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Exploring challenges encountered by plus size women in the selection of lingerie: A comprehensive study

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Abstract

This research delves into the difficulties faced by plus-size women with a heavy bust when it comes to selecting lingerie, to offer a thorough understanding of the intricacies related to this aspect of intimate apparel. Given the pivotal role that lingerie plays in boosting confidence, this study investigates the challenges that impede a smooth lingerie shopping experience for individuals of plus-size proportions. Utilizing a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as surveys, interviews, and market analysis, the research aims to uncover the distinct concerns, preferences, and experiences of plus-size women with a heavy bust in their quest for suitable lingerie. The outcomes aspire to provide valuable insights for the fashion industry, encouraging improved accommodation of diverse body sizes and ultimately fostering more inclusive and positive experiences for plus-size individuals with a heavy bust in the lingerie market.

Keywords: Heavy bust, plus size women, inclusive fashion, intimate apparel

Introduction

The selection of lingerie is a personal and empowering journey that shapes individuals' perceptions of self-confidence and body image. Yet, for women with heavy bust sizes, this experience is frequently marked by unique challenges that impact both the shopping process and the available options. Intimate designs emphasize women's bodies in a way that aligns with traditional ideas of what it means to be feminine throughout history^[7].

Lingerie holds a unique position in the realm of fashion, transcending its utilitarian purpose to become a symbol of self-expression and self-love. Despite this, the fashion industry has historically struggled to accommodate the diverse body shapes and sizes of its consumers, particularly evident in the limited options available for plus-size individuals. As we embark on this exploration, it becomes crucial to understand the specific obstacles faced by plus-size women in their quest for lingerie that not only fits comfortably but also celebrates their bodies^[3].

Plus-size busts can vary widely among individuals, and it's important to recognize the diversity of body shapes within the plus-size community. The term "plus-size bust" refers to the bust size of individuals who wear plus-size clothing. The bust size is a measurement around the chest at the fullest part, typically over the nipples.

Some plus-size individuals may have a fuller bust, while others may have a smaller bust size. Plus-size clothing is designed to accommodate a range of body shapes and sizes, providing options that are both comfortable and stylish. Niche markets, which are specific markets where customers have something special in common often face extra challenges with clothing fit^[11]. The plus-size market, for example, is a group where people always worry about finding clothes that fit well^[2, 10].

Fashion brands specializing in plus-size clothing frequently take into account not only bust size but also other measurements when crafting designs. This inclusive approach to sizing represents a positive stride toward fostering body positivity and ensuring that individuals of all sizes can access a varied selection of clothing options, promoting confidence and comfort. The fit of clothing is influenced by a person's natural body shape, and apparel designers must grasp the various physical distinctions among body shapes to create well-fitting garments^[4, 5, 16].

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Plus size refers to clothing sizes tailored for individuals whose bodies deviate from the conventional sizing standards. While the precise definition may vary across regions and fashion brands, plus-size typically commences at a size 14 or 16 in the United States. In other parts of the world, different sizing conventions might be employed to classify plus-size clothing ^[1].

Through the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including surveys, interviews, and market analysis, this study aims to unveil the intricate experiences, preferences, and challenges faced by plus-size women with heavy busts in the process of selecting lingerie. The insights gleaned from this research will not only enrich the existing body of knowledge but also lay the groundwork for instigating positive changes within the lingerie industry.

Anthropometry of plus size women

Plus-size women, similar to individuals of any size, encompass a range of body types, and there is no universal description that fits all. Plus-size women may exhibit various body shapes, including apple, pear, hourglass, or rectangle. These shapes delineate how weight is distributed around the body. The distribution of fat varies among individuals, influencing areas such as the abdomen, hips, thighs, and arms. Plus-size women may exhibit a fuller figure, with curves manifesting in different locations. Bust size can significantly differ among plus-size women. Some may have a fuller bust, while others may have a smaller bust size. The waist-to-hip ratio may differ, contributing to variations in body proportions. Some plus-size women may possess a more defined waist, while others may display a more gradual curve. Plus-size women, similar to individuals of any size, possess arms and legs with diverse lengths and shapes ^[6]. Plus-size women, akin to any other group, exhibit varying heights, which can also affect body proportions. The elasticity of skin and tissues can differ, influencing how the body responds to fluctuations in weight.

Heavy Bust Size

When characterizing someone as having a fuller bust, it typically indicates a larger breast size, influenced by factors such as genetics, hormonal changes, weight fluctuations, and age. For those with a significant bust, it is crucial to find well-fitting bras and lingerie that provide ample support. Plus-size bras are specifically designed to cater to larger bust sizes, incorporating features like wider bands, supportive underwires, and broader shoulder straps to distribute weight evenly and enhance comfort. The anatomy of a fuller bust, akin to any other body part, exhibits considerable variation among individuals, emphasizing the significance of embracing one's unique body shape for overall confidence and well-being ^[8].

Women with fuller busts may or may not fall into the plus-size category, as body proportions vary among individuals. Plus-size classification is more about overall body measurements.

Challenges in lingerie by heavy bust size women

The survey was done with 90 respondents of a plus size category. The survey revealed that women with a heavy bust size encounter numerous challenges when it comes to discovering and wearing lingerie. Some prevalent issues include:

Limited Size Range and Stylish Options: Many lingerie brands and stores provide a restricted range of sizes, posing a

challenge for heavy-bust-size women to find properly fitting options. Nearly 95% of heavy-bust size women note that available lingerie options lack designs or attractiveness compared to smaller sizes. The absence of stylish choices can impact their confidence and perceived attractiveness. This limitation can result in feelings of exclusion and frustration.

Poor Fit: Approximately 80% of heavy-bust plus-size women find it challenging to obtain well-fitting lingerie due to variations in body shapes and proportions. Ill-fitting lingerie may lead to discomfort, chafing, and potential health issues.

Lack of Support: Heavy-bust plus-size women often struggle to find lingerie that offers sufficient support for their bust and overall body. Properly supportive bras are essential for comfort and maintaining good posture, a concern faced by around 83% of surveyed women.

High Costs: About 87% of women express the view that plus-size lingerie is not budget-friendly, being slightly more expensive than standard sizes. This pricing challenge makes it harder for budget-conscious women to find suitable options.

Body Image Concerns: Unrealistic beauty standards in society can negatively impact the body image of heavy-bust plus-size women. Limited representation in the media and advertising may contribute to feelings of shame or inadequacy.

Limited Availability in Physical Stores and Lack of Inclusivity: Despite improved online access, many physical stores lack a diverse range of sizes, limiting options for plus-size women to try on items in person. Women with heavy busts often feel excluded and underrepresented in lingerie advertisements and promotions, which predominantly feature smaller body sizes.

Inconsistent Sizing Standards: Sizing discrepancies between brands and manufacturers lead to confusion and difficulty in finding the right size for individual body types.

According to the survey it was found that heavy bust size women face several challenges when it comes to finding and wearing lingerie. Some of the common problems include:

Limited size variety: Numerous lingerie brands and stores frequently present a limited array of sizes, posing challenges for women with heavy busts to find options that suit them appropriately. This limitation can evoke feelings of exclusion and frustration.

Lack of fashionable choices: Nearly 95% of women with heavy bust sizes express dissatisfaction with the available lingerie options, finding them lacking in fashion and attractiveness compared to those offered in smaller sizes. This dearth of stylish choices can diminish their confidence and sense of attractiveness.

Inadequate fit: Approximately 80% of plus-size women with heavy busts encounter difficulties in finding well-fitting lingerie due to variations in body shapes and proportions. Ill-fitting lingerie may result in discomfort, chafing, and even potential health issues.

Insufficient support: Women with heavy busts often face challenges in locating lingerie that offers adequate support for both their bust and body. Properly supportive bras are essential for comfort and maintaining good posture, with around 83% of women reporting this issue during the survey.

High Costs: About 87% of women expressed the view that lingerie is not budget-friendly. Heavy-bust plus-size lingerie tends to be slightly pricier than standard sizes, posing challenges for budget-conscious women in finding suitable options.

Body image anxieties: Unrealistic beauty standards in society can adversely affect the body image of women with heavy busts in plus sizes. The limited representation of diverse body

types in the media and advertising may have intensified this problem, fostering a sense of shame or inadequacy ^[14].

Limited availability in physical stores: Although online shopping has enhanced accessibility to plus-size lingerie for women with heavy busts, numerous physical stores still lack a diverse array of sizes. This limitation leaves plus-size women with fewer opportunities to try on items in person ^[9].

Lack of inclusivity in marketing and representation: The majority of women with heavy busts perceive that many lingerie advertisements and promotions predominantly showcase models with smaller body sizes. This further intensifies the sense of exclusion and underrepresentation of plus-size women with heavy busts ^[15].

Inconsistent sizing standards: Sizing standards can vary significantly between different brands and manufacturers, resulting in confusion and difficulty in finding the right size for individual body types.

Physical implications and psychological effects

The consequences on both physical well-being and psychological state due to poorly fitting lingerie can indeed exert a substantial influence on an individual's overall wellness. For instance, Jantzen, in her research ^[10], found that bras are purchased not only to reflect women's social and psychological identity but also to enhance physical comfort and pleasure. While this idea remains relevant, modern young women prioritize comfort more than ever before. This suggests that while women's choices of bras still reflect their social and psychological identity, the primary purpose of purchasing bras is no longer strictly tied to fulfilling a specific societal expectation.

Physical Implications: Ill-fitting bras or underwear can cause discomfort, irritation, and even pain. Straps that dig into the shoulders, underwires that press into the skin, or bands that are too tight can lead to physical discomfort. Poorly fitting lingerie can cause chafing and skin irritation, especially in areas where the fabric rubs against the skin ^[13]. Insufficient support from bras may contribute to pain in the breasts and back, impacting posture and overall comfort. Constrictive lingerie can impede blood circulation, potentially resulting in problems such as numbness and tingling. Extremely tight shapewear has the potential to compress the torso, affecting breathing and causing discomfort.

Psychological Effects: Improperly fitting lingerie has the potential to worsen concerns related to negative body image, as individuals may feel that their bodies lack adequate support or enhancement. Persistent discomfort and dissatisfaction with lingerie can contribute to diminished self-esteem and reduced body confidence. Difficulty in finding well-fitting lingerie may curtail fashion choices, fostering a sense of exclusion from certain styles or trends. Unpleasant encounters with ill-fitting lingerie can potentially contribute to social anxiety, particularly in intimate or social situations where appearance and comfort hold significance. Discomfort and dissatisfaction with lingerie can influence one's readiness to participate in intimate activities, potentially affecting personal relationships. The limited availability of fuller-figure lingerie may evoke feelings of stigmatization and discrimination, reinforcing societal beauty standards ^[16].

However, plus-size bra consumers are not willing to forgo new trends. They seek a fashionable appearance, with innovative fabrics like molded cups. Middle-aged women, whether of average or plus size, require proper support for their posture and breast health ^[7]. A well-fitted plus-size bra offers comfort and support, improving shape, especially for

sagging due to aging ligaments ^[8].

Conclusion

Meeting the needs of individuals with a heavy bust requires the careful selection of well-fitting bras and lingerie that provide substantial support. Tailored specifically for larger bust sizes, plus-size bras should feature essential elements such as wider bands, supportive underwires, and broader shoulder straps to ensure a balanced weight distribution for heightened comfort. The diverse anatomy of a heavy bust underscores the significance of embracing one's unique body shape, contributing to overall confidence and well-being.

To effectively address these considerations, the lingerie industry must embrace a more inclusive approach. This involves expanding both size and style offerings to cater to the varied needs and preferences of plus-size women. Brands should actively celebrate a spectrum of body shapes and sizes in their marketing initiatives and develop lingerie collections that seamlessly marry fashion and comfort for all customers. Furthermore, the provision of accurate size charts and personalized fitting assistance holds the potential to greatly improve the overall shopping experience for plus-size women.

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