fit. It was interesting to graph these ranges and see how they compared between countries.

I next addressed how closely clothing manufacturers follow WHO and CDC growth charts when assigning age labels to garments. I gathered data from the sizing charts of three infant clothing brands: Carter's®, Circo®, and Cherokee®. Each age label is linked with a specific range of weight and height values, which I plotted alongside data that I had gathered from WHO and CDC weight-for-age and stature-for-age tables. These graphs became a great tool in illustrating the differences in body specification standards between the garment industry and the medical profession.

Using data from diapers and clothing added a unique dynamic to my research. I had discovered that diapers and children's clothing size labels are not standardized—from brand to brand or country to country—and this led me to wonder how parents may recognize or deal with sizing variations. During the literature review, I learned that Latino parents in the United States are more than twice as likely as the average consumer to purchase clothing in the birth-to-preschool market. Since many also have lasting connections abroad and may exchange clothing with relatives, this population can offer a

unique perspective on the methods of evaluating childhood growth. I am currently collecting data through qualitative interviews in the Athens, Georgia immigrant community. I will explore how Latino immigrant parents judge the growth of their children, what level of importance they actually place on growth and size, and to what extent parents use clothing size labels—in diapers and in infant garments—to evaluate the growth of their children. It is exciting to be introducing a new topic into anthropological literature. I plan to publish this research and continue with research in graduate school next year. Understanding infant clothing size and its relation to perceived growth may be important in assessing actual growth trajectories, underweight status, and obesity.

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