Is the Body Positive Movement too narrow?: Extra large insights into plus size men and clothing in the context of the Body Positive Movement

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Significance of Plus Size Male Consumers and the Body Positive Movement

Plus size men constitute approximately 70% of the U.S. population and as of 2018 the male plus size market had grown to over \$1 billion in revenue (Howland, 2019; IBIS World, 2019). According to the CDC (2019), the average man in the United States is 5'9" tall, weighs approximately 200 pounds and has a 40 inch waist, placing him in the plus size or big and tall category of apparel. As a response to the strict appearance norms perpetuated by the media and fashion industry, the Body Positive Movement (BPM) developed as social campaign to include and celebrate all types of bodies in advertising and media (Dastagir, 2017; "The body positive," 2019). The BPM has been gaining momentum in popular culture and body positive activists (BPAs) have been campaigning for the inclusion of more diverse female body types in advertising and media as well as the inclusion of apparel that caters to the needs of more diverse female bodies (Howland, 2019; Lubitz, 2017). As a result of this campaign, many retailers have either extended sizes or developed plus size lines to cater to this female consumer. Despite progress made for female body types, many consumers, fashion models and BPAs wonder why men have not been included in the BPM (Rebolini, 2017). Current research on the plus size market and BPM have almost solely focused on female bodies and the impact of the BPM on female representation in media and fashion. The current research has largely left out the male demographic and their experiences with the BPM and apparel, even though they represent a significant share of the population and plus size market (Howland, 2019).

Exploring the perceptions of male plus size consumers is timely because the insights provided by participants can provide a needed understanding of the experience of plus size male consumers in the context of the recent BPM, and how the BPM may affect their shopping experience and attitude toward their own appearance. Additionally, there have been significant shifts in gender norms over the last several decades coupled with a more intense focus on the physical appearance of men (Bordo, 1999; Pope et al., 2000). The steady increase in body image related mental health issues warrants an exploration of the dominant cultural narrative on physical appearance, including the BPM and its possible influence on body image and how men perceive the styles and fit of plus size clothing (Dastagir, 2017; Pope et al., 2000).

Analysis and Synthesis of Relevant Facts, Data, and Literature

The following section outlines the current research regarding the lack of inclusion of men in the BPM, men's body image issues and the general shopping experience of male consumers. The analysis demonstrates a gap in the research addressing men's perceptions of the BPM and its effect on their appearance and shopping experience, as studies have indicated the significance it already has on the shopping experience for women and how they view their bodies as a result of the BPM (Dastagir, 2017; Howland, 2019).

Exclusion of Men from the Body Positive Movement

Men experience many of the same pressures to conform to physical appearance standards, and these standards are reflected most notably in mainstream advertising and fashion (Bordo, 1999). The BPMs campaigns to change the strict standards found in mainstream advertising and media are virtually devoid of male representation as the focus has been on including more diverse female body types in

media and fashion (Lawler, 2019). The Body Positive Organization's website shows only two men on a board of eight women directors, indicating a lack of male involvement in the leadership of the BPM, as well ("The body positive," 2019).

Body Image Concerns Among Men

The last several decades have seen a spike in the numbers of men suffering from body image related mental disturbance (Goldman et al., 2018). It is estimated that approximately 10 million men will suffer from an eating disorder related to poor body image in their lifetime ("Eating disorders in men and boys," 2019). Even as practitioners and educators deal with the increasing amount of body image related issues men experience because of the U.S.' appearance-focused culture, men have been largely excluded from campaigns to increase body acceptance and improve body image, such as the BPM (Lorenzen et al., 2004). Many men suffer from some of the same mental health issues due to poor body image and feelings about one's appearance as women, yet there are still very few popular efforts to increase body positivity among men and little scholarly research investigating body image and appearance concerns as they may relate to body positivity campaigns (Lawler, 2019).

Overall Shopping Experience of Male Consumers

Poor clothing fit accounts for the majority of consumer returns to retailers (Chattaraman et al., 2013). Sindicich and Black's (2011) study on fit and sizing of business apparel, indicate as many as 40% of men have issues with size and fit. Additionally, some apparel companies have noted that sizes small through extra large only fit approximately 15% of their target consumers (Lutz, 2013). Pattern grading and sizing systems are outdated and do not accurately represent the size and shape of today's males (Ketrion, 2016; Schofield & LaBat, 2005). Many male consumers are frustrated with the lack of size offerings and are left wondering why women's sizes have become more inclusive of a range of body sizes, while men's sizes are not as inclusive (Lawler, 2019; Lubitz, 2019). This has also left many consumers wondering when the BPM will modify its campaigns to include men as worthy of both representation in media and size representation in fashion (Rebolini, 2017).

Proposal for Future Action

Research is needed to understand plus size men's perceptions of the BPM and its effect on their appearance and apparel shopping experience. Insight is needed into the growing issues for men regarding appearance, body image and how media and advertisements influence one's evaluation of their physical appearance. Specifically, the awareness of plus size men's apparel shopping experiences and how those experiences are shaped by appearance norms and the current BPM. A research study should be carried out to answer the following questions:

1. What is the experience of men who shop plus size clothing lines? Specifically, what are the fit concerns and fit and style preferences of male consumers who shop plus size clothing?
2. How do plus size men view the Body Positivity Movement?

The proposed study should use a grounded theory approach utilizing semi-structured interviews. Because the research questions are unexplored, this approach is best to elicit participant perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon in question as well as allow for the building of new theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, one-on-one in-depth interviews allows for the exchange of dialogue between the researcher and participant, enabling additional questions to be explored by both researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2014).

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