

Exploring the Relationship between Self-esteem and Wearing Plus-size Apparel

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It is estimated that 70 percent of adult females in the US wear apparel sized 14 or larger, which is considered plus-size by the apparel industry (Murray, 2013). Plus-size clothing is designed for individuals whose girth measurements are greater than average for their height (Keiser & Garner, 2012) and is frequently associated with the person being obese. The media often portrays overweight individuals negatively (Heuer, McClure & Puhl, 2011) and promotes the cultural ideal of thinness. Not surprisingly, apparel size has been shown to influence ones self-esteem and be related to body dissatisfaction in some young women (Reddy & Burns, 2011). However, few studies to date assessed self-esteem among plus-size women across ethnicity. Moreover, limited academic research has implemented quantitative methods in tandem with qualitative methods to gain knowledge about plus-size consumers. Thus, this study fills a gap within the current literature.

This mixed-methods study used Rosenberg's 10-item self-esteem scale to explore the relationship between being a plus-size woman and self-esteem among African-American, Caucasian, and Latina women. Thirty-one women completed in-depth interviews, a 35 item survey, and received a 3D body scan. ANOVA and Chi-square were used to examine quantitative data. To supplement the quantitative data, qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and examined for patterns and inferences.

Significant differences regarding self-esteem and being a plus-size woman were observed among ethnicity, income, education, relationship status, and whether or not the participant had children. Specifically, African-American participants communicated high self-esteem as a plus-size woman in comparison to Caucasian women. Participants in the middle-income range, those with only a high-school education, divorced women, and those with no children, were found to be the least satisfied with being considered plus-size. In-depth interviews revealed ethnicity and its associated cultural values and have a significant impact on how a plus-size woman views herself. Additionally, since a larger majority of the participants were dissatisfied with current plus-size apparel offerings, participants provided advice to the apparel industry regarding styles, prints, colors, and cut of plus-size apparel currently on the market. They suggested improvements for apparel fit, evaluated the marketing and apparel offered from various national

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retailers, and highlighted the ethnic and cultural differences which need to be considered when marketing plus-size apparel.

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