

Body appreciation: an assessment of fashion innovativeness, fashion enjoyment, and psychological fashion risk among plus-size Gwynnie Bee members

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*Introduction.* Recently, there has been a growing appeal among consumers of apparel subscription services, commonly referred to as ‘*subscription boxes*’. According to recent surveys, 15 percent of consumers have ordered subscription boxes through apparel subscription websites, while 14 percent reported not ordering a subscription box yet, but planning to in the near future (Young, 2017). While the majority of the apparel subscription websites target consumers who wear mainstream sizes, the apparel subscription website Gwynnie Bee features clothing for plus-size consumers up to U.S. size 32 (“Gwynnie Bee: Size Charts,” 2019). The website, thus, allows plus-size women to try fashion styles and brands that might not otherwise be available to them. Additionally, Gwynnie Bee features a blog section on their website called “Member Moments” that allows members to post pictures of outfits they’ve worn and brands they love, thereby encouraging fellow plus-size women to explore fashion-forward items (“Gwynnie Bee: Member Moments,” 2019). Given these offerings from Gwynnie Bee to plus-size women, becoming a member of this apparel subscription website may positively impact their body appreciation. This study assesses the impact of body appreciation in relationship to plus-size Gwynnie Bee members. In addition, the variables of fashion innovativeness, fashion enjoyment, and psychological fashion risk will be assessed among members of Gwynnie Bee.

*Literature Review and Hypotheses.* Body appreciation is characterized as a positive body image defined by accepting, favorably evaluating, and caring for the body, while also rejecting narrowly-defined cultural ideals as the only definition of beauty (Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005). In a study by Tylka et al. (2015), college women from the United States reported that they appreciated the features of their body while rejecting the flaws that were commonly highlighted by society. Society was designed to promote an *ideal* body image that alters the individuals' self-esteem and body image perception and impact their sense of fashion. In this study, fashion innovativeness, fashion enjoyment, and psychological fashion risk were examined given their relation to self-image. Fashion innovativeness refers to an elevated level of fashion consciousness, a strong interest in fashion and trends, and frequency in shopping (Cho & Workman, 2011). Fashion innovativeness is a significant factor in determining a consumer’s intention to adopt a new fashion trend or concept (Rahman et al., 2014). Fashion enjoyment refers to the pleasure, fun, and satisfaction gained from performing a certain behavior (Teo et al., 1999). Lang (2018) determined perceived enjoyment as one of the motivations for

consumers to rent clothing. Psychological risk refers to potential harm or damage to one's self-image (Dowling & Staelin, 1994). Kang and Kim (2013) found a significant negative influence of perceived psychological risk on attitude toward the consumption of environmentally sustainable apparel, while Lang (2018) found similar results when applying perceived psychological risk to consumers renting clothing. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed for this study:

H1: Gwynnie Bee (GB) positively impacts the body appreciation of its members.

H2: Fashion innovativeness will differ among high body appreciation GB members and low body appreciation GB members.

H3: Fashion enjoyment will differ among high body appreciation GB members and low body appreciation GB members.

H4: Psychological fashion risk will differ among high body appreciation GB members and low body appreciation GB members.

*Methods.* Data for this study were collected using an online consumer panel within the USA. The surveys were distributed through an online Qualtrics survey. A total of 168 surveys were completed. As screening criteria, respondents had to have been, past or present, a member of the Gwynnie Bee subscription website to participate in the study. Of the 168 consumer panelists, 57 were trial members and 111 were current or past members. Given the community orientation of Gwynnie Bee, the researchers chose to assess solely current or past members who experienced membership beyond a one-month trial. The majority of the subjects were females (99%). Sixty-nine percent were Caucasian, 17% were African-American, 6% were Hispanic, and 8% were other. Forty-six percent were U.S. size 14-16, 20% were U.S. size 18-20, 14% were U.S. Size 22-24, 12% were U.S. size 26 and above, and 9% were U.S. size 10-12. Existing scales from previous studies were adopted to measure body appreciation (Tylka et al., 2015), fashion innovativeness (Park et al., 2007), fashion enjoyment (Lang, 2018) and psychological fashion risk (Lang, 2018). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale.

*Results.* Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was conducted on BA, FI, FE and PFR questions to examine acceptable factor loading, reliability, and validity (Baird, 1987). H1 was analyzed by using a t-test by comparing their perspective of body appreciation (BA) among 111 current and past members of GB and 57 trial members of GB. There was a statistically significant difference between body appreciation in the context of being a current or past member of Gwynnie Bee ( $t = -1.68$ ,  $df = 103$ ,  $p < 0.0414$ ). Current and past members of GB ( $n = 111$ ,  $mean = 35.82$ ,  $s = 5.92$ ) possessed a higher BA score than trial members of GB ( $n = 57$ ,  $mean = 34.05$ ,  $s = 6.64$ ) While H1 was supported and exhibited positive BA scores for members, past literature indicates plus-size often possessing lower BA. Thus, to further assess, high and low body appreciation, GB member groups were created based on top 40 percentile and bottom 40 percentile on the body appreciation scale (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001). To

compare high and low groups, an independent t-test was performed using High and Low groups as the grouping variable, and fashion innovativeness, fashion enjoyment, and psychological fashion risk as the dependent variables. H2 confirmed no statistically significant difference between high body appreciation and low body appreciation groups in fashion innovativeness (FI) ( $t = -1.06$ ,  $df = 84.81$ ,  $p < 0.3172$ ). However, H3 proved a statistically significant difference between high body appreciation and low body appreciation groups in fashion enjoyment (FE) ( $t = -4.088$ ,  $df = 92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with the high BA group scoring higher in fashion enjoyment. H4 demonstrated a statistically significant difference between high body appreciation and low body appreciation groups in psychological fashion risk (PFR) behavior ( $t = 3.5568$ ,  $df = 92$ ,  $p < 0.0006$ ), with the low BA group scoring higher in PFR.

*Discussion and Implications.* Through utilizing a body appreciation scale, the findings of this study suggest that Gwynnie Bee (GB) positively impacts members' body perceptions. Fashion enjoyment and psychological fashion risk variables differed among members who expressed high body appreciation compared to those with low body appreciation. The findings offer new insights for plus-size apparel subscription websites to increase engagement from consumers. For instance, given the high level of fashion enjoyment among high body appreciation GB members, GB may want to include more experiential shopping activities for members, as data shows that being a member of GB provides clear satisfaction and a fun element of shopping for plus-size women. This is especially noteworthy since previous studies have noted negative experiences such as finding the proper fit for plus-size women when shopping for apparel (Kind and Hathcote, 2000). In order to appeal to plus-size consumers with low body appreciation, GB may offer customer service chat lines to help guide consumers to appropriate choices to increase fashion enjoyment. To combat the higher perceived risk of low body appreciation members, GB could offer garment suggestions based on member's shopping history to pair with existing pieces they have already purchased. This, in turn, would decrease their perceived fashion risk. The findings provide implications for other apparel subscription websites who want to venture into the plus-size market or expand their current plus-size offerings, as they indeed can learn from GB's online model.

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