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“The new costumes of odd sizes:” Plus sized women’s fashions, 1910-1929

by

Carmen Nicole Keist

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Apparel, Merchandising, and Design

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through this difficult and challenging process, I have learned so much about myself. I will always be appreciative and grateful for this experience. I would first like to thank my husband, Nicholas Keist. Graduate school would not have been possible without him. He has provided much support when no one else could and gave me strength when writing was almost unbearable. I would also like to thank my parents, Bill and Cheryl Fike, who have done more than words can ever express. Thanks to the rest of my family as well!

Millions of "thank-yous" are in order for Sara Marcketti, my major professor. She has helped me in so many ways over the past four years, both personally and professionally. I will be eternally grateful for her expertise and believing in me. I would like to individually thank my committee members: Amy Bix, Mary Lynn Damhorst, Charles Dobbs, and Linda Niehm. Amy, thank you for always being supportive and thoughtful. I hope to have a collection of books in my office that compares to yours someday. Mary Lynn, thank you for listening to my rambling and providing sound instruction. Linda, you have no idea how much support and nurturing you provided to my soul during my first semester at Iowa State University during your merchandising course. I think so fondly of you! And Charles, thank you for understanding who I am and how I work (ENFP!). Your advice helped me become more comfortable and confident with whom I am as a professional.

Many thanks to my friends through this process for listening: Jan Fitzpatrick, Sara Kadolph, Victoria Van Voorhis, LouAnn Doyle, Lindsey Anders, Ashley Ratute, Erica White, Ja-young Hwang, Dana Tuttle, Connor Walters, and so many others.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mentor, Dr. Tricia Widner Johnson, who passed on to a better place summer 2011. She was my biggest fan and cheerleader. Not a day goes by

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that I don't think of her and wish that I could share with her my triumphs and tribulations. I know that she is looking down, smiling, and is proud of her "first doctoral baby."

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Thinness has not always been seen as the "ideal" feminine figure type. At various points in United States and European history thinness was discouraged. Excess weight was considered a sign of health and prosperity. However, in a very short period, during the turn of the twentieth century, negative conceptions of weight gain, obesity, and concern with weight loss began in earnest. The period, 1910 to 1920 was bracketed between Victorian beliefs that weight loss was neither attractive nor healthy in growing girls and the contrasting 1920s media portrayal of the slim body as the ideal feminine silhouette. The percentage of larger women grew during the early twentieth century, and it was estimated that by 1916 there were over 13 million women, or 12.7% of the total population in the United States was considered overweight or "stout."[1] The term "stout" indicated a figure (often of matronly appearance), with generous bust, back and hip curves that decidedly did not fit in with fashion's demands for the slim figure.[2]

The paradigm shift of viewing excess weight as ideal to deviant was the result of many factors of turn of twentieth century life. Some of these reasons included a sedentary life style created by luxuries such as the automobile along with a changing food industry and a change in American working and living conditions. According to historian Rob Schorman, "The consolidation of industrial capitalism, and the attendant changes in communications, transportation, consumption, urbanization, and demographics, jolted cultural norms" created a

[1] This was particularly true for the middle class in America. Rogan Kersh and James Morone, "How the Personal Becomes Political: Prohibitions, Public Health, and Obesity," *Studies in American Political Development* 16 (2002): 162-175; Amanda M. Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal: The Evolution of the Height and Weight Table in the United States, 1836-1943," *Social Science History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 273-296; Peter N. Stearns, *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). Joan J. Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Tamara D. Fangman et al., "Promoting Female Weight Management in 1920s Print Media: An Analysis of Ladies' Home Journal and Vogue Magazines," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 32 (2004): 213-253. Kerry Segrave, *Obesity in America 1850-1939* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008); the percentage 12.7% was determined by dividing 13,000,000 by total the U.S. population in 1916 of 101,961,000. http://www.demographia.com/db-uspop1900.htm

[2] The medical field was largely silent on the ramifications of excess weight during this period. "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1917, 72.

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unique life for Americans in the 1910s and 1920s.[3] In addition to working outside of the home, a large population of women, regardless of their economic status, purchased ready-to-wear instead of home sewn clothing.[4]

This study explored plus sized women's fashions from 1910 to 1929 because little attention has been paid to this topic in scholarly articles and fashion history books. The year 1910 was selected as a start date because the ready-to-wear industry was newly established and the ideal body shape began to shift. The year 1929 marked the end of the Jazz Age with the Stock Market Crash and end of an unique fashion era.

The plus sized population has often been marginalized and ignored. This topic is important because like then, today's America remains obsessed with weight and appearance. Americans spent nearly $40 billion dollars annually on the diet industry in the early 2000s. In the past 20 years, as the number of overweight and obese individual's has increased, there have been greater attempts at acceptance of overweight individuals.[5] The results of this study will be particularly important in the teaching of fashion history, as the majority of printed sources focus on the average to slim Anglo-Saxon person, which was not the full reality during the 1910s to 1920s.

Who Was The Stout Woman?

During the period of 1910 to 1929, the term "stout" indicated an (often matronly appearance) with generous bust, back and hip curves that did not fit with fashion's demands of the ideal stylish figure. Albert Malsin, husband of Lane Bryant's founder Lena Bryant,

[3] Rob Schorman, "The Truth About Good Goods: Clothing, Advertising, and the Representation of Culture Values at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *American Studies* 37 no. 1 (1996): 23-49: 28.
[4] Jean L. Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge" Woman's Wardrobe Management: 1880-1930," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 20 no. 33 (2002): 33-44, 35.
[5] Kersh and Morone, "How the Personal Becomes Political," 168; It's estimated that the population of overweight Americans in 2009 was 192,788,950; http://www.webmd.com/diet/news/20100210/percentage-of-overweight-obese-americans-swells; http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2008/12/31/us-population-2009-305-million-and-counting.

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characterized a woman as stout if her body was proportioned with larger hips, waist, or bust. Others believed stout women could be well proportioned, but her body size would be larger than normal. Generally, women ten to fifteen percent above the "average" weight were considered overweight.[6] In 1924, *The New York Times* stated that stout sizes ranged from 38.5"to 52.5" bust; a 48" in "ordinary" or average sizes was comparable to a size 42" to 44" in plus sized sizing.[7] According to publications such as *The New York Times* and *Vogue,* a woman became stout because of lack of exercise, laziness, manner of eating, or the way that she dressed because "any restriction in dress which affects the circulation may produce flesh."[8] Other possible reasons mentioned for stoutness included the introduction of motor cars, higher standards of living, less household drudgery, and less worry; factors which usually implied middle to upper class women.[9]

Research Questions

1. What fashions were available to plus sized women during the 1910s and the 1920s? How were these styles similar to or different from "average" sized women's available fashions?
2. What advice, both prescriptive and proscriptive, was given to plus sized women in the 1910 and the 1920s?
3. What apparel-related patents were issued during the 1910s to 1929 period to aid the plus sized woman? What do these patents reveal about the dressing problems faced by the stout woman?

[6] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72; Segrave, *Obesity in America*, 115; Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 280.
[7] "Providing Dresses for Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1924, 42.
[8] "Women Cut Weight to Suit Fashions," *The New York Times*, 25 May 1915, 6; "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72; "Women Cut Weight to Suit Fashions," 6.
[9] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72; "Cater by Method to Stout Persons," *The New York Times*, 11 Aug. 1918, 28; "The Asceticism of Reducing," *Vogue*, 1 Dec. 1916, 144; "That 'Pound of Flesh'," *Vogue*, 15 Apr. 1913, 114.

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Methods

To better understand the portrayal of plus sized women in the media from 1910 to 1929, I systematically analyzed articles, editorials, and advertisements published in popular and fashion press media sources. Primary sources analyzed included *The New York Times, Vogue,* and *Good Housekeeping*. These three primary sources provided multiple viewpoints regarding the plus sized woman during this period. *The New York Times* provided popular press proscriptive and prescriptive advice whereas *Good Housekeeping* and *Vogue* provided fashion-focused perspectives for both the middle (*Good Housekeeping)* and upper class Anglo-Saxon woman (*Vogue)*. Five years (1915-1919) of *Harper's Bazaar* were also included in this study.[10] These primary sources provided popular press and fashion-focused perspectives.

Additional materials analyzed included nutrition books, weight loss pamphlets, and fashion design instructions from the time period. A systematic search of *The Journal of Home Economics* and a search on Cornell's Home Economics Archive: Research, Tradition and History (HEARTH) database also provided additional primary sources. A systematic analysis of the university's JSTOR and America: History and Life database facilitated the search for additional secondary sources. In addition, patents approved by the U.S. Patent Office Society for "stout" fashions were accessed through the search engine *Google Patents.*

A historical method approach in which themes were extracted from compiled data was utilized. Data (articles and advertisements) were photocopied from the three primary sources. Data was collected whenever a source discussed the plus sized woman in any capacity. Once photocopied, the data was organized chronologically by source, and then pertinent information from each source was typed and entered into a Microsoft Excel sheet. The Excel sheet was used to help the researcher organize terms, popular styles, favored fabrics and colors, stores,

[10] Data was collected during Keist's master's thesis work which accounts for the limited years of data collected.

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prescriptive advice, and proscriptive advice. Common themes were extracted from the organized information.[11] The narrative of the dissertation emerged from patterns and themes found within the data.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic and provides the research questions, methods, organization of the dissertation, and definition of terms. Chapter Two included the literature review on plus sized women to aid the reader in understanding the context in which the plus sized women lived in the 1910s and 1920s. Topics discussed included: the science of weight gain, nutrition, dieting and weight loss methods, the ready-to-wear industry, and women's plus sized clothing manufacturers. Chapter Three focused on the fashions available for plus sized women in the 1910s. Chapter Four focused on the fashions available for plus sized women in the 1920s. Chapter Five focused on the patents submitted and issued for inventive clothing for larger women from 1910 to 1929. Chapter Six summarized the study.

Definition of Terms

Avoirdupois	Heaviness or personal weight; middle English word used beginning in the 15th century.[12]
Design	Sometimes used interchangeable with fashion or design. This word can connate one garment or ensemble whereas fashion would infer a wide collection of garments that are popular at the time.
Design Patent	A product that was created by an individual or company submitted to the United States Patent Office in order to have sole ownership over the product for a given amount of time. Patents include utility and design patents. The issuance of patents necessitates originality and novelty tantamount to innovation.

[11] M. Louise Fitzpatrick. "From *Historical Research: The Method*." In *Nursing Research: A Qualitative Perspective*, Edited by Patricia L. Munhall, 403-415. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2007.
[12] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/avoirdupois.

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Diet	Food consumed by an individual with or without regards to weight loss; for the purposes of this dissertation, diet refers to the restriction and limiting of food consumed by an individual in attempts to lose weight. Historically, diet referred to managing illnesses with a regimen of certain type of foods.[13]
Embonpoint	Fat; stout; plumpness; Middle French word first used in 1670.[14]
Fashion	Sometimes used interchangeably with style or design. A clothing style that is adopted by a large segment of the population. A fashion is usually promoted by fashion editors in popular press materials whereas the reader would strive to obtain that fashion to be "fashionable."
Ready-Made	Ready-made garments are traditionally considered first attempts at mass produced garments in the 18th and 19th centuries. Quality and appearance was usually questionable.
Ready-to-Wear	Apparel products that are mass produced and can be purchased at a department or general store. They are made in a factory setting and the maker of the garment does not know the purchaser. The term ready-to-wear typically describes clothing made from the turn of the twentieth century on.
Stout	Synonymous with plus sized.[15] In searching through the primary sources of 1910-1929, terms of the plus sized woman varied by source and year, but the most popular term used throughout the period was stout. Other terms that were used in the primary sources included large figure, full figure, large woman, silhouette beyond their attainment, comfortably housed woman of flesh, woman of robust proportions, plump, Juno type of figure, well developed figure, fleshy woman, inclined to rounding curves, stately figure, mature figure, matronly figure, fat, heavy, extra size, generous proportions, unfortunate proportions, portly people, not-so-slender, big woman, chubby figure, woman of dignity, and stout miss or variations of these terms.
Style	Sometimes used interchangeably with fashion or design. Often refers to a type of line, shape, or form. A style may go in and out of fashion.
Thinness	For the purposes of this paper, thinness refers to any woman during the 1910s and 1920s that was not considered plus sized. This includes any woman with a bust size smaller than 36."

[13] Stearns, *Fat History*, 6.
[14] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/embonpoint.
[15] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72.

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Limitations

Women are the focus of this study because during the period studied, women's clothing became slimmer-fitting and changed more frequently than men's styles, thus differences between the average sized and plus sized woman became more noticeable. The study is focused on the period 1910 to 1929, in the United States, as studied through fashion and popular press periodicals. Only three periodicals were systematically analyzed and these did not include a trade publication, further limiting the study. Further, despite the researcher's multiple attempts, I was not able to research business archives of plus sized women clothing manufacturers such as Lane Bryant.

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CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review chapter provided the framework for an analysis of stout women from 1910 through 1929. In this section, I discuss ideas of beauty, stigmas and criticisms that plus sized women faced, science of weight and nutrition, and dieting and weight loss methods that affected the plus sized woman. Next, I examined the ready-to-wear industry, department stores, and women's plus sized manufacturers.

Ideas of Beauty

In the middle of the 19th century, society admired fleshier women with larger breasts and hips. As a woman became older, she was almost expected to look "matronly" and extra weight was connected to successful motherhood. Women's suffrage leader, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was often praised for her more robust body shape whereas Susan B. Anthony was criticized for her slender appearance. In a study of the city of Boston, Stearns found that in the 1850s some women wore the latest European dress styles that emphasized their fuller figures.[16]

During the post-Civil War "Gilded Age" which was marked by overindulgence, conspicuous consumption, and excessiveness, the upper socio-economic classes viewed excess weight as a sign of success. Weight equaled prosperity. Stout men were often thought to have correspondingly large bank accounts. The stage actress Lillian Russell, who weighed close to 200 pounds, was considered an American icon, with her picture plastered on posters. Generally, however, those in the lower socio-economic classes would not be overweight due to physical work, walking as their primary form of transportation, and lack of quantity or quality of food.[17]

[16] Stearns, *Fat History*, 8-9.
[17] Patricia Vertinsky. "'Weighs and Means': Examining the Surveillance of Fat Bodies through Physical Education Practices in North America in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Journal of Sport History* 35, no. 3 (2008): 449-468; 454; Segrave, *Obesity in America*.

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With the rise of mass media such as advertising in the latter half of the nineteenth century and motion pictures in the early 20th century, beauty and fashion standards gradually became more uniform in Europe and the United States. At its peak in the 1880s, a full-figured woman was highly sought, but by 1890 with the emergence of the Gibson Girl, the voluptuous woman was out of fashion. The new ideal woman's figure included a full bosom, a nipped in waist, and slender legs. Roundness was discouraged. Whereas in the 1850s to 1880s weight loss was rarely discussed, dieting advice became prevalent in women's magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*.[18] A newly emerging modern America focused on control over the body with visible reminders of slenderness through photographs and motion pictures along with an understanding of fat absorption and healthy weight. All these factors emphasized that a slender body was better than a heavy body.

The mass media depicted American women at the turn of the century as slender, lean, graceful, and healthful. The Gibson Girl illustrations of artist Charles Dana Gibson personified the ideal "New Woman."[19] The Gibson Girl was usually drawn tall with a thin neck, waist, and hips. Her figure was elongated with broad shoulders and she often participated in sporting and leisurely activities such as swimming, boating, and bicycling. Previously fashion illustrations depicted the already established ideal silhouette, but now girls desired and aspired to look like the Gibson Girl:

> With white, transparent skin, shiny and wavy hair, a long straight nose, big, deep eyes and a small mouth with full lips—all of which were thought to be classic Western

[18] Allan Mazur. "U.S. Trends in Feminine Beauty and Overadaption." *The Journal of Sex Research* 22, no. 3 (1986): 281-303;284; Segrave, *Obesity in America*, 3; KatharinaVester. "Regime Change: Gender, Class, and the Invention of Dieting in Post-Bellum America." *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (2010): 39-70.

[19] The "Gibson Girl" was often copied by other illustrators. Her image and visage was heavily marketed in a wide variety of products. Lynn D. Gordon. "The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Higher Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920." *American Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1987): 211-230.

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> European racial features. Only a small group of American women were able to identify with this beauty ideal and could hope for the promises it made.[20]

Thinness remained ideal in the 1910s with narrow shoulders, flat stomach, and width at the hips that produced a pear shape silhouette. Thinness would predominate the ideal fashion silhouette into the 1920s and beyond. The growing consumer culture replete with fashion magazines and national advertising campaigns affected the ideal silhouette for women in the 1920s. Companies promoted youth as healthful, beautiful, and slender. Dieting became popular among middle-class adolescents in order to make their bodies conform to the ideals depicted in magazines. Dieting and a slim figure were associated with independence and freedom, however, women often received conflicting information. Some magazines claimed that an overweight or plump figure was associated with womanhood, maturity, fertility, and attractiveness and that men preferred overweight women to the more slender ideal. On the contrary, some magazines portrayed overweight women as lazy.[21]

In the 1900s, motion pictures displayed the ideal female form to large numbers of audiences across the country. Movie studios, such as Paramount Pictures and Universal Studios, "Carefully disciplined and packaged film stars for audience consumption. To ensure that the stars conformed to the ideals of physical perfection new kinds of make-up, hair care, and techniques such as electrolysis, cosmetic surgery and toupees were created to remove imperfections."[22] Celebrity magazines highlighted the film stars of motion pictures. Images were often re-touched providing flawless images. These magazines also featured a variety of advertisements to influence readers.

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[20] Donna R. Danielson. "The Changing Figure Ideal in Fashion Illustration." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (1989): 35-48, 35; Vester, "Regime Change," 54.
[21] Danielson, "The Changing Figure," Vester, "Regime Change."
[22] Mike Featherstone. "The Body in Consumer Culture." *Theory Culture Society* 1, (1982): 18-33, 23.

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Advertisers promoted products to remove underarm and leg hair, smooth skin and remove acne, and "sure ways" to reduce the size of the figure without dieting or exercise.[23]

In addition to advertising in magazines and in the movies, an emphasis on physical education greatly affected the ideal for a more slender aesthetic. Physical education courses became a part of the American schools curriculum in the 1890s. The emphasis on calisthenics promoted a slender and healthful silhouette and fat bodies were viewed as "somehow disgraceful."[24] Colleges and universities initially advocated for the courses to counteract the "damaging side-effects of brain work on women," but were later considered important to strengthen women's physical bodies.[25] The craze and acceptance of bicycle riding for women at the turn of the century also promoted a healthful look. By the 1890s, mental activity and thinness were related in the minds of the public and those who were overweight were thought to be ignorant and lazy.[26]

Extra weight was also seen as un-American and negatively associated with immigrants. Women immigrant bodies were often un-corseted due to the nature of their work which made their bodies larger, and thus considered uncontrollable and unrestrained. To assimilate into American culture and not be seen as the "other" many immigrants felt pressure to conform to the ideal slender image through dieting and apparel choices.[27]

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[23] Featherstone, "The Body in Consumer Culture."
[24] Vertinsky, "Weighs and Means," 454.
[25] Vester, "Regime Change," 51.
[26] Vertinsky, "Weighs and Means," 455; Patricia A. Cunningham. "Annie Jenness Miller and Mabel Jenness: Promoters of Physical Culture and Correct Dress." *Dress* 16, (1990): 48-61.
[27] Vester, "Regime Change."

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Stigmas/Criticisms

In a very short amount of time, ideas regarding extra weight changed from ideal to unattractive. Terms such as "butter-legs," "butter-ball," "stout," "*embonpoint,"* and "helpless" were used throughout the 1910s.[28] The word "fat" was taboo particularly with regards to women whose stoutness was noticeable. Dressmakers said that the trouble with dressing the stout is that they like sweets "in clothes as well as in food" and that have a desire to do all the things that they should not do.[29]

Often, the fashion-media portrayed the stout woman as burdensome. It was thought that the stout woman was not stylish because of the ridicule that she would receive. Grace Gould, author of *The Magic of Dress,* called dressing the stout woman, or the "too-fat" woman, an "obstacle."[30] Anne Rittenhouse, fashion editor and writer for *The New York Times,* observed that the "woman who dislikes the fashions most, and cannot see any good in them, is the one who cannot wear them."[31] Plus sized women were mocked. Rittenhouse, a fashion expert stated, "It looks as though all the fat women in the world were running a race to see who could wear the greatest number of colors and attach to themselves the greatest number of pendants."[32]

During World War I, people made sacrifices for the good of the country and were urged by the American government to conserve food resources. Larger sized Americans were seen as unpatriotic and deviant. Countries involved in the war required food rationing. America

[28] The term "stout" was also used in the second half of the 19th century to describe someone with extra weight.
[29] "Down With Avoirdupois!" Resounds Through the White Mountains," *The New York Times*, 27 July 1913, 53; Anne Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes for Stout and Elderly Women –No Reason for Not Dressing Well –Should Choose Styles to Suit Their Flesh and Their Years," *The New York Times*, 11 Aug. 1912, 62; Clara E. Laughlin, *The Complete Dressmaker: With Simple Directions for Home Millinery*, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1916), 121.
[30] Grace M. Gould, *The Magic of Dress*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1911), 126.
[31] Anne Rittenhouse. "The Right Clothes for Stout Women a Problem Confronted by Many Who Wear the New Fashions," *The New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1910, 60.
[32] Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes," 62; Rittenhouse, born Harry-dele Hallmark, was fashion editor and writer for *The New York Times,* though wrote for numerous other newspaper such as *The Augusta Chronicle, The Philadelphia Press,* and *The Philadelphia Public Ledger*. She wrote the daily column, "The Well-Dressed Woman," which over a hundred newspapers used and died in 1932. "Anne Rittenhouse, Fashion Writer, Dies." *The New York Times*, 2 Aug. 1932, 17.

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experienced shortages of molasses, margarine, and skim milk and participated in days without meat, pork, or wheat. Plus sized women were seen as hoarding food that could have otherwise gone to the war effort and were said to carry 60 pounds of sugar in her flesh for every 40 pounds that she was overweight. Dr. Lulu Peters, author of the dieting book *Diet and Health with Key to the Calories*, decreed to "tell loudly and frequently to all your friends that you realize that it is unpatriotic to be fat while many thousands are starving, that you are going to reduce to normal, and will be there in the allotted time."[33] Peters continued to state the monetary and energy savings from uneaten food that could go to help the Red Cross and to the purchasing of Liberty Bonds to support the War effort.

During the 1920s, slenderness symbolized modernity, youthfulness, and a middle-class status whereas fat symbolized lower class and immigrant women. Stoutness was said to destroy the fashionable and highly desired slender silhouette of the 1920s.[34] Magazines often assumed that plus sized women were not attractive and yearned to "look like the beautiful, slim ladies in fashion-plates in spite of [their] extra pounds." [35] Manufacturers of clothing considered the plus sized woman a manufacturing difficulty and fashion advice books, like *The Magic of Dress* (1911) and *Color Harmony and Design in Dress* (1922), often described the stout as a problem or part of the afflicted.

In the 1920s, most articles written about the plus sized woman assumed that she was an older woman and would only grow stouter with each passing year.[36] Media reporting on the latest fashions neglected the plus size young woman. Clothing featured for the plus sized woman

[33] Lulu H. Peters. *Diet and Health With Key to the Calories*. Chicago: The Reilly and Britton Co., 1918, 12, 78.
[34] Leon Bakst. "Bakst: A Famous Artist Analyses the Slim Silhouette." *Vogue*, 1 Dec. 1923, 60-61, 154, 156.
[35] "A Guide to Chic for the Stout Older Woman." *Vogue*, 15 Apr. 1924, 78,-79, 100, 102.
[36] Peters, *Diet and Health*; Margaret A. Lowe. "From Robust Appetites to Calorie Counting: The Emergence of Dieting among Smith College Students in the 1920s." *Journal of Women's History* 7, no. 4 (1995): 37-61, 43; "Corseting the Summer Mode." *Vogue*, 1 June 1922, 68, 108.

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was often shown on older-looking models and editorials were often titled "Stout **Older** Women." Furthermore, clothing designed for the younger college woman came in sizes related to ages 14 to 20, rather than the more helpful physical measurements of bust, waist, and hip that would take into account a wider diversity of figure types than age alone. If a woman, regardless of age, wanted to be fashionable, she "must have the straight figure, together with a free, easy grace, a litheness of motion, that were formerly the attribute of youth only."[37]

Science of Weight and Nutrition

At the turn of the century, weight loss was still an undeveloped science, although efforts were made to further this understanding. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scientists started to understand how the body used foods and nutrients, though not in the complexity understood today. The excitement of advancements and improvements in industry practices created metaphors comparing human and food to machines and fuel.[38]

In 1903, obesity was defined as the "result of the formation of an excess of low-grade tissue, which, owing to a deficiency of the eliminating organs, was not removed from the body, as it should be."[39] It was believed that fat was caused by an assortment of conditions such as drinking too many liquids with food, inactivity, eating foods or drinking liquids that would interfere with the digestive process, eating too frequently, and the "taking of food in excess of the digestive powers."[40]

Efforts to improve nutrition on a national scale occurred during the first part of the twentieth century. With improved machinery and more efficient transportation, what was

[37] "Simplicity is the Keynote of Lingerie." *Vogue,* 15 Dec. 1923, 95, 114.
[38] Fangman et al, "Promoting Female Weight Management," 220; Vivek Bammi, "Nutrition, the Historian, and Public Policy: A Case Study of U.S. Nutrition Policy in the 20th Century," *Journal of Social History* 14 no. 4 (1981): 627-648, 629; Alida Frances Pattee, *Practical Dietetics: With Reference to Diet in Health and Disease*. (Mount Vernon, NY: A. F. Pattee, Publisher 1927), 3.
[39] Segrave, *Obesity in America,* 50.
[40] Items that could interfere with the digestion process included pastries, tea, coffee, candy, and alcohol. Segrave, *Obesity in America,* 50.

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considered to be regional food was now available from coast to coast and could be purchased in larger quantities at lower costs. Companies such as Kellogg's, Heinz, and Nabisco sold their products nationwide and Americans' diets became more homogenous. With more Americans moving from rural areas to more populated areas and women increasingly working outside of the home, home grown food production slowed and families relied on purchased food from local stores. This migration greatly affected nutrition. With limited refrigeration options and the increase of time between harvest and consumption, manufacturers of food products used chemical preservatives such as salicylic acid, formaldehyde, and borax to save food for future ingestion. These added preservatives could have adverse effects on human health such as food poisoning.[41]

With more foods being processed and shipped across country as well as problems in the food supply that caused harm to consumers, government intervention occurred in the form of the Food and Drug Act of 1906. The Act required foods to be chemically unadulterated and labeled if additives were used. The Act was helpful to the poor who often purchased "a cheaper product or component for a more expensive, higher-quality one" such as products labeled as spices and pepper, but were made of ground nutshells and lard substituted for butterfat.[42]

By 1917, institutions and companies assumed that over indulgence in fat forming foods caused obesity. To overcome weight gain, dieting or restriction of certain foods was necessary. The Hook Drug Company's dietetics manual, *Food and Life: Eat Right and Be Normal*, provided the reader with "menus for everyone—the fat and the lean, the sick and the well" along with

[41] Bammi, "Nutrition, the Historian, and Public Policy," 630.
[42] Donna J. Wood, "The Strategic Use of Public Policy: Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act," *The Business History Review* 59 no. 3 (1985): 403-432.

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diets for hemorrhoids, tuberculosis, and constipation.[43] The authors wrote that according to the "best medical authorities" overweight (and underweight) individuals simply did not eat enough of the proper types of food for their condition and that "right selection of foods rather than quantity determines the restoration of persons overweight or underweight to their proper proportions and symmetry."[44]

The term nutrition was usually understood in 1927 "to include the digestion and absorption of food, its utilization by the cells in growth and repair of tissue and as a source of energy, the storage of excess nutrients, the breakdown or wear and tear of tissue and the elimination of body waste."[45] By 1927, obesity was "not only undesirable from the standpoint of appearance and comfort, but it is sometimes a menace to health because the normal functions of the heart, liver, kidneys and lungs may be interfered with, and because of the interrelation between it and certain diseases."[46] It was understood that obesity could lead to high blood pressure, a lower resistance to infections, an increased risk of diabetes, and a higher mortality rate than for the slender or average sized. Guidelines for an adequate diet from the book, *Practical Dietetics: Diet in Health and Disease*, recommended individuals eat food to "yield the necessary energy" needed, including protein for growth and maintenance and adequate amount of ash constituents and vitamins.[47]

Height and Weight Charts

Ideal weights are socially constructed and vary around the world. In the United States, the notion of an ideal weight resulted from the work of insurance companies. Insurance companies

[43] Hook Drug Company, *Food and Life: Common-Sense Diet for the Fat and the Lean, the Sick and the Well, the Old and the Young*, (Chicago: Nile C. Smith, 1917), 27.
[44] Hook Drug Company, *Food and Life*, 30.
[45] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics*, 30.
[46] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics*, 432.
[47] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics*, 25. Ash constituents is the residue from decomposed organic compounds that consist of salts and oxides containing anions such as chlorides, phosphates, and sulfates. http://www.foodscience-avenue.com/2008/05/what-is-ash-content.html.

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created height and weight charts to determine whether a person was a possible candidate for insurance. The insurance companies used weight to determine healthfulness because they believed that it was a visible indicator of well being. With the constant threat of common diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza at the turn of the century, underweight candidates were thought to be more susceptible and were often denied policies. Weight loss in women was seen as symptom for diseases such as hysteria, neurasthenia, and tuberculosis.[48]

Early height and weight charts, in the late 1830s and early 1840s, were first comprised of select population averages which implied that an average weight was a good and healthy weight, though average weights were "less a condition of human nature than a feature of a modernizing industrializing society."[49] Studies done in the late nineteenth century determined that children had development patterns deemed normal in regards to height, body shape, and weight which solidified that these developments were biological and extra weight was abnormal. There wasn't a large jump for people to transfer the idea of average weight to ideal weight based on these findings. Insurance companies calculated ideal weights by charting, photographing, and analyzing their policy holders by their height and body shape. These measurements were then compared to medical charts and other weight statistics for comparison reasons across the United States. The selected population included only those wealthy enough to purchase an insurance premium and did not represent a sampling of all Americans. Insurance policies usually represented only people in good health and often did not include immigrants. Women's height and weight charts did not appear until 1908 when enough women policyholders for insurance

[48] Vertinsky, "Weighs and Means," 450; Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 275; Lowe, "From Robust Appetites," 39.
[49] Vertinsky, "Weighs and Means," 452.

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companies were available. Prior to this, insurance companies used men's charts to infer healthful weight for women policy holders.[50]

A 1908 height and weight chart compiled by statistician Louis Dublin for the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York found that people 10-15 percent below or above the average weight were considered under or overweight. In the 1920s, those 15 percent below or above the average weight were considered under or overweight. By the 1940s, height and weight charts were construed to reflect ideal weights, not average weights.[51]

Weight loss books such as, the *Food and Life: Common-Sense Diet for the Fat and the Lean, the Sick and the Well, the Old and the Young* (1917) and *Practical Dietetics: With Reference to Diet in Health and Disease* (1927), provided readily available charts of ideal weights for women in the 1910s and 1920s. Table 2.1. illustrates the ideal weights of women aged 30 for 1917 and 1927. In 1927, ideal weights for women 5'2" and shorter lowered by a pound, but for women taller than 5'5", one additional pound was provided. Height and weight charts in the 1910s and 1920s did not take into account any other factors except for height. These charts could be discouraging for the woman whose body type was naturally larger due to genetics, heredity, or medical conditions. In some cases, these ideal weights would not be

[50] Vertinsky, "Weighs and Means," 451-452; Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 274-283; Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1986), 153; Pattee, *Practical Dietetics*, 432.

[51] In contemporary standards, weight recommendations are now based on a person's body mass index number (BMI). A person's BMI number is calculated using their height and weight measurements. Numerous websites provide a BMI calculator where people only need to type in their height and weight and the calculator finds their BMI for them or an old fashioned version of a chart is also provided. A person's BMI number is important enough to today's society that the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute provides a downloadable BMI calculator application for the iPhone on their website. A BMI of 18.5-24.9 is considered "normal" weight while any BMI number of 30 or greater is considered obese. This number does not include any other health factors such as heredity or body frame size. Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 291-292; http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "*About BMI for Adults.*" 15 Feb. 2011. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_b... (accessed Mar. 02, 2011).

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obtainable to all. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company observed a three to five pound decrease in average weights from 1922-23 to 1932-33 of women policy holders.[52]

Table 2.1 Table of height and weights for women aged 30, 1917 and 1927

Table of Height and Weights for Women Aged 30			
Height		*1917*[53]	*1927*[54]
Feet	*Inches*	*Weight (lbs.)*	*Weight (lbs.)*
4	8	112	---
4	9	114	---
4	10	116	---
4	11	118	117
5	..	120	119
5	1	122	121
5	2	124	123
5	3	127	127
5	4	131	130
5	5	134	135
5	6	138	137
5	7	142	143
5	8	146	147
5	9	150	151
5	10	154	155

Scales

With the invention of the bathroom scale, more individuals had access to and knowledge of their weight. Prior to the invention of the bathroom scale, people weighed themselves in public on penny scales located in grocery stores, pharmacies, railroad stations, subways, and later, bus stations, five-and-dimes, and restaurants. These scales were originally manufactured for weighing large freight size loads, but doctors and insurance companies used them to judge a

[52] Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 287.
[53] Hook Drug Company, *Food and Life*, 19.
[54] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics*, 445.

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person's healthfulness. Placed around the country, people weighed themselves in large numbers to make sure that they fit into the ideal weights established by the insurance companies.[55]

Smaller scales that could fit into one's bathroom gained in popularity during the 1910s and turned a public display of weight into a private act that one could do at home. Individuals concerned about disease, death, and fat helped increase the popularity of the scale. In 1913, Marshall Field's sold bathroom scales in its household utilities department; in 1916, the first patent for the bathroom scale was issued; in 1918, advertisements showed bathrooms with scales included.[56] Priced as low as ten dollars, a large portion of the population purchased bathroom scales and thus concerns over the number on the scale became more immediate. The bathroom scale "heralded an era in which weight was quantified into pounds of flesh, and a new concern emerged—the fight against fat."[57]

Dieting and Weight Loss Methods

Dieting

In the nineteenth century, the term "diet" referred to managing illnesses with a regimen of certain type of foods. Europeans were more inclined to participate in dieting and eating in moderation in the nineteenth century well before Americans who prized a fuller figure for both men and women. Dieting in the nineteenth-century was generally considered a man's activity. The 1890s saw an increase in advertisements for weight control methods and diets.[58] At the beginning of the 20th century, the term "diet" connoted the restriction and limiting of food consumed by an individual in attempts to lose weight.[59] Stearns identified three areas where the "modern American interest in dieting first developed consistent expression." These three areas

[55] Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 285.
[56] Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 285; Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 168-169.
[57] Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 273.
[58] Vester, "Regime Change;" Kersh and Morone, "How the Personal Becomes Political," 167.
[59] Stearns, *Fat History*, 6.

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included "shifts in fashion for women and men alike, a host of new fat-control devices, and the rise of public comment on fat."[60]

Some scholars suggest that industrialization and modernization in the nineteenth-century were more responsible for the process of dieting as opposed to class or gender differentiation. Such historians as T.J. Jackson, Hillel Schwartz, and Keith Walden suggested that with increased anxiety from the new fast-paced industrialized world, Americans could decrease their anxiety by controlling their bodies.[61] Margaret Lowe found dieting prevalent with Smith College students in the 1920s. She stated, "Dieting was considered a middle-class activity and its desired result signaled middle-class status."[62]

Before World War I, female students at Smith College wrote letters home happy of their weight gain noting this as a sign of healthiness and academic life suited them. The word "diet" was not in their vocabulary. Opponents of higher education for women feared that academia would destroy a woman's reproductive organs and cause damaging affects to her health such as weight loss. But by the 1920s, Smith College students experienced anxiety about weight gain and urged their family not to send sweets in care packages. They carefully watched their weight because weight gain "suggested weakened will-power and a potential loss of feminine appeal."[63] A slender woman was more likely to have more dates with better looking men, be more popular with other women, and have better career opportunities than someone who was overweight. Students reduced their weight by excluding starches and sweets from their diet, exercising, counting calories, and limiting snacking between meals.[64]

[60] Stearns, *Fat History*, 11.
[61] Stearns, *Fat History*, 4.
[62] Lowe, "From Robust Appetites," 43.
[63] Lowe, "From Robust Appetites," 40.
[64] Lowe, "From Robust Appetites."

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Weight Loss Methods

A Letter on Corpulence, written for men in 1863 by British undertaker William Banting, was the first pamphlet published with weight loss as its primary goal. Other pamphlets and books published in the 19th century included diets to cure or improve certain diseases and sicknesses, but weight loss was not the main focus. Banting claimed that obesity was an illness and encouraged weight loss through eating a low carbohydrate and high protein diet with limited sweets and starchy foods. The pamphlet sold 60,000 to 70,000 copies in 1878 and is still in print today.[65]

Though not the first diet book written, *Diet and Health With Key to the Calories* (1918) by Lulu Hunt Peters was the first diet book to appear on the *Publishers Weekly* Best Sellers list.[66] It appeared on the list five years in a row from 1922 to 1926. By 1923, 200,000 copies were sold, with 800,000 copies sold to date. In 1924, it had "outsold every other nonfiction title."[67] *Diet and Health* was written for not only the woman who wanted to lose weight, but also for the woman who wanted to gain weight. According to Lulu Hunt Peters, the rule to finding your ideal weight was to "multiply number of inches over 5 feet in height by 5.5; add 110."[68] Peters chastised the stout woman by saying:

> Instead of being looked upon with friendly tolerance and amusement, you are now viewed with distrust, suspicion, and even aversion! How dare you hoard fat when our nation needs it? You don't dare to any longer. You never wanted to be

[65] Vester, "Regime Change," 42.
[66] William Banting, in 1864, published a low carb diet pamphlet entitled *Letter on Corpulence* in London, but Peter's book is important to the diet industry because of its appearance on the *Publishers Weekly* Best Seller List. http://homodiet.netfirms.com/otherssay/letters/banting.html; Fangman et al, "Promoting Female Weight Management," 220.
[67] Alice P. Hackett and James Henry Burke, *80 Years of Best Sellers 1895-1975*, (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1977), 98.
[68] Peters, *Diet and Health With Key to the Calories*, 11; For example: a woman of 5'1" should weigh 116.5 lbs.; 5'2" should weigh 121 lbs.; 5'3" 126.5 lbs.; 5'4" 132 lbs.; 5'5" 137.5 lbs.; 5'6" 143 lbs.; 5'7" 148.5 lbs.; 5'8" 154 lbs.; and 5'9" 159.5 lbs, etc.

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> fat anyway, but you did not know how to reduce, and it is proverbial how little you eat.[69]

Other advice that Peters gave for weight loss included exercising at a gymnasium or physical education class, brisk walking, or the self-described "excellent" exercises provided in her *Diet and Health* book. Peters acknowledged that exercise was not only important for weight loss, but a healthful act for anyone that experienced aliments such as stiff joints or gallstones. Diet was also important. Peters suggested fasting, eating a diet solely comprised of baked potatoes and skim milk once a week, and counting calories. Peters also advised women to form their own overweight groups – with the suggested name "Watch Your Weight—Anti-Kaiser Class." Extremely similar to contemporary Weight Watcher brand meetings, Peters advised women to "buy a good, accurate pair of scales" and meet once a week to weigh in. Those weighing in should use the same scale each week (for accuracy reasons) and wear approximately the same weight of clothes from week to week so that clothing would not be a factor in gained or lost weight.[70]

Overweight people in the 1920s were advised to limit the amount of food that they ate and exercise to increase expenditure of energy. Numerous health and weight loss books were written during this time such as *Food and Life: Eat Right and Be Normal* (1917), *The Science of Eating* (1919), *How Phyllis Grew Thin* (ca. 1920s), and a series of weight loss booklets published by the Corrective Eating Society in 1919. These sources provided information on how and why people gained weight and included menus to follow in order to reduce one's weight. In the 1927 advice book *Practical Dietetics: Diet in Health and Disease*, individuals were advised not to starve themselves,

[69] Peters, *Diet and Health with Key to the Calories*, 12-13.
[70] Peters, *Diet and Health with Key to the Calories*, 71, 78.

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but to decrease amount of food ingested and increase activity for "producing results."[71] Healthy weight loss during this time was one to three pounds a week with doctor supervision. Healthy foods for weight loss included milk, fruits, vegetables, protein rich foods and concentrated fuel foods like butter and salad dressing should be ingested with moderation.[72]

The Ready-to-Wear Industry for Men

The need for the ready-to-wear industry was "favored by innovative spirit, advanced industrialization, a sound retail infrastructure, economic affluence and the absence of war within the [North American] continent."[73] In a study of the beginnings of the clothing industry in the United States, Michael Zakim stated, "If the clothing industry had an actual birth, it was in the emporiums and warehouses that appeared in New York and other American seaboard [trading posts] after the end of the war and the reopening of European trade in 1815."[74] Between 1815 and the turn of the twentieth century, primarily men's ready-to-wear clothing could be purchased in stores and off of the rack. The ready-to-wear industry accelerated for men due to the large quantities of uniforms needed for both the War of 1812 and the U.S Civil War. Like today, a major complaint with the early ready-to-wear industry was fit. With only a few standard sizes, it was difficult to properly fit a wide variety of men.[75]

After the U.S. Civil War, production of garment manufacturing advanced because of inventions like the sewing machine in 1846 and the long cutting knife in 1870 which cut multiple fabrics at one time. The sewing machine revolutionized the ready-to-wear industry. Elias Howe's

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[71] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics,* 433.
[72] Pattee, *Practical Dietetics,* 35.
[73] Nicola Tamburrino, "Apparel Sizing Issues, Part 1," *Bobbin,* Apr. 1992, 44-46, 44.
[74] Michael Zakim, "A Ready-to-wear Business: The Birth of the Clothing Industry in America," *Business History Review* 73 no. 1 (1999): 61-91, 68.
[75] Claudia B. Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman. *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974; 47.

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early machine was the precursor to the modern sewing machine with its lock stitch and eyepoint needle. Isaac Singer is usually credited with the title of "The Grandfather of the Sewing Machine." He improved upon Howe's previous machine. Further, Singer's promotion and marketing skills propelled the sewing machine to high status. Many inventors wanted to jump on the sewing machine bandwagon. The United States Patent Office issued 7,339 patents to sewing machine inventors between 1842 and 1895. It was Allen B. Wilson's machine that greatly affected the ready-to-wear industry. His machine made it possible to easily sew curved seams with perfect feed control. Manufacturing hoopskirts, crinolines, and men's suits became a relatively quick process compared to sewing by hand and also produced a more uniform product than hand-stitching. The quickened pace reduced production costs, which in turn, lowered the selling price of garments. With a lowered cost of garments, more people were able to purchase ready-to-wear garments.[76]

Another machine that enabled the ready-to-wear manufacturing industry was the mechanical cutting machine of the 1870s. Cutting fabric for manufacture used to be a skilled process that a trained tailor did with hand shears. Using hand shears only allowed for a couple of layers of fabric to be cut at one time. The mechanical cutting machine made it possible to cut fabric up to eighteen layers thick, but was dangerous for the operator. An improvement on this machine in the 1890s made the process of cutting multiple layers of cloth for manufacture quick, easy, less expensive, and less dangerous. Other machines that helped to increase production in the ready-to-wear business included the snap-fastening machine, felling machine, pinking machine, and the buttonholing machine.[77]

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[76] Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*.
[77] Kidwell and Christman. *Suiting Everyone*; Leonard A. Drake and Carrie Glasser, *Trends in the New York Clothing Industry: A Study Undertaken for the Mayor's Business Advisory Committee and the Committee of Fifteen*, (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1942), 7-9.

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The Ready-to-Wear Industry for Women

Before the turn of the twentieth century, women were able to purchase ready-made[78] staple goods, but unable to purchase complete outfits because women's clothing was very cumbersome with many steps, fabric, and intricacies needed for one garment. Mass producing intricate garments was difficult, time consuming, and costly. In the 1860s, women were able to purchase from stores a limited number of clothing items such as cloaks, crinolines, and bonnets. These garments were less detailed and mass produced at attractive prices that discouraged home-production of these items. Women often sewed garments themselves and many middle and upper class women hired dressmakers to make their clothing. According to Jean Parsons, "A skilled dressmaker offered not only a well-made garment that fit properly, but also convenience and status."[79] Professional dressmaking was one of the highest paying jobs for women at a time when fewer women worked outside of the home and if they did work, often did so for low pay at unskilled jobs. A woman dressmaker could independently own her own store and use her sewing skills and creativity to achieve a decent standard of living.

Dressmakers differed from tailoresses and seamstresses because they were skilled in the trade of cutting the garment to fit the shape of the wearer whereas the latter stitched together previously cut garments. Cutting a garment was difficult since women's body proportions and shape varied from woman to woman. There were also differences between sitting and standing and the type and tightness of undergarments. Dressmaking was a learned trade through apprenticeship, but many thought that any woman could become a dressmaker based on a woman's "natural" calling in the domestic skills. At the turn of the century many dressmakers

[78] Ready-made garments are traditionally considered first attempts at mass produced garments in the 18th and 19th centuries. Quality and appearance was usually questionable.
[79] Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge," 35.

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stated lost revenue and went out of business due to the increased availability of ready-to-wear clothing.[80]

By the 1890s, Americans of both genders could purchase ready-to-wear clothing from mail order catalogs, in specialty shops, and department stores. Consumption of disposable goods increased and garments were a less valuable resource than in previous periods. The prices of garments lowered and were available in every price point so lower, middle, and upper class Americans could purchase any type of garment. Clothing became simpler and less cumbersome which further enabled the ready-to-wear industry. Less fabric, less details, and less complicated construction made clothing easier to manufacturer in a factory setting.[81]

Part and parcel to the availability of ready-to-wear clothing, women's roles expanded to include increased access to education, employment outside of the home, and leisure activities such as sports. Increased urbanization and new approaches to advertising helped expand women's roles as consumers. It was now customary for women to purchase ready-to-wear clothing versus making their own clothing at home or utilizing the services of a dressmaker.[82]

Women's expanding roles along with the perception of home sewn garments as inferior, allowed for the acceptance of ready-to-wear clothing. Women encountered problems with custom made clothing and home sewn garments because of the time spent making and waiting for them, their cost, and styling issues. With fashion styles changing rapidly, manufactured garments were able to meet the needs of the consumer more quickly than home sewn items. Though the quality of ready-to-wear clothing could be worse than homemade clothing, "the

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[80] Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge;" Margaret Walsh. "The Democratization of Fashion: The Emergence of the Women's Dress Pattern Industry." *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 2 (1979): 299-313.
[81] Kidwell and Christman. *Suiting Everyone*; Sara B. Marcketti and Jean L. Parsons, "American Fashions for American Women: Early Twentieth Century Efforts to Develop an American Fashion Identity," *Dress* 34 (2007): 79-95; William Leach. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
[82] Kidwell and Christmas, *Suiting Everyone*; Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge."

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desire to keep up with rapidly changing styles led to a philosophy that quality was less important than being up-to-date."[83]

The ready-to-wear industry advanced tremendously at the turn of the century through the 1920s because of unskilled cheap labor and an increase in communication. The adoption of the shirtwaist along with women entering the workforce helped propel the ready-to-wear industry. The majority of manufacturing of women's garments took place in New York City. The Census of Manufactures reported an "average of 83,800 workers employed in the production of women's clothing in the United States in 1899. By 1924 this had increased to 168,900, a gain of 102 per cent."[84] New York City was primed to become the center of the ready-to-wear industry due to an established infrastructure and influx of southern and eastern European immigrants looking for work.

The clothing trade was specialized by product and usually when a company manufactured clothing, it made only one or two specific types of garments such as shirtwaists or skirts. Prior to the turn of the century, garments were often cut in one building and then were distributed as piece-work to workers in the surrounding areas. Women and often their families would sit in cramped rooms sewing the already cut pieces together. One worker usually completed one garment at a time. The more garments a worker completed, the more money he or she could make. In a factory setting, while piece work was not completely removed, employees would often sit at long rows of sewing machines powered by electricity. Instead of working on one whole garment, work was specialized and a woman would only work on a particular part of a garment whether it was attaching buttons or sewing sleeves.[85]

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[83] Julia Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge," 39.
[84] Drake and Glasser, *Trends in the New York Clothing Industry*, 8-9.
[85] Kidwell and Christmas, *Suiting Everyone*.

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Ready-to-Wear Standard Sizing

With the advent of the ready-to-wear industry, a sizing system was needed for manufactures to know what size to make clothing and for consumers to know what sizes to purchase clothing. While a voluntary sizing standard was published in the 1970s by the Department of Commerce and the Federal Trade Commission, prior to this time, manufacturers subjectively developed their own individual sizing system based on trial and error. Historically and contemporarily, a person of any given population's body dimensions (waist, chest, height, etc) typically follows a normal statistical distribution. This normal distribution can then be used to create sizes that normally fit the majority of any given population.[86]

In the eighteenth century when the majority of clothing was custom made, tailors noticed that many of their clients' body measurements were proportional to each other. Because of this relationship, pattern drafting systems were created for similarly sized customers. The tailor or dressmaker could then easily modify the base pattern to match each individual customer's needs. These pattern drafting systems were then used to standardize apparel sizes. Although the American body has changed since the 18th century, little modifications were made to the original pattern drafting systems and many companies still utilize these primitive measurements. Peter Stearns, author of *Fat History: Bodies and Beauty in the Modern West*, hypothesized that the "growing utilization of standardized dress sizes for ready-to-wear women's clothing may have encouraged greater attention to slenderness."[87]

Men's sizing was more standardized at the turn of the 20th century whereas women's standardized sizing was becoming newly established. Men's standard sizing was readily

[86] Tamburrino, "Apparel Sizing Issues," 44.
[87] Susan P. Ashdown, "An Investigation of the Structure of Sizing Systems: A Comparison of Three Multidimensional Optimized Sizing Systems Generated from Anthropometric Data with the ASTM standard D5585-94," *International Journal of Clothing Science and Technology* 10 no. 5 (1998): 324-341; Stearns, *Fat History*, 13.

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available due to men's clothing manufacturers' access to the U.S. military uniform sizing. The U.S. military provided uniforms to enlisted men and established standard sizes of coats to fit a variety of sizes. These sizes could be grouped to create "standard" sizes for ready-to-wear clothing whereas there was no large bank of women's sizes. The majority of the female population deviated from perfectly proportioned figures which created problems when standardizing sizes. Because of these problems, the first mass produced women's clothing consisted of loose fitting outerwear such as cloaks. These loose fitting garments provided manufacturers with a product in which perfect proportions did not matter. These garments were usually cut from a size 36" bust size pattern and since not all women fit this size, some manufacturers made outerwear in slim, medium, and stout sizes. Women's mass produced clothing had to account for women's changing proportions from her bust, waist, and hip measurements.[88]

Fit was a major concern with ready-to-wear clothing for both men and women. Companies like Jordan, Marsh & Co. and B. Altman & Co. announced in advertising that their clothing was mass produced in limited bust sizes and alterations were to be expected and common. At the turn of the 20th century, many women's clothing manufacturers sold apparel in 32" to 44" bust measurements, 23" to 30" waist measurements, and front skirt lengths in 39 to 43 inches. Companies who sold plus sized garments would sell items with an up to 53" bust measurement often without charging extra.[89]

Department Stores

With the rapid growth of clothing manufacture and increased communication of fashion trends, women needed a place to purchase the latest fashions relatively easily. Enter the

[88]Tamburrino, "Apparel Sizing Issues," 45; Kidwell, and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*; 108.
[89] Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*.

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department store. Department stores offered mass produced consumer goods such as household items, clothing, and furniture at relatively low prices due to new advances in factory production such as the assembly line. The department store was preceded by the dry goods store of the 1800s where women were able to purchase cloth to manufacture into clothing for themselves and their families. Now, women were able to go a store to purchase finished clothing for her whole family.

Department stores differed from the dry goods store because department stores had a free-entry policy where customers could shop at their own will without hassle to purchase products, products were set at one price to avoid haggling, and advertising was standardized. In the early 1800s, merchants specialized in a limited assortment stock. When patrons entered the store, prices were negotiable.[90]

Prior to the department store, people in rural areas who wanted ready-to-wear clothing had to travel to larger cities to stores that specialized in specific products. Mail-order catalogues and department stores derived from the need to provide ready-to-wear clothing for everyone. Department stores started in the 1850s as urban, large country stores that had a variety of goods to satisfy a variety of customers. Some department stores started as specialty clothing stores while many started from dry goods stores that grew in size. Dry goods stores that were successful found themselves selling a wider variety of products to cater to the needs of a more diverse group of customers. With more products, there needed to be more organization so customers were able to find the products they needed successfully and without hassle. Owners placed like-items together to facilitate ease of shopping. With the expansion of product

[90] Susan Porter Benson. "The Cinderella of Occupations: Managing the Work of Department Store Saleswomen, 1900-1940." *The Business History Review* 55, no. 1 (1981): 1-25; Rudi Laermans. "Learning to Consume: Early Department Stores and the Shaping of the Modern Consumer Culture (1860-1914)." *Theory Culture Society* 10, (1993): 79-102.

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categories, more people could shop in one place to meet all of their product needs. The larger volume of goods equated in lower overhead for the store and in turn, lower fixed prices for the customer.[91]

The first department store, Au Bon Marche, opened in 1852 in Paris. Marshall Field and Levi Leiter's "Marble Palace" opened in Chicago in 1868 and John Wanamaker opened his department store in Philadelphia in 1877. Department stores were usually elaborately decorated both inside and outside with new technologies in lighting, glass, and color. Department stores provided men and women the luxury of convenience. These palaces were an all encompassing spectacles that not only had a variety of goods to purchase, but also hosted theaters, restaurants, hotels, botanical gardens, museums, libraries, groceries and butcher shops, beauty parlors, post offices, and sometimes even large pet stores. These grand, ornately decorated, multi-floored buildings contained a large assortment of goods.[92]

Department stores helped propel advertising to a different and more visible level. Previous dry goods stores' advertisements were often small, descriptive in nature, and lacking visual images. John Wanamaker, of Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, revolutionized advertising. He placed large sized advertisements and used catchwords, new font types, slogans, and photography to draw in customers. Once inside the store, "dazzling decorations, architectural adornments, fairyland lighting and, first and foremost, a sophisticated display of mostly fashionable merchandise" attracted customers to purchase or at least to continue to return to the store for future purchases.[93]

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[91] Laermans, "Learning to Consume," Leach, *Land of Desire*; William R. Leach. "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Departments Stores, 1890-1925." *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (1984): 319-342.
[92] Laermans, "Learning to Consume," Kidwell, and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*; Leach, *Land of Desire*; Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," 319-342.
[93] Laermans, "Learning to Consume," 91.

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Department stores also created a new social aspect of life. Women, primarily of the middle and upper classes, could now leisurely shop with friends to find the best prices and enjoy each other's company and the experience. It also provided an excuse for women to leave their domestic sphere. Department stores were places to see and to be seen. They offered lunch rooms, art galleries, post offices, concert halls, and even offered women informative courses on current topics of the time such as bicycling.[94]

In order for the department store to be successful, large quantities of goods needed to be sold regularly. At the turn of the 20th century, male department store managers saw the potential of hiring a well trained selling force. The quiet, ill-prepared "shopgirls" of the late 1800s were often lower class women newly immigrated who received little to no training. Managers thought that higher-end products would sell themselves without the aid of a sales pitch. Shopgirls were replaced by a trained, well developed, and powerful force of saleswomen. New rules and training programs promoted an environment of professionalism.[95]

Women's Plus Sized Clothing Manufacturers

By the early 1910s, Sears and Roebuck offered mail order clothing in women's sizes 32" to 44" as well as plus sized clothing in 39" to 53" for stout women. The M. Gross Company and F. F. Models also manufactured clothing for plus sized women. The National Cloak and Suit Company sold plus sized women's clothing in 1916, but called them "odd sizes." These garments fit women with a normal bust size, but with larger hips or waist measurements.[96] Balsam Brothers sold georgette and printed crepe dresses for plus sized women in sizes from 42.5" to 52.5" adapted from slender styles and advertised as youthful, charming, and smart. Balsam Brothers also sold a line of short plus sized women's clothing in sizes 37.25" to 43.25"

[94] Laermans, "Learning to Consume."
[95] Porter Benson, "The Cinderella of Occupations."
[96] Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone,* 106-109.

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called "Stubby Stouts—Youth-line."[97] Clothing for the plus sized was often labeled "Full Form Suits" and "Stylish Stouts" and could be found at specialty stores such as the Stout House of Philadelphia. I will next discuss two companies particularly important for the plus sized woman during this time.

Lane Bryant

The well known plus sized women's clothing retailer, Lane Bryant was created by Lena Himmelstein Bryant Malsin and her husband, Albert Malsin. Lane Bryant manufactured clothing in the early 1900s for what it claimed was the nearly forty percent of women who were not the "perfect 36 figure."[98] Lane Bryant originally specialized in mail order maternity clothing. By 1900, the first brick and mortar stare was created. In 1916 sales exceeded one million dollars.[99]

Along with maternity clothing, the founders of Lane Bryant viewed a niche market for clothing that fit a larger figure demographic. Since standard sizing was not available for plus sized women, Bryant and Malsin used statistical information from two hundred thousand women as well as personally measuring forty-five hundred of their customers to determine three general types of plus sized women. Albert Malsin also looked at the difference between age, sex, and population figures. A Lane Bryant advertisement from 1917 stated that Malsin made "it possible to render custom-made service with ready-to-wear convenience" by personally measuring 153,000 women to learn how proportions varied, though other sources claim that a much smaller number were personally measured.[100]

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[97] Balsam Bros. Advertisement. *The New York Times* 10 March 1926, 37.
[98] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 161.
[99] While opening her first bank account, Lena accidentally signed her name "Lane," but was too embarrassed to resolve the mistake and went by the name Lane the rest of her life. Joseph J Fucini and Suzy Fucini, *Entrepreneurs: The Men and Women behind Famous Brand Names and How They Made It*, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985), 119.
[100] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Feb. 1917, 166; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* May 1917, 33.

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The sales of the plus sized women's clothing exceeded the maternity wear sales by 1923 with more than half of their annual five million dollars a year. Lane Bryant had an advantage. Her husband Albert Malsin, a mechanical engineer and business partner, applied his knowledge of optics, mathematics, color, physics, and psychology to design slimming clothing for the Lane Bryant customer in response to criticisms of available clothing choices. By the end of her life in 1951, her company Lane Bryant Inc. was worth $50 million and had twenty five stores across the country.[101]

Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers, Inc.

The Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers, Inc. was incorporated on September 11, 1916 in New York City by Isidor Heller, Alfred Beer, Alexander J. Mayer, Oscar Weingarten, Abraham Hertzberg, and Solomon Blogg. The purpose of the association was "To secure and provide co-operation and united effort in all matters relating to the improvement of conditions in the stout wear apparel industry."[102] Eight New York based makers of plus sized women's clothing comprised the Association; I. Heller & Co. (stout dresses and costumes), Blogg & Littauer (S.S.S. suits and coats), J. A. Goldstein & Co. (shur-fit suits), Alfred Beer Co. (A.B.C. stout waists), Hertzberg Bros. (stout skirts), Fox Bros. Mfg. Co. (Mildred stout underwear), Arlington Skirt Mfg. Co. (stylish stout petticoats), and Weingarten Bros. Inc. (W. B. Reduso corsets).[103] By shopping at these eight retailers alone, a plus sized woman could have a complete wardrobe from underwear to outerwear. These eight manufacturers cooperated together and concentrated their efforts to specialize in scientifically designed ready-to-wear garments. They

[101] http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/malsin-lane-bryant; "Lane Bryant Dies; Founder of Chair," *The New York Times*, 27 Sept. 1951, 31; Segrave, *Obesity in America*, 115; there is discrepancies in sources of whether Lane Bryant's husband's first name is Alfred or Albert, most claim Albert; Fucini and Fucini, *Entrepreneurs*, 119.
[102] Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers, Inc., Incorporation Papers, September 1916, New York Department of State.
[103] After each company name, in the parentheses, is what the company specialized in.

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combined their experience and expertise in designing plus sized fashions to establish quality and high standard garments.[104]

Manufacturers of plus sized garments who did not belong to the Association could also participate. The Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers endorsed stout women clothing and manufacturers with their "Sveltline" garment label (Figure 2.1). The Association guaranteed a larger profit, better garments, and better satisfaction by plus sized women customers if manufacturers placed the label inside their garment. The Association also welcomed suggestions from other plus sized manufacturers and offered help and literature to companies who wanted to build their business to cater to the plus sized woman.[105]

Figure 2.1 The Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers "Sveltline" garment label, 1916.

Source: *The American Cloak and Suit Review*. Vol. 12, 1. New York: John M. O'Connor Co., 1916, 102.

Conclusions

This chapter provided a framework for an analysis of plus sized women's ready-to-wear fashions of the 1910s and 1920s. The dramatic shift from fatness to slenderness in a relatively short period of time is important to note. During the 1800s, the "Gilded Age" was known for overindulgence, conspicuous consumption, and excessiveness by the upper-class and weight was

[104] *The American Cloak and Suit Review*. Vol. 12, 1. New York: John M. O'Connor Co., 1916, 102.
[105] *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, 102.

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no exception. By the 1920s, a boyish, very slender silhouette was desired by women. Great lengths were sometimes taken to obtain this ideal. This chapter also explored the science behind weight gain. Dieting and other weight loss methods became popular. I finished with a history of the ready-to-wear industry, department stores and women's plus sized manufacturers. Purchased clothing was inexpensive compared to using the skills of a dressmaker. Women could purchase the latest fashions inexpensively and quality was not as valued as quantity and ease of purchase. Purchased clothing could be bought at department stores. Department stores offered mass produced consumer goods such as household goods, clothing, and furniture at relatively low prices due to new advances in factory production like the assembly line. Department stores provided a new arena for women to shop and socialize. Plus sized women were able to purchase ready-to-wear clothing from manufacturers at this time, but little has been written about these companies. Lane Bryant was and is the most well-know plus sized women's clothier in the United States.

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CHAPTER THREE: 1910s

The ready-to-wear industry increased exponentially for women in the 1910s. Now, women could purchase almost any apparel item ready-to-wear. With the growth of the average sized women's clothing industry, the plus sized woman's ready-to-wear industry emerged. Plus sized women were able to purchase limited ready-to-wear clothing in their sizes, but not at the quantity or quality of their more slender sisters. This chapter examined the emergence of the plus sized women's ready-to-industry during the 1910s. This topic is important to explore since by 1916, it was estimated that there were 13 million plus sized women living in the United States and little research has studied this significant demographic of women. This chapter is divided into the following sections: fashions for the average woman, the ready to wear industry for plus sized women, separate departments for plus sized women, stores for plus sized women, prescriptive advice, prejudices against the plus sized woman, proscriptive advice, and conclusions.

Fashions for the Average Sized Woman, 1910s

Women, both thick and thin, generally followed certain styles and silhouettes during the 1910s. Styles and silhouettes became slimmer than those in the past. Gone were the bustles, leg-o-mutton sleeves, and excessive fabrics from the late 1800s. With Americans' increasingly fast paced lives, clothing became more efficient and slimmer. The corset also known as stays or pair of bodies, a mainstay for women since the 15th century, evolved with the use of less rigid materials and the introduction of rubber, and fewer metal fastenings for easier movement.

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Women were less able to hide behind their under and outer garments and their physiques were more exposed.[106]

Fashions changed rapidly at the turn of the century. Women wore bodice and skirt combinations in the 1890s with large leg-o-mutton sleeves, tight fitting bodices, and long floor length skirts. Undergarments were restrictive and needed in order to create the ideal silhouette. The 1900s featured an s-shaped silhouette with emphasis on the bust and backside and particular accentuation of a small, nipped in-waist. The masculine-inspired shirtwaist was a quasi uniform worn by the Gibson Girl or "New Woman" for sport, work, and everyday attire. The shirtwaist was a woman's blouse that followed the styling of men's button-up shirts. Shirtwaists buttoned up the front and varied in styles with the use of lace and other trimmings. They ranged in price from less than one dollar to very expensive. The fashion was affordable by all classes of women. This style was worn with a long, slim skirt with little fullness and jacket.[107]

During the 1910s, known as the Age of Opulence, women who were able usually changed their clothing at least four times a day. Clothing corresponded to the time of day: morning, early afternoon, tea time, and evening. Morning and early afternoon wear consisted of skirts, jackets, and coats. During tea time, which was generally held around 5 o'clock in the late afternoon, tea gowns were worn. Tea gowns were "long, flowing and sometimes voluminous, giving the body room to relax" from tight fitting corsets and restrictive clothing.[108] Empire waists were popular for evening wear and made from fabrics such as tulle, chiffon, and crepe de

[106] Corsets were called pairs of bodies and stays in early centuries. In the 18th century, they were called corsets; Jane Farrell-Beck and Jean Parsons. *20th-Century Dress in the United States*. New York: Fairchild Publications, Inc, 2007, 34-45.
[107] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *20th-Century Dress in the United States.*
[108] Valerie Mendes and Amy de la Haye, *20th Century Fashion*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 29. Tea time was usually around five o'clock. Mendes and de la Haye, 31.

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chine. Wrappers which were loose fitting, one-piece garments were worn for relaxing when at home and not intended to be seen by the public.[109]

During the 1910s, the speed of modern life, including cars, rapid dances, and more women working outside of the home necessitated sensible clothing free from the excess fabric of previous decades. Popular styles included the tailored jacket and skirt. Jacket bodices hugged the body, with skirts raised to ankle length to prevent dragging. The look was lean. In 1911, the raised, empire waistline joined smooth skirts. In 1912, some adapted the latest fashion fad, the hobble skirt. The hobble skirt, credited to fashion designer Paul Poiret, constricted movement of the knees and ankles as the circumference of the bottom of the skirts was quite small.[110]

During World War I, "Radical developments were most evident in women's dress and had a particular impact on daytime and workplace clothing" along with an impact in manufacturing, fabrics, and design.[111] Wool was restricted for the War effort so silk and cotton were used for the majority of women's clothing. The silhouette during the War became wider with skirts growing shorter. The waistline of dresses sat at the natural waistline and full skirts were worn. In 1916, skirts were six inches off of the ground and in 1917 skirts were eight inches or more off of the ground. Women's tailored suits were popular and styled with distinctive military influence.[112] Tailored suits were fashionable ensembles of a jacket, skirt, and sometimes vest, styled after men's suits in fabric choice and color often called "man-tailored."[113]

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[109] James Laver. *Costume & Fashion*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995, 220; Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*.
[110] Elizabeth Ewing. *History of Twentieth Century Fashion,* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1974); Mendes and de la Haye, *20th Century Fashion,* 40; Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*; Ewing, *History of Twentieth Century Fashion*, 69.
[111] Mendes and de la Haye, *20th Century Fashion,* 48.
[112] Mendes and de la Haye, *20th Century Fashion*; Phyllis Tortora and Keith Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*. 3rd ed, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1998); 370.
[113] Kidwell and Christman, *Suiting Everyone*.

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Influenced by the War, jumpers and knitted cardigans became popular along with pullovers. The silhouette of evening wear was close to the style of day dresses. Skirts were full with many layers of ruffles with beading and embroidery. Women assisted with the War effort by working in factories while the men fought in Europe. Women wore womanalls which were coveralls with gathered pant legs. Women also wore uniforms with above the ankle length skirts with "no-nonsense" jackets when serving in the army motor corps.[114]

The years immediately following World War I were "really a transitional period from the wartime styles to the styles of the 1920s."[115] In 1918, fashionable dresses were barrel shaped, with narrow hems and wide waistlines. In 1919, skirts became narrower and hemlines shortened to ankle length. Women wore tailored suits with matching skirts and jackets and flattened silhouettes with the bosoms deemphasized. Post war designers included Jean Patou, Chanel, Edward Molyneux, Vionnet, and Lanvin.[116]

In 1919, Jeanne Lanvin introduced a bouffant skirt known as the *robe de style* which was reminiscent of the earlier crinoline period. Women strayed away from the corset and were adopting the brassiere as a form of support. Early brassiere styles between 1919 and 1924 included bandeau styles without separate cups and a full brassiere style. It was not until after 1924 that brassieres started to have defined cups.[117]

Paris and French couture continued to exert their influence on fashion. With the help of Paul Poiret, the corset became less fashionable. While Poiret "shackled" women's legs with the hobble skirt, he also prescribed a more "natural" form for women using the brassiere to form the body as opposed to the tight restrictions of the corset. Opposed to the exaggerated "S" curve of

[114] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 45.
[115] Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*. 3rd ed, 371.
[116] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*; Tortora and Eubank, *Survey of Historic Costume*. 3rd ed, 371.
[117] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 71.

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the early 1900s, a more natural and straight silhouette was ideal. While the brassiere became increasingly popular, the corset did not vanish from fashion; it simply changed shape. The new style of corset sat lower on the body and looked and functioned similarly to a girdle. It helped to slim the hips while creating a more "natural" waistline. Though the corset no longer emphasized the bust and hips while cinching the waist, it remained restricting and uncomfortable.[118]

Hats and accessories were important for women when shopping, visiting with family and friends, and other activities outside of the home. The extremely large picture hats of the 1900s were no longer fashionable and accessories in general became lighter and softer than in decades before. Popular hat styles of the time included the mushroom style, the peach basket style, and hats with no brim and deep crowns. The mushroom style was characterized by a raised, rounded crown while the peach basket style had little to no brim and broad crown. Hairstyles became less cumbersome and towards the end of the 1910s, brave women began bobbing their hair. Those who didn't bob their hair wore it up in French twists or waves.[119]

The Ready to Wear Industry for Plus Sized Women

It was stated that plus sized woman wore sizes 39" to 51" bust in dresses and 46" to 56" for separate waists. Lane Bryant manufactured dresses in bust sizes 38" to 60." Albert Malsin, Lane Bryant's husband, determined that there was three types of plus sized women in the 1910s: the full-busted but normal hipped type, the flat-busted but large hipped type, and the stout overall type.[120]

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[118] Ewing, *History of Twentieth Century Fashion.*
[121] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 49.
[121] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 49.
[121] Katherine Cranor. "Homemade Versus Ready-to-wear Clothing." *Journal of Home Economics* 12, no. 5 (1920): 230-233.
Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 49.
[121] Katherine Cranor. "Homemade Versus Ready-to-wear Clothing." *Journal of Home Economics* 12, no. 5 (1920): 230-233.

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Prior to the 1900s, a hired, professional dressmaker was seen as a status symbol and convenient for the woman hiring her. By hiring a dressmaker, a woman could afford to participate in other activities rather than be at home sewing. Generally in the 1900s custom-made clothing was of better quality than ready-to-wear clothing. Dressmakers allowed women a choice in fabric, style, and color. But, perceptions and availability of ready-to-wear garments shifted at the turn of the century. Ready-to-wear clothing quality became comparable to custom-made clothing and at much less expensive prices. Women needed quick, convenient, inexpensive, and fashionable clothing for work and ready-to-wear clothing was almost always the preferred choice.[121]

Even if the quality was better from a dressmaker, hired seamstresses could not produce fashionable garments fast enough for the ever changing styles demanded by women. Fashion and quantity were more important than quality. Ready-to-wear clothing was viewed as superior to custom-made clothing because women had an opportunity to analyze the quality and style of the finished product rather than pay a dressmaker and be disappointed with the outcome. Dressmakers would not spend the time "to study line, color, individuality, and fashion sufficiently to turn out always a stylish, artistic, garment."[122] Returning products that were unsatisfactory was also a new option with ready-to-wear clothing not available when utilizing the services of a dressmaker.[123]

While slender women of the 1910s had more ready-to-wear choices than ever before, the plus sized woman was "sadly neglected in the early development of the manufacture dress."[124] The plus sized woman was forced to rely on dressmakers or "the 'made-to-order' specialist" to

[121] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress in the United States*, 49.
[122] Cranor, "Homemade Versus Ready-to-wear Clothing," 232.
[123] Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge," 35.
[124] "Variety the Keynote of Millinery Show." *The New York Times*, 1 Aug. 1926, 39.

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make the latest fashions (sometimes to the chagrin of the dressmaker). A 1911 article in the *New York Times* stated, "If a designer who has her art at heart could only say to a very stout person that she only designed for the thin and tall figures, she would be relieved of a tax on her patience and skill."[125] Plus sized women found the inconvenience, delays, high prices, and tedious fittings of dressmakers to be unsatisfactory.[126]

The alternative to dressmakers was for women to make clothing for themselves. Home-sewn gowns were economical and afforded women an outlet for creativity, uniqueness, and individuality. Homemade gowns could usually be made for a third of the price of ready-to-wear garments and potentially be made with better craftsmanship and materials; that is, if the woman was a knowledgeable seamstress. The quality of the fabric, the color, and durability were all important factors to consider when creating a garment. One key factor to making garments at home was time. During the 1910s, more women were working outside of the home, spending time with their children, participating in leisure activities, or simply disliked sewing.[127]

Commercial patterns and pattern drafting systems were available to ease the home sewing process, though many of the patterns were limited in sizes. Pattern drafting systems were the precursor to commercial patterns and were based on three themes for sizing and fitting: direct measure, proportional, and hybrid. Direct measure used measurements of the bust, waist and hip and provided the best fit for garments, but was also the most time consuming. With a proportional system, one measurement, usually a women's bust, would be measured and determined the waist, hips, and any other measurements needed. This system was often the most unreliable since it was not guaranteed that a woman's body was in proportion between the bust, waist, and hips. A hybrid system combined direct measurements and the proportional system. It

[125] "Lack of Fashions for the Stout." *The New York Times*, 14 May 1911, 75.
[126] "Solving the Problem of the Large Figure." *Good Housekeeping*, July 1917, 72, 124.
[127] Parsons, "No Longer a "Frowsy Drudge," 35; Cranor "Homemade Versus Ready-to-wear Clothing."

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used only one measurement, typically from the bust which would determine the rest of the garment size. There were many problems with home sewn garments. If a plus sized woman was disproportioned, home sewn garments could be a fitting nightmare. Patterns often included poorly written instructions. Add to this difficulty many women lacked appropriate sewing skills. Oftentimes, women needed the help of a dressmaker to finish the garment.[128]

By the latter half of the 1910s, the ready-to-wear clothing industry had expanded for the plus sized woman. Plus sized woman strayed away from dressmakers clothing because of the satisfaction and convenience of ready-to-wear clothing. However, ready-to-wear clothing was usually made for those women larger in size, but of perfect proportion. Women with a bust measurement larger than "normal" or not proportioned still had difficulty purchasing ready-to-wear clothing. It was stated that in "good shops" women of larger size who were disproportioned could find a limited selection of ready-to-wear clothing.[129] The ready-to-wear industry for the plus sized woman developed by the 1920s and more manufactures and retailers saw the potential and profitable market of the plus sized industry during that time.[130]

Separate Departments for Plus Sized Women in Stores

Discussion of a separate department in department stores for plus sized women was mentioned in the *New York Times* in 1911 with the questions, "Why should fashions be lumped together in a mass like goods on a counter at a bargain sale? Why shouldn't everything be divided into fashions for the tall, for the short, for the stout, and for the thin?"[131] By 1910 department stores were divided into different product categories, such as women's, men's, and children's. Within each department, there were separations, such as the hosiery, gloves,

[128] Gamber, "Reduced to Science."
[129] "Solving the Problem of the Large Figure," 124.
[130] "Variety the Keynote," 39.
[131] "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.

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cosmetics, and jewelry sections, but there were no further divisions based on sizing (such as misses, women's, plus sized).[132]

The New York Times predicted in 1917 that "in a very short time all of the larger department stores will have departments designed solely for catering to the needs of the stout woman."[133] The need for separate departments and unique boutiques sprung from the discouragement that many plus sized women encountered when shopping in stores for the average sized women. Some felt humiliated that stores did not have clothing in their size and would have to rely on a tailor or dressmaker; especially at a time in history where homemade clothing was seen as an inferior product. Plus sized women also felt an "air of superiority" from slim salesgirls when they stated "we haven't your size."[134]

Several articles in *The New York Times* stated plus sized departments and stores did surprisingly well on the West Coast in cities such as San Francisco and Seattle. In one *New York Times* article titled, "Catering to the Stouter People: Is There an Advantage in Having Separate Department in Stores for Them?," stated that New York seemed slower to adopt separate departments for plus sized women over more progressive stores in Western cities despite the fact that it was understood that separate department stores were a "golden opportunity."[135] One Chicago business owner stated how lucrative the plus sized woman customer was, "Flesh comes from good things to eat and a more or less easy life, and both presuppose the possession of money."[136]

[132] Susan Porter Benson. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986.
[133] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72.
[134] "Cater By Method to Stout Persons," 28.
[135] "Catering to the Stout People." *The New York Times*, 28 Sept. 1919, 31.
[136] "Cater By Method to Stout Persons," 28.

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Department store managers and owners debated the pros and cons of separate departments for the plus sized individual. Some department store executives stated that they did not have enough space for a separate department. In one instance, an executive blamed the plus sized woman for her sensitivity, stating, plus sized women "resent having [their large size] called to their attention. Some women of this type are so sensitive about their size that they often seem to go out of their way in trying to find something to get offended at."[137] Another executive believed a plus sized woman would feel more comfortable shopping with and being waited on by other women of her size. She would not have to hear rude comments from "slender" shoppers and would have a saleswoman who understood her body type. The advantage of a separate department meant the buyer for the plus-sized department would select clothing with the proper line to flatter the larger figure and rely on the buyer's knowledge of her needs. This added department would increase sales and earn repeat customers. Separate departments were also needed to better differentiate the products. Often, non differentiated departments would include larger sizes placed on the same racks as "average" sized clothing. Because of this lack of attention, department stores lost considerable business to tailors, dressmakers, specialty shops, and corsetieres.[138]

Stores for the Plus Sized Woman

Stand-alone retail establishments for the plus sized women emerged during President William Howard Taft's administration, 1909-1913, with companies such as M. Gross & Co., who established the Stout House of Philadelphia, and Lane Bryant, who manufactured clothing for the nearly 40% of women who were larger than the perfect 36 size.[139] These specialty shops were able to cater specifically to the needs and desires of the plus-size population and provided

[137] "Catering to the Stout People," 31.
[138] "Catering to the Stout People," 31.
[139] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 161.

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freedom from ridicule and embarrassment. One Chicago business owner relayed a story about a slender woman entering her plus sized shop to purchase a blouse. The "skinny little 34 customer" was dismissed by the plus sized saleswoman stating "'Madam…we have nothing that will fit you.' Then every one of the twelve stout women sitting in front of the counter laughed aloud. They had all heard that verdict handed out to them so many times that it gave them the greatest pleasure to see conditions reversed."[140]

There were several specialty stores that catered to the plus sized woman. Leonard's of New York provided a brick and mortar store along with mail order catalogs for plus sized women. It sold dresses, suits, coats, skirts, and corsets. It advertised "quality and style" and "planned garments on lines of grace and individuality with distinctive finishing touches."[141] Graceline Stout Style Dress used "scientific designing" to design clothing for stout women instead of cutting the same pattern from smaller sizes to fit the larger woman. It designed "graceful, youthful style, perfect fitting, and a number of the newest modes from which you can select your frock."[142] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women advertised "slenderness to every line of the figure…perfect fitting, smartly tailored and beautifully made."[143] Like Lane Bryant, it made plus sized women's clothing specially designed and skillfully patterned to meet the requirements of a woman's proportions that added slenderness, poise, and grace without alterations. It clothing added length to the figure in a variety of fabrics appropriate for the plus sized woman in youthful styles.[144] F. F. Models stated that "long lines and youthful figures

[140] "Cater By Method to Stout Persons," 28.
[141] Leonard's. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Nov. 1916, 173.
[142] Graceline Stout Style Dresses. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Jan. 1918, 100.
[143] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Feb. 1918, 112.
[144] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Aug. 1917, 83 ; F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Mar. 1917, 123; F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Oct. 1917, 147; F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Jul. 1918, 83; F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Mar. 1918, 119; F. F.

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[were] so much desired by every full formed woman."[145] By 1919, F. F. Models, similar to other plus sized women's apparel companies, stated its clothing was "cut by experts who have made a special study of the requirements of the full-formed woman" to create a modish distinction and smooth fit "which are hers by right."[146] Drezwellsley Frocks were "for all 'types,' all purposes, all figures, ranging from the slim to the stout; for maid or matron."[147]

The Lane Bryant Company specially designed plus sized women's clothing to deceive the eye with lines that created slenderness through optical illusions. Its designs "borrowed both from the height, slenderness and airy grace of Gothic cathedrals and the camouflage innovations of World War I."[148] Based on a number of advertisements in fashion periodicals, Lane Bryant appeared to be the largest and most popular plus sized woman's apparel retailer during the 1910s and offered clothing to the stout woman. Lane Bryant offered a diverse assortment of products such as coats, dresses, suits, skirts, negligees, bathing suits, waists, sweaters, corsets, and underwear in bust sizes 35.5" to 58" and waist sizes 30" to 49." Lane Bryant promised to give all types of plus sized women clothing that would make them appear slender, poised, and confident. Lane Bryant styled and "cleverly" adapted models for the "average" size to fit and flatter the plus sized figure. It stressed that their ready-to-wear clothing would fit any type of plus sized figure from the stock without alterations.[149] It had "ultra-fashionable fashions" and "up-to-the-minute,

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Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Feb. 1917, 102; F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Oct. 1917, 147.

[145] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Mar. 1917, 123.

[146] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Mar. 1919, 107.

[147] Drezwellsley Frock. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Jul. 1917, 4.

[148] Tom Mahoney. *50 Years of Lane Bryant*. Lane Bryant, 1950; 20-21.

[149] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Sep. 1916, 117; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Aug. 1916, 81; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Apr. 1916, 126; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Jul. 1915, 61; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Sept. 1915, 88; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Oct. 1915, 108; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Sept. 1915, 88; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Oct. 1915, 108; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Apr. 1916, 126; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Feb. 1916, 122; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Sept. 1915, 88; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Oct. 1915, 108; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Apr. 1916, 126; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Feb. 1916, 122.

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youthful styles" at moderate prices.[150] Lane Bryant promised "that dumpy figure becomes a queenly carriage" that would "accentuate height and create the illusion of tapering lines that lend grace to the figure."[151] In 1917, Lane Bryant added new millinery, blouse, lingerie, hosiery, and mourning wear departments to their stores. It stressed that its garments were reproductions of American and foreign designers.[152]

Prescriptive Advice for the Plus Sized Woman, 1910s

Though the majority of fashions were designed for the slender woman, the media did not completely ignore the larger woman. *The New York Times* stated that the stout woman had a problem when dressing correctly, but should not ignore current fashions of the 1910s. As long as the stout women chose silhouettes that flattered her, then fashion would be in her favor. Oftentimes, fabrication and design were adapted from fashions for the "average" woman to fulfill the needs of plus sized women. Often called a "science," adapted styles tried to make the waist appear smaller and elongate the height.[153] *The New York Times* even suggested that a slight curve to the back would help "disguise the stout problem."[154]

Clothing

Plus sized women were advised through various sources what to wear to flatter their figures. Popular press sources that featured fashion editorials focused on fashions that were available ready-to-wear. For the most part, they did not offer dressmakers and home-sewers

[150] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Apr. 1916, 126.
[151] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Dec. 1916, 114.
[152] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* May 1917, 33; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Feb. 1917, 166; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazar* Mar. 1917, 119.
[153] Stout women who belonged in the lower class were advised to not reduce because she would not be able to keep up moneywise with the ever changing styles. "Importance of the Silhouette –Treatment of the Cutaway Coat for Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 30 Mar. 1913, 82; Rittenhouse, Anne. "Desirable Clothes," 62; "Women Cut Weight to Suit Fashions," 6; "Design and Materials Especially Adapted to the Figure of the Older and Stouter Woman." *Good Housekeeping*, Sept. 1916, 87; "The Science of Adding an Inch to a Woman's Stature and Subtracting Several from Her Waist and Hips." *Good Housekeeping*, Oct. 1916, 76.
[154] "Importance of the Silhouette," 82.

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advice on styling details. Women would need to look to other printed sources such as *The Delineator* and *The Modern Priscilla* for information pertaining to custom-made garments. These magazines published by sewing pattern companies, provided advice, solutions, and information about products for the home sewer.[155]

While *The New York Times* claimed that plus sized women were excluded from wearing high fashion garments, much advice was provided to help the overweight stay fashionable.[156] Specific silhouettes and construction techniques were recommended to the plus sized woman. The fashionable empire waistline style of the early 1910s was flattering to both the slender and plus sized figure (Figure 3.1).[157] The *New York Times* stated the empire style "if properly handled, carries satisfying results for the women who find the present silhouette beyond their attainment."[158] The higher empire waistline created a smoother and straighter line over the hips which flattered the figure more than a dress with an anatomically correct waistline. The caveat was provided, however, that while the empire waist was an advantage to the plus sized form, it needed to be created by an experienced dressmaker to fit properly.

Figure 3.1 Fashionable Empire waistline style for the plus sized woman, 1911.

Source: "Becoming to All Types." *Good Housekeeping*, Mar. 1911, 283.

[155] Sidney R Bland. "Shaping the Life of the New Woman: The Crusading Years of the Delineator." *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 19, no. 2 (2009): 165-188.
[156] *The Delineator*, published by the Butterick Company from 1873-1937, provided not only fashion and sewing pattern information to its readers, but also provided lengthy discussions on women's reform, women's involvement in social clubs, improved educational opportunities, and work advancements for women at the turn of the century "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.
[157] Rittenhouse "What the Well Dressed Woman Wears," 13 Nov. 1910, 60.; "Styles for Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 18 Dec. 1910, 64.
[158] Rittenhouse, "The Right Clothes," 60.

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Other advised clothing items for the plus sized woman included the tunic for it was "bulky with its drapery around the ankles, its festooning above the knees, its gathers at the waist and its immense belt, yet it is worn by all figures with grace and dignity."[159] Plus sized women were advised to wear straight coats that covered the hips. The coat should be fastened over the lowest point of the bust area. Coats with net and chiffon components were "magical transformers."[160] Some plus sized women felt the need to wear a suit in the summer because a jacket would provide a smoother and straighter line than a blouse would provide. *The New York Times* advised against this trend however because of how uncomfortable it would be on hot days and suggested that they wear a gown that was all one piece. Women with large faces were advised to wear wide-brimmed hats that would cast shadows on the face (Figure 3.2).[161]

Figure 3.2 One piece dress with wide brimmed hat, 1916.

Source: "Design and Materials Especially Adapted to the Figure of the Older and Stouter Woman." *Good Housekeeping*, Sept. 1916, 87.

[159] "Flounced Skirts Once More Appearing--Made of This Fabric for House Wear, and Worn Over Slips." *The New York Times*, 9 Jan. 1910, 60.
[160] Mrs. LeRoy-Huntington. "Dress-Up Clothes." *Good Housekeeping*, Jan. 1911, 81-85.
[161] Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes;"James M Flagg. "Straining for the Queer." *Good Housekeeping*, Mar. 1911, 281.

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Unique construction and design techniques were used on plus sized women's garments. Flattering features on plus sized women's gowns were longer skirts, when the skirt was cut in front at a downward angle, and a single box pleat at the back. Adding an extra panel of trimming below the knees balanced the width of the hips.[162] Other construction techniques included selecting dresses with a fitted yoke on the skirt which highlighted the best proportions on the plus sized woman and were said to be flattering on women with "undesired pounds."[163] Loose fitting sleeves such as the modified kimono sleeve were better selections than tight bodices with tight sleeves that would cling to curves.

Color and Fabrics

Clara Laughlin, author of *The Complete Dressmaker: With Simple Directions for Home Millinery* (1916), advised different color palettes. She advised plus sized women to wear dark, concealing, solid colors in brown, blue, green, black, and sometimes plum. These colors not only concealed the curves and size of the wearer, but also made the woman blend in with her surroundings and background. In comparison, slender women could wear almost any color of the rainbow which included pastel blue, rose, yellow, silver, light green, turquoise, and white. The tall plus sized woman was advised to wear small checks or figures, narrow stripes, or light and dark solid colors. Plus sized fair skinned women with blue eyes were advised to wear dull sage greens, soft grayish blues, and purple and lavender with shades of pale yellow, white, cream, or pale blue.[164]

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[162] "Lack of Fashions for the Stout." *The New York Times*, 14 May 1911, 75.
[163] A fitted yoke on a skirt is a smooth garment piece around the hips. Fullness is usually sewn on the bottom of this piece. "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75; S. de Ivanowski, S. "Becoming to All Types." *Good Housekeeping*, Mar. 1911, 285-286; "Solving the Problem of the Large Figure," 72, 124.
"Styles for Stout Women," 64.
[164] "After Six O'Clock." *Good Housekeeping*, Oct. 1916, 65; Laughlin, *The Complete Dressmaker*, 163-164, 285.

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The *New York Times* and *Harper's Bazaar* included much advice related to color and fabric selection for the stout woman. It was crucial for plus sized women to wear ensembles of only color from head to toe. A monochromatic look would not draw undue attention to the plus sized woman. Other colors could be incorporated into a gown, but it was important that the majority of the garment be of the same color and the same fabric and not divided into two parts at the waistline.[165]

Fabric choices in the 1910s were softer and more pliable than in previous decades which made draping easier without adding extra weight to the wearer. Plus-sized manufacturers preferred gabardine, georgette, broadcloth, chiffon, velvet, and crepe de Chine fabrics as these were considered more forgiving to the figure. These fabrics were also often made with spun yarns, which were more matte in comparison to smooth, filament yarns made from silk or newly manufactured rayon. Silk in filament form and rayon fibers were more lustrous than cotton, wool, and linen and therefore, made a shinier fabric. The sheen of satin fabrics was believed to magnify curves and was best avoided by the plus sized woman. In addition to a wider color palette, the slender woman was provided a larger selection of fabric choices such as taffeta, charmeuse, and silk jersey.[166]

Optical illusions could be used to disguise the plus sized woman's form. Important points to remember were that "broad, unbroken surfaces are fatal; that an expanse of regular stripes is still an expanse; that two lines are sometimes better than twenty to give an effect of length; and that drapery can be made to disguise dimensions as well as to increase them."[167]

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[165] Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes."
[166] "Importance of the Silhouette," 82; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Sept. 1915, 88; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Oct. 1915, 108; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Nov. 1915, 96; "Design and Materials," 87; "The Science of Adding an Inch," 76; "After Six O'Clock," 65; "A Clever Bit of Economy in Models Which Serve the Double Purpose of Sports and General Wear." *Good Housekeeping*, Apr. 1917, 64.
[167] "Importance of the Silhouette," 82.

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Corsets

Though undergarments were important for average sized women, underwear for the stout woman was imperative. Properly fitting undergarments, such as the corset, provided the proper silhouette popular at the time. Anne Rittenhouse, fashion editor of the *New York Times*, wrote that if the stout woman "would be even near fashionable she cannot afford to have any thickness around the hips or ruffles at the ankles."[168] The corset was often considered a stout woman's "best friend." The corset was "the most important auxiliary" item worn by plus sized women to fit in with the current fashions of the time; it provided the figure control that she needed. The corset afforded "the 'new' stout woman to free herself from the unsightly lines of the past and take her rightful position in the world of fashion."[169]

While corsets were declining in popularity for the slender woman, the plus sized woman could not abandon this necessity. Brassieres were worn by both the slim and the stout, though it was strongly suggested that plus sized women always continue to wear a corset. The majority of women with any curvy shape continued to wear their corset or the new foundation garment, the girdle. Oftentimes however, the girdle did not provide enough support for the plus sized woman.[170] Many major corset companies acknowledged that woman came in different shapes and sizes and offered corsets for the stout, average, and slender figure.[171]

Though not intended to reduce a woman's size, the stylish stout woman's corset was made to make her appear slender by reducing curves and bulges. To the plus sized woman, the

[168] Rittenhouse, "The Right Clothes," 60.
[169] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72.
[170] A girdle is different than a corset. Girdles are usually made from elastic material like rubber and shapes a woman's figure from the waist to upper thighs, whereas a corset consists of boning and rigid fabric to shape the bust to the waist.
[171] It is a common belief that all women threw away their corsets during the 1910s, though this was not the case. Women would disrobe their corset while performing strenuous exercise like dancing or if they were very thin and young. Rittenhouse, "What the Well Dressed Woman Wears," 4 June 1911, 72; Jill Fields. "'Fighting the Corsetless Evil': Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930." *Journal of Social History* 33, no. 2 (1999): 355-384.

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stout corset was deemed as the most important part of dressing. It would smooth lines and afford the latest styles to be worn so that the stout could now be in fashion. Though the corset could aid in making the stout woman look better, some believed that the corset could only do so much. Rittenhouse believed that "even when a woman has laced in her hips and flattened her abdomen until she can stand no more she does not present the exact silhouette that will stand a light short skirt and a rakish schoolboy's jacket."[172]

The "stylish stout" corset appeared in popular press materials in 1917 and was said to have combined knowledge of scientific construction principles and common sense corset design. The stout corset was low riding and worn with brassieres of embroidered fabrics and was better suited for the plus sized figure than a corset with a high bust that would push the flesh upwards towards the neck and chin. Scientifically designed corsets were often a strategy for corset companies to differentiate themselves from others. By sending their corsetieres to sponsored courses on the topic, the corset company often seemed concerned with their customer's health.[173] The stylish stout corset was a "distinct innovation" appropriate for stout and super-stout women and worn to fit in with the current fashions of slender lines. The stylish stout corset was not easily manufactured since,

> Not only did it require considerable work and experimenting in the designing rooms, but conferences with specialists in apparel for stout women were required to determine on standard sizes, so that given the corset size, a corresponding gown, shirtwaist, petticoat, and other apparel could be provided to meet exactly the individual requirements of the stout woman.[174]

Skilled corsetieres specially designed and patterned corsets in the early 1910s to create comfortable undergarments for the plus sized woman, but *The New York Times* stated "it was

[172] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72; Rittenhouse, "The Right Clothes," 60.
[173] Fields, "Fighting the Corsetless Evil," 370.
[174] "Stout Women Can Now Be Stylish," 72.

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better to buy [a corset] than to have one made."[175] A woman's corset should have been purchased readymade and fitted to "cover her defects" opposed to made to order by a special corsetiere or made at home.[176] Ready-to-wear corsets provided enough support for the plus sized figure. It was difficult prior to the 1910s for a woman to get a properly fitting corset at a reasonable price, but towards the end of the 1910s it was stated that this problem was not as difficult. A variety of ready-to-wear, high quality figure molding corsets were reasonably priced and comparable in price to corsets for the average sized woman.[177]

Prejudices Against the Plus Sized Woman

Plus sized women in the 1910s were called a variety of names to describe their silhouette. Stout was the predominant term during this time. The term stout did not seem to have a negative connation during the 1910s like it does today. Other terms used to describe the plus sized women might have been offensive to some especially terms like "silhouette beyond their attainment" or "ungainly figure."[178] Throughout the 1910s, plus sized women were also called large women, comfortably housed woman of flesh, woman of robust proportions, extremely stout figures, short fat women, rather large figure, stout women, slightly stout woman, super stout women, large figure, very large figure, somewhat larger figure, well developed figure, plump young women, portly, full formed, and ungainly figure or variations of these terms.

The topic of women's weight was a source of ridicule during the 1910s because silhouettes slimmed down and people became more aware of the potential health problems that extra weight could add. Plus, it seemed that many people found extra weight unattractive at a time when slimmer lines and less fabric were popular.

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[175] Rittenhouse, "What the Well Dressed Woman Wears," 13 Nov. 1910, 60; "Don'ts for Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 29 May 1910, 63.
[176] "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.
[177] "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.
[178] "Styles for Stout Women," 64; Goodform Reducer Supporter. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Apr. 1918, 117.

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Proscriptive Advice for the Plus Sized Woman, 1910s

Clothing

Special care and attention was needed for plus sized women's clothing and advice often warned women of the delicate balance required for styles, silhouettes, and fabrics to be either flattering or unflattering. In addition to the popular and fashion press, several dressmaker handbooks addressed the stout woman. *The Magic of Dress* by Grace Gould included a chapter entitled "The Afflicted in Appearance" that included the stout, the too-thin, the homely, the nervous, and the dowdy, "each with her own pathetic tale of woes peculiarly unjust and cruel."[179] Other dressmakers' handbooks which addressed the difficulties of dressing the plus sized woman included *American Dressmaking Step By Step* (1916) and *The Complete Dressmaker: With Simple Directions for Home Millinery* (1916).

Sources offered advice to the plus sized woman that counseled her in what not to wear in terms of collar choices, dress styling, and suit selection. The plus sized woman was advised to never wear the half-high round neck collar, the sailor collar, frilled collars, or large hemmed skirts. Elaborately decorated styles of collars were much too fashionable for her and only plain collars would do. Plus sized women were also advised against wearing tight fitting clothing. Tight fitting clothing exaggerated curves and the preferred style was to add drapery to clothing that was close to the body.[180] This added drapery would camouflage the apparent size of the woman. It was important for plus sized women to find "the right kind of" clothing that was specially made and tailored for her rather than refigure a suit manufactured for the "average" size woman. If a woman did this, the refigured garment would not fit properly. A suit needed to be cut and sewn to encompass the plus sized woman's proportions since they were often much

[179] Gould, *The Magic of Dress*, 119.
[180] "Panniers Come Back into Favor in Paris." *The New York Times*, 16 Sept. 1912, 13.

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different than a slender woman's. This difference in proportions would greatly alter the fit of a reconstructed garment.[181]

The New York Times advised plus sized women to not wear the tight fitting sheath-like gowns that were fashion in the mid-1910s since they would expose "every superfluous ounce of flesh."[182] Tight bodices with snugly fitting sleeves were unattractive on the plus sized figure. Some even felt that dressmakers should make dresses for only average sized customers or only for plus sized customers; to special their efforts to one segment of the woman's population.[183]

Skirt choices for the plus sized woman were important. Many different styles of skirt choices were deemed off limits for the larger figure. Plus sized women were advised not to wear skirts with extra wide hems. The proportion of this hem was not well suited for the plus sized woman's figure. It made the plus sized woman appear stouter. Narrow skirts were quoted as the "real Waterloo" of plus sized women, but could be worn if adapted from the present style.[184] It depended on how the skirt was cut. A plus sized woman's skirt could not be as short or as narrow as a slender woman's could. She was also asked not to wear a plain or narrow skirt like a slender woman could. Plus sized women could not wear hobble skirts. She also wanted to avoid skirts many ruffles and folds on the surface. Plus sized women were advised to avoid a wide cutaway opening in the front of the skirt or coat for it would have a "barn door effect." They should not wear plain front skirts, but always had concealing decorations and trims.[185] A narrow silhouette,

[181] "Cater By Method to Stout Persons," 28.
[182] "Women Cut Weight to Suit Fashions," 6.
[183] "Styles for Stout Women," 64; "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.
[184] "Styles for Stout Women," 64.
[185] Rittenhouse, "What the Well Dressed Woman Wears," 13 Nov. 1910, 60; "Styles for Stout Women," 64; "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75; "The Narrow Skirt." *Good Housekeeping*, Mar. 1911, 282-283; Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes;" "Importance of the Silhouette," 82.

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fitted jackets and narrow skirts, was popular and "figure-revealing" was thought to bring "woe to the hearts of the stout."[186]

The New York Times stated that even in 1910 that the silhouette already had "boyish" styling even with added ruffles. This new boyish style was "impossible" for the plus sized woman to wear. Even if a woman was properly corseted, the rigid boning would not be enough to provide the proper silhouette to wear a "schoolboy's" style jacket with a light, short skirt. For a woman to fit into fashionable dress, it was imperative that she did not have thickness around her hips and ruffles at her ankles. This would add unnecessary fullness in undesired areas. Jackets should not be worn if they slope in the back or cut too short at the hip level.[187]

Certain accessory styles were also off-limits for plus sized women. Patent leather shoes with gray or white tops or magpie slippers with steel buckles did not flatter the plus sized woman's foot. She was advised to wear shoes and stockings that matched. Even brightly colored hats were discouraged as brilliant colors and lustrous fabrics would unduly "call attention to [the stout] woman's figure."[188] Hats were critical for the stout woman. Tiny hats should be avoided for "everyone knows how ridiculous it is to see a large woman wearing a tiny hat."[189] Along with tiny hats, women should avoid the bowler hat, high-pointed crowns with trimmings. She should also be careful when choosing a belt, since most would be unflattering on her.[190]

It appeared that by the end of the decade manufactures of "stylish stout" garments made ready-to-wear garments fashionable however, hosiery manufacturers were still "unsympathetic." The hosiery machinery was not equipped to make larger sized hosiery in "out sizes," therefore, plus sized women did not have the opportunity to purchase stylish and openwork hosiery, but

[186] "Woe to the Stout Woman." *The New York Times*, 23 Aug. 1917, 16.
[187] Rittenhouse, "What the Well Dressed Woman Wears," 13 Nov. 1910, 60; "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.
[188] Rittenhouse, "The Right Clothes," 60; "Stylish Stout Hats Now." *The New York Times*, 11 May 1920, 19.
[189] "Stylish Stout Hats Now," 19.
[190] Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes."

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could only buy plain patterned hosiery. This was a disadvantage to plus sized women who wanted to have the latest fashions in hosiery.[191]

Color and Fabrics

Stout women were instructed to never wear stripes, checks, large flowered prints, or vivid colors like emerald green, pink, or crimson and to avoid fabrics such as crash, taffeta, or satin. Large patterns, checks, and stripes did not flatter the plus sized figure and only added to a woman's girth. These stylistic devices made a woman appear larger; quite the opposite effect of the desired silhouette during this time. Fabrics such as crash, taffeta, and satin were shiny fabrics which magnified the troubled areas on a woman's body. Plus sized women were advised to avoid wearing a blouse of one color and a skirt of a different color because this color blocking effect emphasized the plus sized woman's larger figure.[192]

Conclusions

Plus sized women were often discriminated against and criticized when trying to follow fashionable dress. They were often disadvantaged with lack of ready-to-wear choices and stylish garments in their sizes. This made it difficult for plus sized women to easily participate in fashionable dress. Advice literature dictated prescriptive and proscriptive advice. Through the research conducted, the advice given to plus sized woman of the 1910s became clearer. Common themes that emerged from the study included prejudices against the plus sized woman, prescriptive and proscriptive advice regarding what the plus sized woman should and should not wear, and the apparel industry's attempts to create suitable styles and properly fitting clothing for the larger woman. The plus sized woman endured name calling such as "butter-legs," "butter-balls," "stout," "embonpoint." These stereotypes still exist today.

[191] "Lo, The Poor Stout Woman." *The New York Times*, 20 May 1919, 26.
[192] Rittenhouse, "Desirable Clothes," 62; Gould, *The Magic of Dress*, 119-131; Laughlin, *The Complete Dressmaker*, 163; "Lack of Fashions for the Stout," 75.

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Through the popular press articles researched for this study, the plus sized woman was advised as to what proper styles would look best as well as which styles to avoid. Though the stout woman was generally seen as a problem, it was thought that if she had a plan in mind, she would be able to dress according to fashionable styles. The empire waist styled garment would flatter her figure and lucky for her, it was in style during the 1910s. Tunics, peasant blouses, and modified kimono sleeves could all be worn by her along with skirts and blouses that were monochromatic. She should also wear collarless blouses, shallow yokes, square necks, and V necks. The most important garment the plus sized woman could wear was the corset designed especially for her. Wearing a corset made the plus sized women appear more slender and more fashionable. What not to wear advice usually provided discouraging advice to women such as that she would not fit into fashionable clothing and was seen as an obstacle to dress as in Grace Gould's dress advice book, *The Magic of Dress.* She should abandon fashionable clothing and stray away from bright colors and certain fabrics such as crash, taffeta, and satin for these fabrics would draw unnecessary attention to her; she should blend into the background as much possible. Even brightly colored hats were discouraged as brilliant colors and lustrous fabrics would unduly "call attention to [the stout] woman's figure."

By 1916, the stout women comprised 13 million Americas, and had high purchasing power. During this time period, businesses began to take notice of her. This can be seen through the fashion companies that emerged such as Lane Bryant, Leonard's, Graceline, and F.F. Models for Full Formed Women. These businesses noticed the potential for the plus sized woman and companies like Lane Bryant are still in existence today and continue to provide ready-to-wear options for the plus sized woman.

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CHAPTER FOUR: 1920S

Chapter 4 examines the emergence of the plus sized women's ready-to-wear industry during the 1920s. This topic is important to explore since home or dress maker made garments were no longer fashionable and there was a large demand for ready-to-wear garments. This chapter is divided into the following sections: fashions for the average woman, the ready to wear industry for plus sized women, separate departments for plus sized women, stores for plus sized women, prescriptive advice, prejudices against the plus sized woman, proscriptive advice, and conclusions.

Fashions for the Average Sized Woman, 1920s

The silhouette of the early 1920s was quite different from the silhouette of the 1910s. The ideal silhouette of the 1920s was tubular and flat and was "boyish" as opposed to the desirable womanly silhouette of the 1910s. At the beginning of the 1920s, skirts remained ankle length, but as the middle of the decade approached, skirts were fourteen to sixteen inches off of the ground. The skirts of 1926-1928 were at their highest for the decade. This was the first time that women's knees were seen. Women usually wore one piece, loose fitting, sleeveless dresses with a "V", round, cowl, or bateau neckline. Dress silhouettes were very straight and boxy with lowered waistlines at the hip level. Silhouettes changed from a barrel shape in 1919, to an oblong shape in the early 1920s, and then in the late 1920s were wedged shaped with a narrow hemline.

Dress and coat combinations were popular along with tailored suits, overblouses, mock jackets, vestees, and tunics. Skirts were cut on the bias and included scalloped or handkerchief style hems. Evening wear was cut in the same length as day time dress, but usually more heavily ornamented. Fashionable fabrics for evening dresses included velvets, satins, and chiffons.

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Popular fashion designers at the time included Vionnet, Chanel, Jeanne Lanvin, Jean Patou, Lucien Lelong, and Edward Molyneux.[193]

The Ready to Wear Industry for Plus Sized Women

By the 1920s, plus sized women were able to purchase ready-to-wear clothing specially designed for their size. The plus sized woman was more accepted in the 1920s than in the 1910s. Manufacturers and designers saw the potential for profit if they catered to the plus sized woman. It was believed that this newly emerging market would make for a loyal customer base. *Vogue* acknowledged that stout women could and should be as stylish and fashionable as her slender sister stating "Yet surely the makers of the mode do not expect all women whose waist-lines measure more than 34 inches to retire to one of those communities where the genial garment known as the Mother Hubbard is the last word in dress."[194] Specialization and choice was limited in the 1910s; the beginning of the 1920s saw growth in the number of plus sized clothing manufacturers and the importance of the plus sized women's demographic.[195]

Sizing

Sizing for plus sized women in the 1920s was discussed in greater depth than in previous years in sources such as *The New York Times*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Vogue*. Like today, however, no standard sizing amongst ready-to-wear companies existed and discrepancies in sizing occurred. Sizing by the bust circumference was standard since it reported a numeric value and did not have discrepancies from company to company. The problem with sizes based solely on bust measurements was that these measurements did not account for differences in waist and hip measurements. Manufacturers faced difficulties because even if two plus sized women had

[193] Farrell-Beck and Parsons, *Twentieth Century Dress.*
[194] "Smart Aids to Slenderness." *Vogue*, 1 May 1921, 115, 118.
[195] "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade: Success Met with in the Attempts to Make Specially Designed Garments." *The New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1923, 45.

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the same bust measurement, their body types could be very different. *The New York Times* stated in 1924 that stout sizes ranged from 38.5" to 52.5" in bust measurement. Further, a 48 in "ordinary" or average sizes was comparable to a size 42" to 44" in plus sized sizing.[196]

A "prominent manufacturer" of the plus sized trade stated in a *New York Times* article stated that in the early 1920s, the plus sized women was grouped into three categories: the "stylish stout" who was a narrow waisted well-corseted woman that lived primarily in large cities; the plus sized women with larger hips, a flatter bust, and tight stays; and the third type was the "stubby" or short plus sized woman.[197] If the "stylish stout" lived primarily lived in large cities, it is inferred that the other two types of plus sized women, the larger hipped woman and the short plus sized woman, lived in smaller cities and rural areas. The article did not state how many other manufacturers and retailers subscribed to the idea of three distinct types of plus size women. These types were in contrast to the three types of stout women Albert Malsin identified for Lane Bryant in the 1910s: the full-busted but normal hipped type, the flat-busted but large hipped type, and the stout overall type.[198]

It was stated that plus sized women "cannot gown themselves in the same styles as their exceptionally slender friends."[199] Appropriate styles were modified and adapted from styles worn by the average sized woman with concealing and flattering lines. It was important that plus sized women purchased gowns specially designed for them and not purchase "regular" gowns in larger sizes. The "regular" sized garments in larger sizes did not have the "stylish stout effects" because they were not properly cut and proportioned for the plus sized woman's body type.[200]

[196] "Providing Dresses for Stout Women," 42.
[197] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade." *The New York Times*, 13 Aug. 1922, 41.
[198] Mahoney, *50 Years of Lane Bryant* ; "A Chance to Make Money." *The New York Times*, 27 Apr. 1922, 27.
[199] "The Importance of the Line." *Vogue*, 1 Aug. 1920, 48.
[200] "Providing Dresses for Stout Women," 42.

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At the start of the 1920s, some plus sized women felt neglected by fashion designers though it is to be noted many averaged size women expressed similar sentiments. Well known fashion designers discriminated against designing clothing for plus sized women. [201] Lanvin stated that her frocks would not be noted "for beauty and distinction" unless worn by the "right type of person." The right type of person was of the "right height, right weight, and above all, slenderness."[202] Couturieres ignored the specific body requirements needed by plus sized women. Paris did not acknowledge, as New York had already done, that plus sized women could look fashionable if they were presented with clothing specially designed for them with slenderizing effects. By the mid-decade, France did not specially design garments for the plus sized woman, but still cut popular regular sized dresses in larger sizes to accommodate larger women.[203] This came at a curious time when the vast amount of "American" ready-to-wear designs were often copies of French designs.[204]

In order to modify and adapt current fashions to plus sized fashions, U.S. designers were hired to study the plus sized women's form. These designers found that creating clothing for the plus sized women was no different than designing for average sized women. Similar to slender women, plus sized women wanted stylish garments that fit her figure and personality. She wanted garments that were designed for her body type in youthful lines that promoted slenderness. She did not want to purchase garments designed for the average women in larger

[201] "For the Stouter Woman." *Good Housekeeping*, Apr. 1920, 69; Gardner, Edith M. "The Older Woman: Distinction in Dress Demands Correct Lines." *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1926, 60.
[202] "The Importance of the Cape and Scarf; The Smartness of Tailored Frocks." *Good Housekeeping*, June 1926, 72-73, 222.
[203] "Large Women's Dresses." *The New York Times*, 31 May 1925, 34.
[204] Marcketti and Parsons, "American Fashions for American Women."

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sizes.[205] These "afterthought" garments produced by companies not interested in catering to plus sized women's needs would not fit properly, nor flatter the figure.

By 1923, plus sized women were able to purchase almost all of their clothing ready-to-wear. No longer did she have to purchase whatever was available in ill-fitting styles or have them made to measure by dressmakers. The garments were designed using ingenuity and skill to create clothing that fit well and was becoming. The plus sized woman had expectations of ready-to-wear retailers and manufacturers. She did not want to wait for the new styles of the season. She expected the styles to be in the fashionable mode and available as early as the garments for the average sized women.[206]

By the end of the decade, manufacturers started making plus sized clothing in half sizes.[207] Half sizes were introduced to reduce the need for excessive alterations and fit plus sized women 5 feet five inches and shorter. Half size garments typically had shorter waistlines, more narrow shoulders, shorter skirts, fuller hips, and fuller sleeves through the upper arm. Half sized garments were "generally young styles and close in fashion and styling to regular misses size dresses."[208]

Separate Departments for Plus Sized Women in Stores

Within the fashion press, businesses and plus sized women gradually acknowledged that there should be different departments for plus sized women's clothing in department stores. In order to satisfy the needs of the plus sized woman, manufacturers and retailers needed to sell appealing garments that were specially designed and properly proportioned by people who

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[205] "Youthful Fashions Adapted to the Older and More Mature Figure." *Good Housekeeping*, Sept. 1921, 59; "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45.
[206] "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45; "The New Costumes of Odd Sizes: Attractive Treatments for the Sleeves, Skirts and Waists are Introduced--New Ensemble Styles." *The New York Times*, 14 July 1929, 104; "Attire for Stout Women: Output of it for Resort Season Larger Than Ever Before." *The New York Times*, 14 Nov. 1926, 48.
[207] "The New Costumes of Odd Sizes," 104.
[208] Kidwell and Christman. *Suiting Everyone*; Mahoney, *50 Years of Lane Bryant*; 22.

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studied the stout woman's "clothing problems."[209] Further, special departments would allow for salespeople hired and trained to meet the plus sized woman's needs. According to historian, Susan Porter Benson, a plus sized woman would be able to empathize easier with a fellow plus sized customer rather than a slender saleswoman.[210]

By the early 1920s, business owners slowly realized the potential for manufacturing and selling plus sized women's clothing even if it did "put themselves at pains."[211] Greater attention to plus sized clothing ready-to-wear manufacturing and merchandising in specialty shops and department stores was seen by 1922. An encouraging article published in the Business World section of *The New York Times*, titled "A Chance to Make Money," stated there was "surefire success" in starting a knitwear business for plus sized women manufacturing knitted silk garments, sweaters, and smocks. These garments could usually be made with a low overhead which made them reasonably priced. Interestingly, the article stated that fitting knitwear to the plus sized figure was more difficult than fitting woven garments since seams on woven garments could be opened and closed easily if a garment was the wrong size.[212] Usually, due to the stretch of knit products, these garments tended to be easier to fit a larger range of sizes, however, they could be less becoming to a larger physique. These sweaters compared in fit, workmanship, and quality to the "regular-sized" sweaters. Rayon sweaters were sold for as inexpensively as $6.50.[213]

One business owner in New York chastised average sized clothing retailers for viewing plus sized women as "the fifth wheel of the wagon and who profess to see 'nothing in it.'"[214] In

[209] "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45.
[210] Porter Benson, "The Cinderella of Occupations."
[211] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41.
[212] "A Chance to Make Money," 27.
[213] "Claims it Can Be Done." *The New York Times*, 29 Apr. 1922, 23; The rayon sweaters were described as "fibre" sweaters. Previous research done by the researcher determined that the term "fibre" was synonymous with rayon.
[214] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41.

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the early 1920s, some business owners stated that separate departments in larger cities was logical, however, separate departments in smaller town stores were discouraged. This was because people were more likely to know everyone in a small town and different departments would cause discrimination. The plus sized woman did not want to feel different and excluded by shopping in areas based on sizes apart from slender women she knew.[215] Further, some department store buyers and managers thought that plus sized women's clothing was a novelty, the customers were difficult to deal with, and not much profit was to be made. Often buyers in these stores would offer garments in "extra" large sizes that were not specially designed for the plus sized woman.

By 1923, this view changed and retailers in medium and smaller sized cities were encouraged to "cash in" by catering to the needs of the plus sized woman.[216] Toward the middle of the decade, it was reported in *The New York Times* that department stores sold a better selection of plus sized clothing than earlier in the 1920s and that buyers spent more time considering their customer. Department store buyers perhaps noticed the popularity and success of specialty shops like Lane Bryant and that the plus sized woman was not a novelty.[217]

By 1924, businesses that offered separate departments for plus sized women experienced rapid growth though there was still hesitation by some retailers. One large department store in New York City renovated its "stylish stout department" with new and modern fixtures and displays. *The New York Times* stated, the "trade developed an appreciation of how much attention must be paid to the needs of the stout woman, who is still very much in evidence despite the general tendency toward slimness of figure which is the desire of femininity in

[215] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41.
[216] "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45.
[217] "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45.

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general at the present time."[218] Ready-to-wear garments for plus sized women were still considered an afterthought, however, and usually presented after the start of the season following the presentation of the "regular" size garments in fashion shows.[219]

Specialty Stores for the Plus Sized Woman

In the 1920s, plus sized women could purchase ready-to-wear clothing from a variety of specialty retailers that catered to their needs. Numerous shops advertised in *Good Housekeeping, Vogue, and Harper's Bazaar* including Lane Bryant, R and Z Stout Waists, Graceline Dresses, F.F. Models, Super Customade, La Mere Frocks, Blackshire, Queen Make Everyday Dresses, Charles E. May Company, Inc. Department stores that featured and sold plus sized women's fashions included Gimbel Brothers, The Rosenbaum Co., Mandel Brothers, R. H. Macy & Co., Barmon Brothers Company, Inc., and Platt Bros. Many of these retailers stressed that their garments were scientifically designed to improve the look of the plus sized woman and to make her appear more slender.

Lane Bryant (Figure 4.1) sold a wide gamut of women's products from undergarments to outerwear for plus sized women. Women with a 39.5" to 56" bust could purchase coats, suits, skirts, dresses, waists, corsets, negligees, and underwear in styles that were specially proportioned and designed for larger women.[220] Lane Bryant stressed in their advertisements that it specialized in clothing that would make the plus sized women appear slender and smaller and "make stoutness becoming."[221] Lane Bryant stated in its advertisement that their "aim in business [was] to provide for stout women the same clothes service that other specialty shops provide

[218] "Providing Dresses for Stout Women," 42.
[219] "Attire for Stout Women," 48.
[220] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Feb. 1920, 146; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Apr. 1920, 158; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Aug. 1920, 20.
[221] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Apr. 1920, 171; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Sept. 1920, 148; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Aug. 1920, 20.

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only for the slender women."[222] Lane Bryant acknowledged in its advertisements that plus sized women would be unbecoming in styles that slender women wore, but by modifying the styles, plus sized women would look smart and "express individuality."[223]

Figure 4.1 Lane Bryant advertisement, September 1921.

Source: *Good Housekeeping*, September 1921, 109.

Select stores across the country sold garments in plus sizes. R and Z Stout Waists sold blouses in sizes 42.5 to 56.5 that were "Cleverly cut to bring the fullness in the right places, but every line and detail contributes to a slenderizing effect."[224] Graceline Dresses sold dresses for the plus sized woman that were expertly and scientifically designed to provide long lines to the

[222] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 May 1920, 143.
[223] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Sept. 1920, 143; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Nov. 1920, 123.
[224] R and Z Stout Waists. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Oct. 1920, 133.

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"Juno type of figure" in a variety of fabric choices and in the latest styles. Its advertisements claimed that they used the correct lines to solve the problem of the plus sized woman's body and fit perfectly.[225] F.F. Models sold slenderizing suits and coats to meet the needs of the plus sized woman.[226] Super Customade dresses from Salomon, Blum & Co., Inc. sold custom made suits, coats, and frocks for women with a bust size 36 upwards to 50 or larger with slenderizing long lines.[227] La Mere Frocks sold frocks for large women with an elastic waistband in original styles adapted to the particular requirements of a fuller figure's proportions.[228] Blackshire sold women's dresses in all sizes including "stouts" in the favored dark colors of all black, all navy blue, or "navy expressed with colorful combinations."[229] Queen Make Everyday Dresses sold dresses in extra sizes of 48," 50," and 52."[230] Dolly Gray advertised semi-made dresses with special models for odd and plus sized women. Dolly Gray stated that in addition to its dresses for the "perfect figure," it also manufactured semi-made dresses "for the stout, the short, and the hard-to-fit."[231]

Department stores like Gimbel Brothers sold dresses to the larger figure in sizes 42.5 to 52.5 that were designed to provide grace, the appearance of symmetry, and slenderness.[232] The Rosenbaum Co. sold specialized blouses for stout women in bust sizes 46 to 54.[233] The R. H. Macy & Co advertised a slender silhouette "tuxedo" sweater made of rayon in green, grey, blue, buff, white, and black for average sized women, but charged one dollar more for extra sizes for

[225] Graceline Stout Dress Co. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Feb. 1920, 126; Graceline Stout Dress Co. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Mar. 1920, 164.
[226] F. F. Models for Full Formed Women. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Feb. 1920, 134.
[227] Salomon, Blum & Co. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Mar. 1920, 147; Salomon, Blum & Co. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Apr. 1920, 173; Salomon, Blum & Co. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Oct. 1920, 123.
[228] La Mere Frocks. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Mar. 1920, 33; La Mere Frocks. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Aug. 1920, 9; La Mere Frocks. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Sept. 1920, 12.
[229] Blackshire. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Mar. 1922, 6.
[230] Queen Make Everyday Dresses. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Jul. 1926, 234.
[231] Dolly Gray. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Sept. 1927, 233.
[232] Gimbel Brothers. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Mar. 1920, 13.
[233] The Rosenbaum Co. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Feb. 1920, 119.

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the plus sized woman and only offered the sweater in black, navy, and buff.[234] Barmon Brothers Company, Inc. sold adjustable wash dresses that solved larger women's problem of fashion and fit and "who has experience difficulty in being properly fitted and who longs to share the fit, form and fashion of slender women."[235]

Sales Tactics

Plus sized women's clothing retailers seemed to hold conflicting views about their customers. Some viewed these women as difficult to deal with, sensitive about their size, and generally old whereas others found them to be easily pleased and appreciative of the efforts to fulfill her needs.[236] In order to be successful, retailers needed to have a variety of colors and styles in slenderizing and youthful lines for stout women. Though some feelings of plus sized women customers were negative, it was crucial for businesses to acknowledge plus sized women as important, paying customers. This perspective could only help improve customer service and sales.

Retailers were advised to reasonably price plus sized women's garments for "too often the case has been that the stout woman has been penalized in price for her size" and is "entitled to see a variety of garments at a range well within her pocketbook."[237] Business owners were urged to make a plus sized woman feel like she was being catered to. By doing this, it would generate more revenue since she would likely purchase all her needs there and tell her plus sized friends. One retailer stated that if a plus sized woman could not solve her "particular problem" in one store, she would not purchase any items, but remain faithful to stores that were able to fit

[234] R. H. Macy & Co. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Jun. 1923, 5; The sweater for the average sized woman came in sizes 36 to 46; extra sizes were sizes 48 to 52.
[235] Barmon Brothers Company, Inc. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Oct. 1926, 205; Barmon Brothers Company, Inc. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Nov. 1926, 210.
[236] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41; "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45.
[237] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41; It was typical for companies to charge more for garments in larger sizes to counter the price of the extra fabric used. This practice is still common today in many companies.

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her. Retailers increased sales in plus sized women's clothing by training sales people to be courteous and sensitive to the plus sized woman's needs instead of ignoring them and telling them to have their clothes made to order.[238]

Prescriptive Advice for the Plus sized Woman, 1920s

Clothing

Plus sized women were advised to wear garments that were stylish, but age and size appropriate. The styles should be adapted and modified to flatter the larger figure, but remain styled in the current fashions. Plus sized women were advised through various sources what to wear to flatter her figure. All prescriptive advice counseled plus sized women to hide the true silhouette of her body with extra fabric or optical illusions.

Designing for plus sized women was a science. Dresses were designed with pleats, flares, draperies, floating panels, variations of sashes, slenderizing apron backs with bows, diagonal lines, and surplice effects to flatter the plus sized figure. Panels at the sides of a garment added to the effect of movement which flattered the figure. *Good Housekeeping* advised plus sized women to veil the portion of the silhouette that appeared too curvy.[239] Even couture designer Worth added long, floating panels with bias edges designed for larger sized women. Worth did not state what he determined constituted a "larger sized" figure, however.[240]

Generally, stout women were advised to wear pointed necklines, long loose sleeves, simple shoes and a straight silhouette that would detract from a woman's curves and make her look dignified. The plus sized woman of the 1920s was recommended to choose only the styles

[238] "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41; "Increase in the Stout-Wear Trade," 45; "Providing Dresses for Stout Women," 42; "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41.
[239] "Large Women's Dresses," 34; "Brims are Uneven; the Cloche is Still Good." *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1928, 59; "The Deceptively Simple Sports Mode." *Good Housekeeping*, Dec. 1928, 63.
[240] "Fitting the Flat Back," 45, 128; This is contradictory to previous statements that French haute couture designers generally did not design for the plus sized woman since Worth was a high fashion designer. Worth was seen as out of fashion by the 1920s and not up to date with current trends. He might have extended his ideal clientele to include larger sized women to account for lost sales by the 1920s.

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that were most flattering on her figure and to reject any fads of the season (including accessories and length of garments) if they were unsuitable to her figure.

Specific silhouettes were advised for the plus sized woman to wear.[241] When properly designed, the tube-like, straight evening gown was excellent at camouflaging extra weight as long as it included wide sleeves, floating panels, and other modifications for the stout figure (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Straight silhouette of the 1920s designed for the plus sized woman, 1923.

Source: "Grace and Dignity for the Mature Woman are in the Lines of These Gowns." *Good Housekeeping*, March 1923, 57.

In the 1920s, garments with tight fitting parts were unflattering. Bell-shaped sleeves with the lower edge flat and bound open with a tight under cuff made the hands more attractive and graceful than close fitting, puffed, or shirred sleeves (Figure 4.3). Fashionable sleeves were finished with decorations such as fluting, rows of buttons, and wide and unusual shaped cuffs.

[241] "For the Woman with Grown Daughters," 64-65.

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These treatments added attractiveness to the wrist and directed attention away from other areas of the body. Further, it was advised that sleeves should be joined discreetly at the shoulder with a yoke treatment rather than being set-in to facilitate easier movement.

Figure 4.3 Bell shaped sleeves with tight fitting cuffs flatter the figure, 1923.

Source: "Grace and Dignity for the Mature Woman are in the Lines of These Gowns." *Good Housekeeping*, March 1923, 57.

Tapering effects of garments and necklines flattered the figure. Garments in the 1920s included many dresses with "smart" attachments such as vests to the bodices. Bows on the shoulders, the use of jabots, and diagonal trimmings provided coverage for the plus sized woman. Deep V back necklines tapered and elongated the body. Women were advised to avoid any other cut such as the bertha collar that would suggest roundness. At the end of the 1920s, silhouettes were more fitted, but plus sized garments continued to feature garments with exaggerated or swathed hips and fullness placed low on the garments. Flared skirts were often worn in longer lengths as it would provide height to the wearer.

If a plus sized woman was also tall, she was advised to wear garments with a cape effect in the back which started underneath the shoulder blades. This decorative treatment visually broke up the "bulging" effects of the hips, but in order for this to work; the skirt had to be long in

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length to balance the effect. Evening gowns for tall, plus sized women often included flares and pointed uneven hemlines. The gowns had no belts or established waistline so that the skirt and bodice was one continuous line which "takes away any appearance of bulk."

Women with large hips hid this "flaw" with long side panels of fabric or a panel at the back. These panels would "[break] the circumference line."[242] Tailored wraps were flattering to a "somewhat heavy figure." Tulle capes over evening gowns added youthfulness and blurred the outlines of the non-slender figure. Deep cape-collars, hanging panels, and three-quarter coats all flattered the plus sized figure.[243]

During the 1920s, sports apparel was increasingly important and more plus sized women became interested in the concept.[244] With the introduction of sportswear for plus sized women, the stout woman "no longer [felt] bound to the simple silhouette and the somber colors." More colors, other than just black, became popular in sportswear. Sportswear silhouettes were simple in design, but had flowing lines that appealed to plus sized women. The introduction of sportswear added yet another product category for plus sized women's clothing.[245]

Accessories also needed to be considered for the plus sized woman. Hats for plus sized women needed to be becoming and stylish with correct lines and proper colors. The use of colors, details, and trimmings were all taken into consideration. Plus sized women's shoes and stockings should match as to not draw too much attention to a thick ankle. The monochromatic footwear would help to make the ankles and feet appear thinner. Scarves and capes were "kind" for hiding the figure and unsightly double chins. Plus sized women were advised to wear hats

[242] "Smart Modes for Older Women." *Vogue*, 1 July 1922, 57.
[243] J. R. K., "The Parisienne Takes Age," 31-86; M. H., "Paris Tempts the Summer with New Fads and Fabrics." *Vogue*, 1 June 1923, 42-43,126.
[244] Sportswear is an American contribution to new fashions. This type of casual clothing is usually comprised of separates (blouses, skirts, shorts, etc) that are easy care and easy to wear.
[245] "More Sports Apparel: It is Now Going into the Wardrobes of the Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 25 Sept. 1927, 45.

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with moderate sized brims with one-sided trims for trim on both sides of the hat tended to shorten the silhouette. Other flattering hat styles those with slightly drooping brims and large, soft crowns.[246]

Color and Fabrics

Plus sized women in the 1920s were advised to dress to accentuate her best features and hide her defects.[247] Hillel Schwartz, author of *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat*, found that plus sized women generally wore dark colored clothing such as black and dark blue with vertical lines in noiseless fabrics, soft collars, and slenderizing jewelry in order to be inconspicuous. Larger women were advised to avoid large patterned prints, hanging trims, bold and bright colors, and noisy fabrics such as satin and taffeta.[248] Similar to the 1910s, plus sized women's clothing were designed and made in "sure and safe way[s] to be smart" in dark and concealing colors such as black, browns, and dark blues.[249] Navy blue and purple were noted as popular colors which was "fortunate" for plus sized women as it was "especially suited to garments for them."[250] Black concealed undesirable features and monochromatic black ensembles provided inconspicuous outfits that blended waistlines and silhouettes (Figure 4.4).

Compared to the 1910s, new colors and more variety were acceptable. Occasionally brighter colors such as rust and lighter shades of gray and blue with occasional touches of reds, purples, greens, and beiges were used. Lighter shades of gray and blue were appropriate and

[246] "Stylish Stout Hats Now," 19; "For the Woman with Grown Daughters," 64-65; "A Guide to Chic," 100; "Bright Colors in a Variety of Fabrics are Offered for the Fall Season." *The New York Times*, 9 Oct. 1927, 142.
[247] "A Guide to Chic," 79.
[248] Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 161.
[249] "Dark Colors in Stout Dresses." *The New York Times*, 25 Aug. 1922, 20.
[250] "Large Women's Dresses," 34.

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designed for dinner wear.[251] Plus sized women were advised not to wear bright colors such as orange as this would draw too much attention to her and to her figure.

Figure 4.4 "Black is most becoming to the woman of years and increasing weight," 1922

Source: "Smart Modes for Older Women." *Vogue*, 1 July 1922, 57.

Favorite fabrics for the plus sized woman included crepe romain, kasha, crepe de chine, silk alpaca, and flowered silks in medium patterns. These fabrics had a dull sheen which flattered the figure. Other popular fabrics included serge, georgette, tricotine/tricolette, twills, moiré, jersey, and voile. These fabrics were easily draped along the curves of the plus sized without clinging tightly, were durable, forgiving, and structured. Flat crepes were noted for their dull

[251] Graceline Stout Dress Company. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Mar. 1920, 164; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Feb. 1923, 127; "Smart Frocks and Accessories." *Good Housekeeping*, Nov. 1923, 49; "These New Fall Clothes." *Good Housekeeping*, Sept. 1926, 64; "Dark Colors in Stout Dresses," 20.

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surface and velvet for its draping capabilities. Garments from these fabrics provided flattering, fashionable styles. Fur on collars and cuffs, and solid colored fur fabrics made from muskrat and marmink were also popular.[252]

All lace dresses were not flattering on plus sized women, but if she did want to wear a dress that had lace on it, she should incorporate it with other fabrics such as moiré, satin, taffeta, or georgette. Lace could be incorporated in the sleeves, as trim on the edges, in panels, or used in covering the skirt. Evening gowns with V necklines softened by tulle or netting flattered the plus sized woman as well as organdy or lace around the neckline for daytime wear.

It was "pointed out that more or less specialized patterns and coloring are required to meet adequately the requirements of the stout woman, and definite attempts are being made to offer these varieties."[253] Great strides were taken to offer these varieties. One retailer installed a special counter that displayed the silk fabrics suitable for the needs of plus sized women and stated that "This particular sales promotion has struck the exact centre of the bullseye."[254]

Corsets

Corset styles were largely influenced by the demands dictated by the silhouette popular at the time. Corsets were needed by many women to shape their bodies to conform to the ideal silhouette. While slender women largely stopped wearing the corset in the 1920s, plus sized women were advised to never abandon the corset like her slender sister. *Vogue* stated, "Only the perfect skeleton can permit itself entire freedom from the ghost of the corset."[255] In a *Vogue* fashion editorial, it was stated that women who abandoned the corset tended to gain weight.

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[252] "The New Costumes of Odd Sizes," 104; "Buying Activities of the Retailers: Calls for Dresses for Resorts' Wear, Suits, Children's Coats, Scarfs and Shawls." *The New York Times*, 20 Dec. 1925, 51; "The Merchant's Point of View." *The New York Times*, 8 Nov. 1925, 39.
[253] "Printed Silks for Stout Women." *The New York Times*, 28 Oct. 1925, 41.
[254] "Printed Silks for Stout Women," 41.
[255] "Figures that Do and Do Not Lie." *Vogue*, 15 Nov. 1923, 63.

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Corsets for plus sized women included special boning, extra reinforcements, elastic gores, and slender, long lines. Corsets were designed to fit the individual wearer in order to keep the back flat and to provide a smooth, unbroken line in the front of the garment. This unbroken line was necessary for the simple and straight silhouetted garments popular at the time. Back laced corsets worn with silk covered elastic brassieres were thought to reduce the full figure. Corsets were necessary to suppress the hips and flatten the back. Without the aid of a corset, women seemed to gain weight that they would then have to try and lose to be fashionable. Corsetieres at this time made corsets that molded the figure to her smallest proportion without sacrifice of youth or comfort.[256]

Corseting the plus sized body was seen as difficult around the hips, bust, or diaphragm. In order to account for these problems, cross-boning cinched in the "over-developed diaphragm while a confining brassiere was made for an ample bust."[257] *Vogue* stated that "flesh is plastic and can be moulded to look its best with very little guidance."[258] Plus sized women were advised to wear their corsets at all times for "training one's figure is much like training children's manners—it cannot be done for guest days only, but it must become a habit."[259] Women appeared smaller and more slender when wearing a properly fitting corset or girdle. In 1927, plus sized women comprised the majority of the demand for corsets. At this time, corsetieres tried to make supportive corsets without added bulkiness. The purpose was to achieve the straight silhouette in fashion.[260]

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[256] "Simplicity is the Keynote," 114; "Youthful Fashions," 59; Edith May Gardner. "The Older Woman: Underlying Points of the Well-Gowned Matron." *Good Housekeeping*, Nov. 1924, 61; "Odds Against Chic: Middle Age." *Vogue*, 15 Feb. 1924, 72-73; "Mainstays of the Slim Silhouette." *Vogue*, 15 Feb. 1924, 76-77.
[257] Gardner, "The Older Woman: Underlying Points," 61.
[258] "A Guide to Chic," 86.
[259] Edith May Gardner. "The Older Woman: Distinction in Dress Demands Correct Lines." *Good Housekeeping*, Feb. 1926, 60.
[260] "The Corset Makes the Figure," 62-63; "Changed Ways of Selling Corsets: Contrary to General Impression the Business in These Articles is Growing." *The New York Times*, 3 Apr. 1927, 51.

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Corset companies in the 1920s created figure type classifications for corsets which "bolstered their claims to scientific validation of their products, and to the need for professional fitters."[261] Corsetieres realized that plus sized women's body proportions were more varied that average sized women and that the stout needed support in different ways. Corsets needed to be fitted to the individual wearer. Even if a woman was of the same size as a friend, her proportions could still be very different. Corsetieres and saleswomen commonly attended company-based corset schools to learn the methods and characteristics of the corsets they would be selling. With so many different lines and types of corsets offered by one company, it was important that saleswomen be successful in selling the corsets. Historian Jill Fields found in her research on corsets during the 1920s that plus sized women were often grateful, loyal, and appreciative to their particular corsetiere and saleswoman. They expressed this appreciation with repeat patronage to that particular corset company. Plus sized women often stated comfort when the corset fitter themselves was larger.[262] This concept was on par with sentiments expressed towards plus sized women clothing saleswomen.

The corset company, Gossard, offered nine different figure types: tall heavy, tall slender, short heavy, short slender, average, short waisted, curved back, large above waist, and large below waist. By identifying with a certain figure type, corset companies hoped to convince women that the appropriate corset would fix figure issues. If the hips were "too large" for the figure which was seen an "obvious defect," there were special girdles that counteracted the problem.[263]

[261] Fields, "Fighting the Corsetless Evil," 372.
[262] "Simplicity of Line and Perfection of Detail Mark the Older Woman's Wardrobe." *Good Housekeeping*, Apr. 1924, 65; "A Guide to Chic," 86; Fields, "Fighting the Corsetless Evil."
[263] "A Guide to Chic," 86.

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All women in the 1920s wore brassieres; but it was often stated that plus sized women needed more support when it came to brassieres. Brassieres were made in heavy and durable fabrics such as silk brocade and slipper satin or filet lace reinforced with netting. The delicate "dress up" lingerie style brassieres in jersey fabric and unreinforced laces and decorated with rosebuds and other dainty trimmings would not provide the needed support for the plus sized woman. It was advised that women's brassieres should be the right length and attached to the corset on both sides and in the front. This would produce a smooth and straight line that was so important for the silhouette. A one-piece, step-in chemise was also recommended for plus sized women's foundation garments.[264]

In the early 1920s when the silhouettes were long and slender, plus sized women were advised to wear low girdles that would provide straight lines with narrow, long panels.[265] The silhouette of the time, narrow and slender, was dependent on youth and natural slenderness or the aid of a corset. Garments of the early 1920s required a flat-back in order to appear "correct." Plus sized women could purchase "tailored" corsets which extended over the hips.[266] By 1922, the slender figure needed to wear the corset less and less unlike the plus sized woman who needed to wear it every day. Slender women often could achieve the fashionable silhouette without wearing a corset. If they needed a little foundational support, many slender women adopted a girdle and brassiere opposed to the rigid and confining characteristics of a corset. A woman was not considered well-dressed if her foundation garments spoiled the silhouette of her outer garments. Suggested material for corsets was heavy brocades rather than knitted silks and rayons for the slender figure's corset. Larger women needed heavier fabrics, such as brocades, to bind extra flesh. Knitted silk or rayon corsets would not provide the support needed by plus sized

[264] "A Guide to Chic," 86; Gardner, "The Older Woman: Distinction in Dress," 60.
[265] "Youthful Fashions," 59.
[266] "Corseting the Summer Mode," 68, 108.

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women. These heavier corsets were more cumbersome, more uncomfortable, had more boning, and were heavier than the light weight models advertised for the slender woman and would cost the plus sized woman more money. These corsets had elastic gores at the hips for ease of movement while the brassieres for plus sized women included elastic shoulder straps for support.[267]

Other foundation garments worn by the plus sized woman included flexible step-ins, garter belts, clasp-front girdles, closed back girdles, and back laced corsets with self-reducing lines. Plus sized women's step-in combination garments included garters of double elastic attached to the girdle part and an underneath band to prevent slipping. An extra band was added to the combination garment underneath the girdle to confine the hips and hold the diaphragm firmly in place. Another popular combination style undergarment that controlled the plus sized woman's body was a garment with fan-shaped reinforcements of triple boning that controlled the diaphragm and abdomen. It included large knitted elastic inserts at the sides and boning in the back for added control. The garment was then lined with batiste for durability.[268]

Prejudices Against the Plus Sized Woman

Some designers, manufacturers, and businesses thought the plus sized woman was more trouble than she was worth. She was seen as the afflicted, a problem, and the cause of "manufacturing difficulties."[269] Plus sized women in the 1920s were called a variety of names to describe their silhouette. Most terms usually had a negative connotation. Stout was the predominant term during this time. Other common terms were large figure, full figure, or large woman. Throughout the 1920s, plus sized women were also called the Juno type of figure, well

[267] "Changes Shown in Lingerie Styles: A Half Century of Evolution in the Making and Selling of This Underwear." *The New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1922, 38.
[268] "Corset Designs Now Shown for Every Figure: The Combination Brassiere and Girdle Makes Its Bid for Approval." *The New York Times*, 14 Feb. 1926, 139.
[269] "A Chance to Make Money," 27.

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developed figure, fleshy woman, inclined to rounding curves, stately figure, mature figure, matronly figure, fat, heavy, extra size, generous proportions, unfortunate proportions, portly people, not-so-slender, big woman, chubby figure, woman of dignity, and stout miss or variations of these terms.

It was thought that gaining weight made a woman look older. Many assumed that plus sized women were part of the older demographic though *The New York Times* estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of plus sized women were considered young stout women. *Vogue* stated that it was better for older women to be a little broad opposed to cinching her corset too tightly to try to obtain a 34 inch waist.[270] In 1950, author, Tom Mahoney, stated in his history of Lane Bryant that, "Stouts were stout all of their lives and many became stouter as they became older."[271]

Excess flesh was considered inadequate and destroyed the slender silhouette of the 1920s.[272] Women questioned whether they could be considered beautiful if they were overweight. *Good Housekeeping* stated that "there is no denying the fact that the better the figure the better the fashion, but with a poor figure, that is, one too thin or too fat, there are certain points that will greatly improve it."[273] If a woman, regardless of age, wanted to be fashionable, she "must have the straight figure, together with a free, easy grace, a litheness of motion, that were formerly the attribute of youth only."[274] Plus sized women's figures were seen as a "weak

[270] Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Vogue* 15 Feb. 1921, 95; "Style in Stout Wear," 47; "Odds Against Chic," 72-73.
[271] Mahoney, *50 Years of Lane Bryant*, 20; Tom Mahoney was not affiliated with Lane Bryant. He was a public relations executive, author, and newspaperman in New York City. Mahoney authored nine books including co-authoring *The Great Merchants: America's Foremost Retail Institutions And The People Who Made Them Great*. He died in 1981. Obituary of Tom Mahoney, *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jul. 19, 1981.
[272] Bakst, "Famous Artist," 60-61, 154, 156.
[273] "The Waistline." *Good Housekeeping*, Oct. 1925, 240.
[274] "Simplicity is the Keynote of Lingerie," 95, 114.

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point."[275] With the slender silhouette in mode, sources reported that any woman could be slender if she tried hard enough. This advice provided no regards to genetics or health history.[276]

Proscriptive Advice for the Plus Sized Woman, 1920s

Clothing

The plus sized woman most likely found it very frustrating to dress in the morning. Many of the advised against styles were the most fashionable at the time. In order to dress correctly, a plus sized woman was encouraged to ignore highly fashionably clothing and to dress plainly and be inconspicuous. *Vogue* stated that "Often the apparent plumpness of a woman is, in reality, the result of unwise selection of frocks."[277] Plus sized women were advised not to call attention to themselves by overdressing or trying too hard to follow popular fashions, wearing the fads of the season or "wild frocks" unless modified, and extenuating her curves. [278] Plus sized women were advised to "shun all wayward, trampish, boyish outfits as white souls shun the devil" and that "only be extreme repression can they fit themselves decently into modern garments."[279] Plus sized women were urged to dress for her figure in styles that were appropriate. Advice included appropriate dresses, waistlines, hemlines, necklines, and accessories.

Dresses with bodices and skirts of different materials, even of the same color, shortened the full figure. Plus sized women avoided tight, long skirts because it would give a "sausage-like effect."[280] Women with thick legs should wear long skirts that concealed and "do not think of putting your skirts fourteen inches off the floor."[281] Incorrect waistlines and skirt lengths shortened and widened a figure. Garments that were too tight accentuated body parts that should

[275] "A Guide to Chic," 100.
[276] "Fitting the Flat Back," 45, 128.
[277] "The Importance of the Line," 48.
[278] "The No-Longer-Slim Bride." *Vogue*, 1 Apr. 1922, 60.
[279] "Figures that Do," 63.
[280] "A Guide to Chic," 102.
[281] Kouse, "Fashions," 56, 226, 256.

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be concealed. Raised waistlines were popular in 1926 and plus sized women were advised against wearing them. Tailored suits for plus sized women declined in popularity in 1922.

If a plus sized woman needed a new afternoon and evening gown, it caused more problems for her than a daytime dress. Afternoon and evening gowns had fabric too tightly gathered around the hips and back when there was fullness in the front or narrowly cut to produce a tight fitting tube-like structure. These effects were unflattering on the plus sized figure. Unique and unusual trimmings added to "regular" size garments were considered too bizarre or extreme for plus sized women's garments.[282]

All components on a garment, like necklines and sleeve styles, impacted the appearance of the plus sized woman. Plus sized women should not wear bateau necklines or gowns with shoulder straps.[283] A square neckline did not flatter the neck of a plus sized woman and added to her thickness. Short sleeves revealed too much flesh and very long and tight sleeves gave a stuffed, unpleasant effect.[284] Plus sized women should not wear pull-over sweaters by themselves. An acceptable sweater choice was a pull-over and cardigan that was unbuttoned and hung loose. All aspects of dress were considered, including sporting clothing. Women with "massive chests, thick haunches, and stout legs or those with bottle-necks, hunched shoulders, and spindle shanks" did not want to dress for "hiking" in untidy half-open blouses, too tight short breeches, and ungainly sweaters tied around their waist for this would be "considered evidence of madness."[285]

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[282] "The Deceptively Simple Sports Mode," 63; "The New Costumes of Odd Sizes," 104; "Attire for Stout Women," 48.
[283] "Fitting the Flat Back," 45, 128; "A Guide to Chic," 102; "Catering to the Stout Wear Trade," 41; "For the Woman with Grown Daughters," 64-65.
[284] "Odds Against Chic," 72-73; "A Guide to Chic," 102; "The Waistline," 240; Helen Kouse. "Fashions: New Silhouette Has Movement Without Width in Short Skirts, Bloused Above Hips-Long Sleeves--Sumptuous Fabrics--More Trimming." *Good Housekeeping*, Oct. 1926, 56, 226, 256.
[285] "Figures that Do," 63.

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It was deemed "ridiculous" for a plus sized woman to wear a tiny hat which was incongruent with the size of her body. Women's hats should be in proportion with her body size so that it would flatter the figure.[286] Big hats on plus sized women shortened the neck and straps on shoes emphasized thick ankles. Her shoes should be plain with variations of buckles and advised against wearing the fashionable two- or one-strap pumps. Thin cord belts should be inconspicuous around the waist since a wide horizontal line would be unflattering. *Vogue* advised plus sized women not to "bob" their hair since long hair concealed her thick neck.[287]

Color and Fabrics

Plus sized women were advised to wear garments made from woven fabrics rather than knits since seams could be easily modified on woven garments. Knit garments also tended to cling to the body or sag more than woven fabrics which produced structured, tailored garments. Plus sized women were urged to avoid tight-fitting, clinging garments. This piece of advice from one article directly contradicts advice from another article that stated that manufacturers were bound to make money by making knit garments for the plus sized woman. Contradictory advice like this must have been frustrating for the plus sized woman. Other fabrics that were to be avoided included shiny satins because these fabrics would draw unseemly attention to unsightly curves. Plaids and taffetas, which were fashionable at the time, were also advised against unless used as small trimmings on hats. The shininess of taffeta would draw too much attention to her figure and plaids made her appear larger. Horizontal lines were to be avoided as they widened and shortened the figure. Plus sized women's gowns were to be plain without decorations like

[286] "Stylish Stout Hats Now," 19.
[287] "Odd Against Chic," 72-73; "A Guide to Chic," 102.

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embroidery and trimmings as this would give an overdressed appearance and contradict the term "stylish stout."[288]

Conclusions

By the 1920s, plus sized women were able to purchase ready-to-wear clothing. While still viewed as the "afflicted" and a problem by manufacturers, designers, and businesses, these groups did see the potential and purchasing power of the plus sized woman. They manufactured garments specially designed for her and catered to her needs in department stores. It was important that plus sized women purchased the gowns specially designed for them and not purchase "regular" gowns in larger sizes. Manufacturers created plus sized sizing and introduced half sizes to account for a greater variety of body sizes. More stores opened to account for the plus sized population. But acceptance of the plus sized women was questionable. Prescriptive advice and even plus sized women's specialty stores, such as Lane Bryant, repeatedly suggested ways to look slimmer.

Advice for the plus sized woman was much more prevalent in the 1920s than the 1910s. Some of the women's fashion advice literature contradicted literature from the past decade. Conflicting and contrasting advice most likely confused and frustrated the plus sized woman at a time in history that was already unsympathetic. This discrepancy in information on appropriate styles could be due to designers and manufacturers lack of interest in the plus sized women in the

[288] "For the Stouter Woman," 69; R and Z Stout Waists. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Nov. 1920, 153; Graceline Stout Dress Company. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* Mar. 1920, 164; "Youthful Fashions," 59; Lane Bryant. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* Feb. 1923, 127; "Fitting the Flat Back to the Full Figure." *Vogue*, Nov. 1923, 45, 128.; "Gowns Designed to be Worn by Women Who Have Put on Pounds." *Vogue*, 1 Aug. 1924, 69; "Frocks From New York Houses Illustrate the Grace That Long, Unbroken Lines Give to the Mature Figure." *Vogue*, 15 Feb. 1925, 87; "Soft Silks and Lovely Lines for Spring." *Vogue*, 15 Apr. 1925, 81.; "For the Larger Woman." *Good Housekeeping*, Nov. 1926, 57; "Let Us Buy for You in the New York Shops." *Good Housekeeping*, May 1927, 68; "For Shopping or Home." *Good Housekeeping*, June 1927, 65; "The Afternoon Town Frock." *Good Housekeeping*, Apr. 1928, 77; "A Chance to Make Money," 27; "A Guide to Chic," 100; Gardner, "The Older Woman: Distinction in Dress," 60; "The New Costumes of Odd Sizes," 104; "A Guide to Chic," 100; Gardner, "The Older Woman: The Smart Combined," 63; "Providing Dresses for Stout Women," 42.

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1910s and growth in information in the 1920s based on profit potential and the demand by women for fashions that complimented their figure. All prescriptive advice counseled the plus sized woman to hide the true silhouette of her body with extra fabric or optical illusions. Plus sized women in the 1920s were advised to dress to accentuate her best features and hide her defects. Plus sized women were advised to wear garments that were stylish, but age and size appropriate. Styles did not drastically change for the plus sized woman, but were adapted and modified from the current styles to flatter a larger figure (dark colors, long sleeves, etc.). Common themes that emerged from the study included prejudices against the plus sized woman, prescriptive and proscriptive advice regarding what the plus sized woman should and should not wear, and the apparel industry's attempts to create suitable styles and properly fitting clothing for the larger woman.

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CHAPTER FIVE: PATENTS

In Chapter 5 I discussed patents related to the plus sized woman from the years 1910 to 1929. These 53 patents provided a unique look into the plus sized women. Patents for the plus sized woman focused on supporting and improving the body with inventions like corsets, brassieres, menstrual products, support devices, and combinations corset and brassieres. Patents can provide a different and unique view of perceived problems of clothing for the plus sized woman and solutions that were not mentioned in magazines and newspapers. Patents also provide an average or lay person's perspective to problems and solutions faced by the plus sized woman opposed to employees of companies and magazines who might be biased toward either promoting or disregarding larger women.

Background Information

Scholars have discussed the difference between an idea of an invention and an invention itself. To be an inventor, a person does not have to make the physical product, but he or she should have the "inspiring concept which makes it possible to build the physical device."[289] Intellectual property, or an idea, is not protected by law until it is formally submitted as a patent, trademark, or copyright. Apparel designers and manufacturers have had tenuous success utilizing copyright and trademark laws to protect the design of their products.[290] Patents have provided some protection for apparel design. By 1902, European countries, every English colony, the United States, and Japan had their own patenting system; China was establishing one.[291]

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[289] Willis B. Rice and William L. Grossman. "Reissued Patents and Intervening Rights." *The Yale Law Journal* 43, no. 5 (1934): 766-793; 767.

[290] Copyright law may protect a fabric design; however, the garment that is created from the fabric is not protected under copyright law. In the United States, trademark laws provide protection against counterfeiters that create look-alike products passed off as the true original; they do not protect the design of the goods themselves. Sara B. Marcketti and Jean L. Parsons. "Design Piracy and Self Regulation: The Fashion Originators' Guild of America: 1932-1941." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (2006): 214-228.

[291] John S Seymour. "Patents." *The Yale Law Journal* 12, no. 2 (1902): 82-92.

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Patents have been a part of American history since almost the birth of the nation. The Patent Act of 1790 made it possible for inventors to create an invention that was legally their own. A patentee had to disclose information such as defining how a product worked, drawings, and specifications so that anyone skilled in that particular field could understand it. Patents exclude others from making, using, selling or importing the invention. After approved by the U.S. Patent and Trademark System, a patentee was able to use their invention free of competition for a total of 20 years.[292]

There are two distinct forms of patent protection: utility patents and design patents. Utility patents protect machines, processes, devices, and other "useful" objects. Clothing articles that qualify for utility patent protection tend to have underlying technology that dictates the outward appearance of the article. Utility patents can be very difficult to enforce, however, since there is nothing to restrict a copyist from designing a garment with a similar appearance but different underlying technology.[293] In 1842, Congress agreed that the subject of ornamental design was appropriate for separate legislation and expanded the existing patent laws to include design patents. Design patents protect intellectual property that falls between purely artistic works and inventions which rely entirely on function.[294] Design patent protection resides in the visual aspect of the object and not in the structure or function of the item.

Utility and design patents differ according to what is required to be submitted for approval. Utility patents require the patent number, name of inventor, names of witnesses, dates of patent application and approval, and title of the invention. Drawings illustrative of the work

[292] Women, during this time, had limited rights to their inventions for a stipulated number of years under this Act. Anne L. Macdonald. *Women and Invention in America: Feminine Ingenuity*. New York City: Ballantine Books, 1992.
[293] Anne Theodore Briggs, "Hung Out to Dry: Clothing Design Protection Pitfalls in United States Law," *Hastings Communications and Entertainment Law Journal* 24 (Winter, 2001-2002): 169-213.
[294] U.S. Department of Commerce, *Design Patents* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1983).

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may be included. In utility patents, written specifications describe the purpose of the invention and characteristics of the invention. Inventors also describe what is new or different about their creation from previous models. An example of a utility patent is functional improvements to a corset or creating a new undergarment altogether. Similar to utility patents, in design patents, inventors must include the title, the description, and dates of patent application and approval. In design patents, inventors must include detailed illustrations of the article to be protected. Unlike utility patents, design patent inventors do not need to include written specifications describing the purpose of the invention or characteristics of the invention. Nor do inventors need to describe what is new or different about their creation from previous models. An example of a design patent is a new shape of a bottle or a certain style of a garment.

While patentees provided information regarding design problems and possible solutions, there are caveats to their use. Issued patents do not guarantee that the products were commercially produced and sold to customers. While author Merritt stated, "In 1900, patent authorities asserted that three quarters of the inventions patented by women during the previous five years were yielding profitable returns" the bias of this statement is unclear and certainly does not hold true throughout the twentieth century.[295] Nor are patents easily tracked through sales figures from companies. Some companies may not have corporate records due to space limitations or the companies are long closed with no trace of their records. Researchers must be cautious even when using existing data from companies since these documents may have been created as propaganda to promote the business.[296]

[295] Deborah J. Merritt. "Hypatia in the Patent Office: Women Inventors and the Law, 1865-1900." *The American Journal of Legal History* 35, no. 3 (1991): 235-306, 288.
[296] Catherine C. Cole. "Caveats in the Use of Corporate Literature by Costume Historians." *Material History Review* 34, (1991): 1-12.

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Methods

Patents allow researchers to gain a different viewpoint regarding the plus sized woman of the 1910s and 1920s that newspapers and magazines cannot provide. Utility patents approved by the U.S. Patent Office Society for "stout" women's apparel and garments were accessed through the search engine *Google Patents.* All patents available through *Google Patents* come from the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). *Google Patents* covers the entire collection of issued patents and millions of patent application made available by the USPTO, from patents issued in the 1790s through the present.[297] The researcher concentrated on utility patents for this research because they provide written specifications describing the purpose of the invention, characteristics of the invention, and statements of what is new or different about the invention from previous models. Design patents were not utilized as they provide information regarding the aesthetic design of the garment alone.

I entered the search term "stout women," "large women," and "fat women" to identify products that targeted plus sized women. For this study, it was important to single out products identified to aid the plus sized woman specifically opposed to looking at inventions for women in general. Many inventors at this time understood that plus sized women might have different garment fitting needs than women of average size and wanted to capitalize on new inventions to aid in stated problems they faced.

In submitting their patents for approval inventors stated a descriptive title for the product that they were patenting, such as "chafing shields." Upon downloading the patents issued for stout women apparel products, the researcher placed each product into a category according to function and purpose of the product. For example, "chafing shields," would have been placed into the category "support devices." The placement of singular items into groups of categories is

[297] http://www.google.com/googlepatents/about.html

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important to better understand what types of products the patentees invented, to identify common themes in inventions, and to better understand the problem and proposed solution of clothing design for the plus sized women. Based on the inventor's statements, many of the products were improvements on existing products and not new inventions. For example, the corset (or something similar) has been around for centuries. Inventors in this study took the existing form of the corset and improved upon one or two aspects such as increased comfort using elastic strips or adding extra godets for fullness. It is important to note the inventors of plus sized focused products specifically stated their intentions to provide solutions and improve upon aspects of the plus sized women's life that other inventors did not. These products were not invented for all women, but for an exclusive category of women: the plus sized.

Each patentee was categorized as either a male or a female. To identify gender based on names, traditional male or female names were initially determined. For example, traditionally, Daniel is a male name and Mary is a female name. Additional research was conducted on ancestry.com and similar websites to determine gender for less familiar names. For example, the name Alonsita was unknown to the researcher, but the website eHow indicated that names ending in "a" were traditionally female.[298] Additional biological information about each patentee was then searched using newspapers such as the obituary listings of *The New York Times* or ancestry websites, but often to no avail. Each patentee stated the city or county and state from which they filed the patent. From this information, website searches were conducted using the patentee town's online newspaper. Information from the patent and local obituaries were cross-referenced to determine accuracy. For most of the patentees, there was not enough information to conduct further research. Many patentees had "common" surnames so numerous records would

[298] http://www.ehow.com/how_2249130_find-gender-name.html

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appear for each person with contrasting information. Biological information was included for patentees when the researcher was certain that the correct person was found.

Many fashion historians have utilized patents because they provide information regarding design problems and suggested solutions. Helvenston Gray and Peteu analyzed women's bicycling attire patents from the 1890s to study clothing solutions for women to gracefully and modestly ride the bicycle. They found that the majority of cycling attire patents were authored by women and, "Perhaps women were uniquely qualified to respond to their own difficulties in riding the bicycle."[299] By analyzing patents, they determined previously unstated problems and solutions for bicycling attire not available through fashion magazines or advertisements. Kidd and Farrell-Beck explored patents to explore nineteenth and early twentieth century menstrual product technology. It was necessary for them to use patent research since advertisements related to this topic were scarce (the subject was considered taboo).[300] Kidd and Farrell-Beck stated that the "United States patents provide the most complete record of menstrual products that were developed before 1921."[301] Farrell-Beck also analyzed sewing machine patents in the 19th century to determine if improvements on the sewing machine were used in factory produced garments. In addition to patents, she identified machine produced stitches in extant garments for comparison. Farrell-Beck used sewing machine patents to determine "which of the thousands of patented 'improvements' were actually used in early clothing factories."[302] She found that manufacturers of clothing had more difficulties than manufacturers of say, glass or iron, due to the variety of fabrics and techniques used to construct garments. These difficulties in sewn

[299] Sally Helvenston Gray and Mihaela C. Peteu. "Invention, the Angel of the Nineteenth Century": Patents for Women's Cycling Attire in the 1890s." *Dress* 32, (2005): 27-42, 27.
[300] Helvenston Gray and Peteu. "Invention, the Angel of the Nineteenth Century" and Laura K. Kidd and Jane Farrell-Beck. "Menstrual Products Patented in the United States, 1854-1921." *Dress* 24, (1997): 27-42 were used as reference.
[301] Kidd and Farrell-Beck, "Menstrual Products Patented in the United States," 27.
[302] Farrell-Beck, Jane. "Use of Patented Sewing Devices in a Sample of Manufactured Garments Dated ca. 1860-1900." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 10, no. 3 (1992): 3-11, 3.

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garments challenged inventors to further advance techniques and "offered added incentives for innovation."[303]

Inventors of Patents for the Stout Woman

In searching through *Google Patents*, I found 25 patents issued to 26 patentees in the 1910s. The total number of patents issued in the 1920s was 28 patents issued to 28 patentees. Patents were issued throughout the two decades, though the first half of the 1920s saw a steady number of issued patents. This steadiness could be due to the increased interest in the plus sized women in the retail sector (Table 5.1).

The majority of patentees were issued only one patent for the plus sized woman, while Abraham Ziewbelson authored two patents and Daniel Kops authored seven patents throughout the two decades studied (Table 5.2). Abraham Zwiebelson filed two patents in the 1920s and counted individually for each patent. In both decades, Daniel Kops filed more than one patent and counted in the gender chart for each new patent for a total of seven patents total.[304]

Table 5.1 Number of patents per year, 1910-1929

Year	Number of Issued Patents	Year	Number of Issued Patents
1910	3	1920	5
1911	0	1921	5
1912	4	1922	5
1913	0	1923	1
1914	0	1924	6
1915	5	1925	2
1916	2	1926	1
1917	3	1927	0
1918	6	1928	1

[303] Farrell-Beck, "Use of Patented Sewing Devices," 11.

[304] Daniel Kops worked for his family's business, Kops Brothers, based out of New York. They were conservative in their corset design and likely appealed to a more mature clientele. As this paper as already stated, "mature" was synonymous with plus sized women. It has been noted in previous research that Kops dedicated more time to patenting rather than fashion innovation. Authors Farrell-Beck and Gau stated that Kops Brothers reached their customer base through store flyers, newspapers, and household periodicals opposed to high-fashion press such as *Vogue*. Jane Farrell-Beck and Colleen Gau. *Uplift: The Bra in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 22.

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Table 5.1 (continued)

1919	2	1929	2
Total	25	Total	28

Table 5.2 Number of patents issued to patent holders

Number of Patents Issued to Patent Holder	Number of Patent Holders	Percent of Total Number of Patent Holders	Number of Patents	Percent of Total Number of Patents
1 Patent	45	96%	44	83%
2-5 Patents	1	2%	2	4%
6-10 Patents	1	2%	7	13%
Total	47	100%	53	100%

Both men and women patented inventions for the plus sized woman in the 1910s and 1920s (Table 5.3). In both decades, the majority of patentees were women. In the 1910s, out of the 25 patents awarded for apparel solutions for the plus sized woman, 54% of the patentees were women (14) and 46% were men (12). In the 1920s, out of the 28 patents awarded for apparel solutions for the plus sized woman, 64% of the patentees were women (18) and 36% were men (10).

Table 5.3 Patents categorized by gender, 1910-1929

Patents Categorized by Gender					
Gender 1910s[305]			**Gender 1920s**		
	#	%		#	%
Male	12	46	Male	10	36
Female	14	54	Female	18	64
Total	26	100	Total	28	100

It is important to note the significance of women inventors in this sample. Women invented products for centuries, but due to gender discrimination in the 18th century, women did

[305] One patent was filed by two people; one male and one female. Each person was counted in their corresponding gender category.

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not formally patent an invention until 1809.[306] The number of patents filed and issued grew in the period 1865 to 1900, with women specifically patenting over 5,500 patents in a variety of fields including agriculture, mining, and apparel. Women were limited throughout the nineteenth century by available finances, legal rights, cultural attitudes, and limited educationally opportunities.[307] Under property laws at this time, married women's property, including patents, were transferred to her husband. In the mid-1800s, many states repealed these laws and married women were able to patent inventions and pocket the income from these inventions. According to Deborah Merritt, during the late 19th century most women designed inventions related to the home including (supposed) time saving devices. Invention themed magazines such as *New Ideas*, *Patent Record*, and *Scientific American* provided support and encouragement for women inventors.[308] Gender discrimination was still prevalent at the turn of the 20th century, but more women gained greater independence than ever before due to increased opportunities for education and work outside of the home.

Only four of the 53 patentees stated representation by a company. These four included: Alfred Abt who designed his corset for Warner Brothers Company also known Warnaco; Hugh Malcom McCormick who designed his method of corset-stay production for the Uplift Corset Company; Isidor Roth who designed his brassiere for the Benjamin & Johnes Company also known as Bien Jolie; and Clayton Whitney who designed his corset for the Royal Worcester Corset Company. It is not clear if the remaining 49 patentees were affiliated with companies. For example, Mary Phelps Jacobs patented, manufactured, and sold her "backless brassiere" to

[306] The first patent by a woman was for a straw-weaving process in 1809 by Mary Kies. Most of the patents invented by women in the first half of the 19th century related to the hat industry, clothing in general, or other "domestic sphere" inventions.
[307] Merritt, "Hypatia in the Patent Office," 235-306.
[308] Macdonald, *Women and Invention in America.*

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friends and neighbors. The brassiere design was later sold and designed by the Warner Brothers Corset Company.[309]

Product Categories of Patents for the Stout Woman

In the 1910s, there were 25 products patented for the stout woman. These included: corsets and accessories (11, 44%), brassieres and accessories (3, 12%), menstrual products (3, 12%), undergarments (3, 12%), support devices (3, 12%), and garments (2, 8%).[310]

Table 5.4 Category of patents, 1910s

Category of Patents, 1910s		
Category	#	%
Corsets and accessories	11	44
Brassieres and accessories	3	12
Menstrual products	3	12
Undergarments	3	12
Support devices	3	12
Garments	2	8
Total	25	100

In the 1920s, there were 28 products patented for the stout women. These included: corsets and accessories (11, 39%), brassieres and accessories (8, 28%), undergarments (4, 14%), combination corset and brassiere (3, 11%), menstrual products (1, 4%), and support devices (1, 4%).

Table 5.5 Category of patents, 1920s

Category of Patents, 1920s		
Category	#	%
Corsets and accessories	11	39
Brassieres and accessories	8	28
Undergarments	4	14
Combination corset and brassiere	3	11

[309] Macdonald, *Women and Invention in America.*

[310] Undergarments were not included in corset and brassiere categories due to the purpose of the product. Undergarments in this case were usually looser fitting garments worn under the top layer of clothing, but did not have the supporting characteristics of corsets and brassieres. The first number in the parentheses is the number of products patented in each category, the second number denotes the percentage that category represents out of 100%.

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Table 5.5 (continued)

Menstrual products	1	4
Support devices	1	4
Total	28	100

Patented Garments

Corsets and Accessories

In the 1910s and 1920s, almost half of all patents regarding stout women's apparel were in the corset and accessories category (11 garments in each decade). Corset accessories included an abdominal adjuster, reducer, supporter, and retainer along with a corset attachment, a corset belt or girdle, a hip brassiere attachment for corsets, a corset waist, an athletic corset, a garment that performed the same functions of a corset, and an attachment or adjustable back for corsets. Out of the 11 corset and related patents in the 1910s, seven patentees were women and four male. Daniel Kops patented apparel corsets three times.

Corset and corset accessories patented during the 1910s and 1920s were stated to be unique from other products available in the marketplace in that they were designed to provide support, be comfortable, simple in construction, easy to put on and take off, and would not ride up when sitting or stooping. The newly invented corsets also promised to provide an attractive silhouette to the wearer without the spilling of extra flesh. Almost all of the corsets patented during this time served two or more functions. They would support while providing a stylish silhouette. They were comfortable and prevented excess flesh to spill over the sides. They kept the wearer cool while absorbing excess perspiration to prevent chafing.

To provide support as well as produce a fashionable silhouette to the plus sized woman, corsets patented during the 1910s and 1920s generally supported the lower front portion of the

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body, the abdominal walls, and the overall carriage of the body.[311] The "Abdominal Adjuster, Reducer, Supporter, and Retainer" patented in 1910, "simply" attached to the bottom of an existing corset in order to provide a graceful silhouette and to reduce the size of the abdomen. According to the inventor, it fit "perfectly and acts similar to a person holding the abdomen with both hands to adjust it to its proper position."[312]

One can only image that a corset might not be the most comfortable of undergarments, but comfort was a largely stated benefit of the corsets patented in the 1910s.[313] Corsets could be uncomfortable because perspiration would cause chafing and irritation. One corset designer, stated that his new corset supported and reduced the abdomen and also eliminated any discomfort "such as the torture of scalding in summer and chafing in winter" by absorbing perspiration or "other moisture cast off by the wearer."[314]

Many corset patentees made note that their newly designed corsets would be easy to take on and take off. The attachment or adjustable back for corset design, aided in "the natural functions of the body" since many of the corsets already on the market made it so that is was "necessary to partially or entirely remove the corset in performing such functions." This design helped to reduce the hips by an attachment of lacings around the lower back of the corset. These lacings could be opened or closed independently of the rest of the corset to aid in the long straight hip effect that was desired at this time.(Figure 5.1).[315] A similar product was found in

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[311] Fanny Morse, "Hip Brassiere Attachment for Corsets," Patent No. 1,319,604 (1919); Clayton Whitney, "Corset," Patent No. 1,495,056 (1924). The Royal Worcester Corset Factory started in 1861and "claimed to be the largest corset manufacturer in the world." They produced corsets under three brand names: Adjusto, Bon Ton, and Royal Worcester. The Adjusto brand was made specifically for plus sized women. http://www.worcesterart.org/Exhibitions/Past/bound_by_fashion.html

[312] Agnes Harris, "Abdominal Adjuster, Reducer, Supporter, and Retainer," Patent No. 960,908 (1910).

[313] Alfred Abt, "Corset," Patent No. 1,155,864 (1915). Abt worked for the Warner Brother Company who sold corsets and later, in the 1920s, brassieres. Warner advertised one of the first brassieres for the "Growing Girl." This brassiere was intended for women with a small bust size which most likely included teenagers and flappers.

[314] Ivy Howell, "Corset," Patent No. 1,227,442 (1917).

[315] Kate Lamberger, "Attachment or Adjustable Back for Corsets," Patent No. 1,565,168 (1925).

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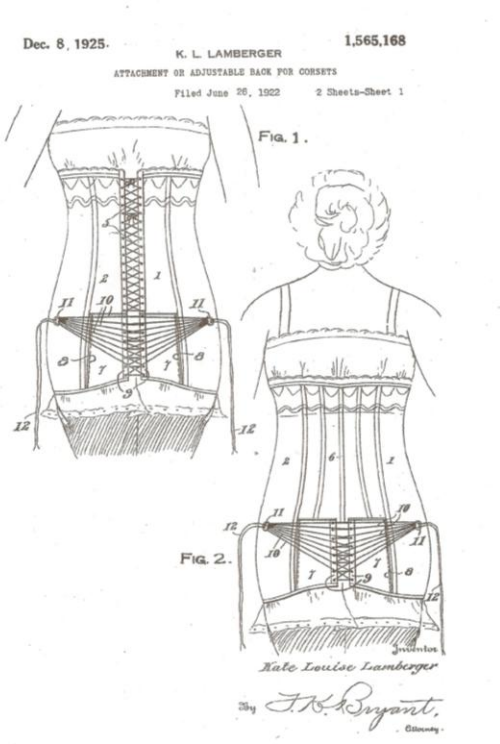
Camco Self Adjusting Corsets, a trademarked name. The S. H. Camp & Company, manufacturers of the Camco Corset, stated that it had an "exclusive self-adjusting feature, with utmost simplicity, molds the larger figure to proportionate lines, easy grace and regal dignity" (Figure 5.2).[316] Interestingly and speaking to the length of time that inventions took to gain patent protection, Lamberger's patent was filed in June 1922, four months before the Camco advertisements appeared, but did not become patented until December 1925.


Dec. 8, 1925. 1,565,168

K. L. LAMBERGER

ATTACHMENT OR ADJUSTABLE BACK FOR CORSETS

Filed June 26, 1922 2 Sheets-Sheet 1

FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

Kate Louise Lamberger

Figure 5.1 (left) "Attachment or Adjustable Back for Corsets," 1925.

Source: Kate Lamberger, "Attachment or Adjustable Back for Corsets," Patent No. 1,565,168 (1925).

[316] S. H. Camp & Company. Advertisement. *Harper's Bazaar* October 1922, 142; S. H. Camp & Company. Advertisement. *Vogue* 1 Oct 1922; 107.

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Figure 5.2 (right) Camco Corset advertisement, 1922.

Source: *Vogue*, October 1, 1922.

"Average" sized designs of corset would not fit plus-sized women's bodies properly and when worn, the stout woman's extra flesh and fat would spill over and under the corset fabric. Inventors during the 1910s and 1920s worked to alleviate this problem with added fabric panels at the top or bottom of the corset or through extra straps or stays that would provide additional support. Alverda Hensely's corset attachment in 1912 was a semi-circular piece of fabric that attached to the front top of the corset to reduce and support the bust as well as prevent "the unsightly and embarrassing projection…beyond the upper edge of the corset."[317] Sara Kinscella's straight back corset would not only produce a fashionably smooth appearance on the outside of the garment, but would prevent any excess flesh from hanging out the back of the corset along the top edge. This invention promised to also be cool and comfortable to the wearer.[318] Daniel Kops' design of an apparel corset in 1921 had a pocket formed by the upper edges of attached stays that gathered the excess flesh that would normally spill over the top edge of the corset and securely contain it. Kops' corset also supported the plus sized woman's body where she needed support the most, under the arm.[319] Amber Benjamin was concerned about the flesh forced out of the bottom of the corset opposed to coming out the top. Her corset "improved conformation to the back of the wearer which allows the garment to cling to the form instead of bulging out at the bottom, as with former corsets, when the wearer is seated." This corset also prevented rolls of flesh at the shoulders from bulging out the top of corset with straps.[320]

[317] Alverda Hensley, "Corset Attachment," Patent No. 1,031,069 (1912).
[318] Sara Kinscella, "Straight Back Corset," Patent No. 1,216, 326 (1917).
[319] Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,365,504 (1921).
[320] Amber Benjamin, "Corset," Patent No. 1,521,068 (1924).

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A garment designed in 1924 had the same function as a corset and therefore was included in the corset category. It was designed to be comfortable, easily put on and taken off, could "conveniently applied by even the stoutest person without assistance," not cause any undue pressure, and would not force excess flesh out of the bottom or top while in a seated position.[321] From the stated problems and solutions to this problem, it appeared that when a plus sized woman sat down in her corset, her extra weight around her hip and buttocks area would displace the corset and force it upwards.[322] An athletic corset designed in 1922 allowed for freedom of movement when a woman bent over, was seated, or while the woman walked, danced, skated, or played tennis. It also provided a smooth line across the front of the garment and supported the abdomen.[323] In his patent of a corset, Abraham Zwiebelson made a plus sized woman's waist and bust appear to be barrel shape and prevented pressure against the front of the body so that it would not displace the corset or make it dig into the skin.[324]

One of the more unique advantages of patented corsets was supposed weight loss through gentle compression and massage or at least making the body appear reduced. Daniel Kops' apparel corset in 1910, patent number 967,645, had a "holding-in function" that reduced the figure by preventing any "abnormal abdominal prominence" (Figure 5.3).[325] A search of the *New York Times* yielded a Kops Brothers Manufacturers Company advertisement from 1911 that featured similar, yet not identical, corset designs (Figure 5.4). The advertised Kops Brothers "Nemo" brand corset featured similar triangular design on the front of the corset and extra panels that wrapped around the woman's abdomen to create a "holding-in function" for a flat front

[321] Dora Shultz, "Garment," Patent No. 1,497,308 (1924).
[322] Agnes Harris, "Abdominal Adjuster, Reducer, Supporter, and Retainer," Patent No. 960,908 (1910); Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,020,764 (1912); Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,032,146 (1912).
[323] Marjory Heinzen, "Athletic Corset for Women," Patent No. 1,409,215 (1922).
[324] Abraham Zwiebelson, "Corset," Patent No. 1,415,757 (1922).
[325] Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 967,645 (1910).

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effect.[326] The corset belt or girdle design gave the wearer a straight front without any restraint in bodily movement. It also prevented "the skirt bands from cutting into the waist" which was stated to be "unsightly as well as uncomfortable."[327] Within the advertisement, the Kops Brothers Manufacturers extolled the virtues of their invention "Lastikops Webbing" and urged dealers to "not palm off a 'just as good' corset for the sake of making a larger profit." This advertised corset stated that it was trademarked, but did not mention if it was patented. Further research did not yield any patents for the special webbing or Nemo corsets specifically, but in 1922 Kops filed a patent that related to previous "Nemo" Marvelace corsets already on file in the early 1920s.[328] Shortly before Daniel Kops' death in 1923, his son Waldemar filed a patent for a brassiere as assignor to Nemo Circlet Company.[329] In 1912, Kops patented a corset that provided a self-reducing benefit with the additional plus of remolding, confining, and reducing the upper portion of the thigh.[330]

[326] Kops Brothers. Advertisement. *The New York Times* 5 March 1911, 73.
[327] Lucy Walker, "Corset Belt or Girdle," Patent No. 1,256,850 (1918).
[328] Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,432,470 (1922).
[329] Waldemar Kops, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,546,135 (1925); Obituary of Daniel Kops, *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct 3, 1923.
[330] Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,020,764 (1912); Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 1,032,146 (1912).

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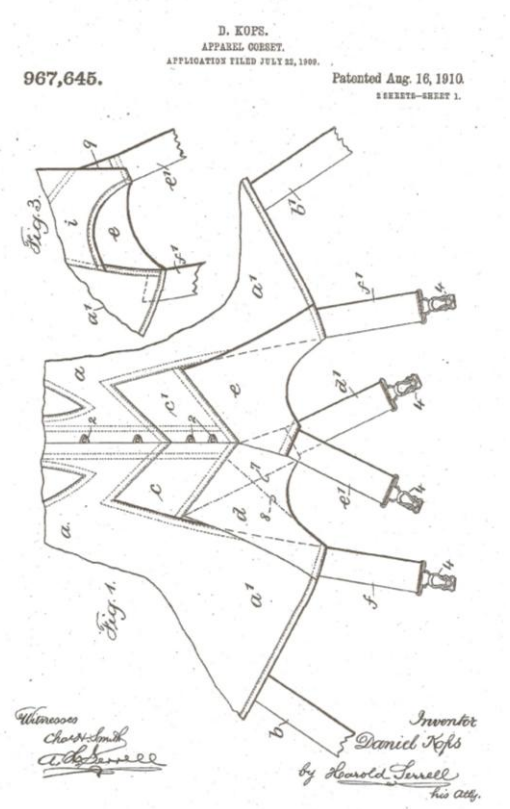
D. KOPS.
APPAREL CORSET.
APPLICATION FILED JULY 22, 1909.
967,645. Patented Aug. 16, 1910.
2 SHEETS—SHEET 1.
Fig. 3.
Fig. 1.
Witnesses
Chas. N. Smith
A. Hoffmann
Inventor
Daniel Kops
by Harold Serrell
his Atty.

Figure 5.3 (left) "Apparel Corset," 1910.

Source: Daniel Kops, "Apparel Corset," Patent No. 967,645 (1910).

Figure 5.4 (right) Kops Brothers advertisement, 1911.

Source: *The New York Times*, March 12, 1911.

Amber Benjamin's corset design issued in 1924, patent number 1,521,068 applied pressure upon the areas of the body with extra fat tissue including the bust and under the arm. Benjamin stated that "an object is to provide a means whereby reduction of adipose tissue may be effected by applying a gentle and not uncomfortable pressure upon the parts where such tissue has accumulated and is likely to accumulate."[331]

[331] Amber Benjamin, "Corset," Patent No. 1,521,068 (1924).

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Brassieres and Accessories

Twelve percent, or three out of the 25 total patents in the 1910s, were brassieres and accessories. Brassiere accessories included a bust confining and reducing garment, a combined corset cover and brassiere, a combination of brassiere and drawers, and an adjustable bust confining garment. These patents were improvements on previously invented brassieres. In the 1910s, brassieres were designed to not only support the bust, but to conceal extra rolls of flesh and possibly reduce the bust. Daniel Kops claimed that one problem with low-busted corsets was the "tendency to develop a roll or layer of flesh between the busts and the upper front edge of the garment."[332] His concern was that this extra roll of flesh would be unattractive because it broke the line of an otherwise smooth front of a garment. His solution to this problem was to create a brassiere that overlapped the upper edge of the corset to be seamless. Mary Clark also developed a bust confining and reducing garment that covered and confined the superfluous fat that usually hung over the plus-sized woman's corset. It was important to her that the extra fat was covered when a thin blouse was worn. Her bust garment was also easily worn, easily adjusted, and improved the figure.[333] Inventor Frances James suggested in patent #1,254,043 in 1918, "When wearing thin dresses, it is very desirable that a fancy garment be worn, and yet with stout persons, it is necessary that a supporting inner garment in the form of a brassiere be also used."[334] Her garment was supportive, but was also completely concealed by the outer garments.

There was a drastic increase in the amount of brassiere patents issued from the 1910s to 1920s. In the 1910s, only 12% of all patents were brassieres, but in the 1920s, 28%, or eight out of the 28 total patents, were for brassieres or brassiere related products. Patentee, Anne Elizabeth Miller, stated in 1920 that "One of the defects of ordinary garments of this class is that they tend

[332] Daniel Kops, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,252,124 (1918).
[333] Mary Clark, "Bust Confining and Reducing Garment," Patent No. 1,197,344 (1916).
[334] Frances James, "Combined Corset Cover and Brassiere," Patent No. 1,254,043 (1918).

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to ride up from the waistline, not only causing discomfort, but robbing them of their function of supporting the figure."[335] Her invention supported the figure, but also permitted ease of movement and freedom of the body and arms. Her brassiere also prevented the garment from riding up after excess movement and exercise. Aline Godchaux's suggested that her brassiere design be made from what she called a heavy and durable fabric such as linen, satin, or silk for these would provide adequate support. Traditionally, these fabrics are not considered heavy and durable and are fairly lightweight. She felt that the problem with other brassieres were that their previous designs forced the bust out of a natural position which made the wearer uncomfortable. She also stressed that plus sized women could wear any style of dress including low neck dresses and evening dresses.[336]

Similar to corset improvements, inventors crafted brassieres to prevent excess flesh from bulging out of the top or the bottom of the brassiere's edge. Isidor Roth stated that his brassiere design did not move out of proper placement when the wearer bent over. It supported the wearer's diaphragm which tended to bulge unattractively "outwardly over the edge of the modern low bust corsets."[337] His construction intended to provide an unwrinkled and smooth line to the outer garment for an attractive appearance. Viola Smith designed an adjustable bust confining garment that prevented excess shoulder flesh from protruding over the back of the corset while still firmly holding the bust firmly.[338] Abraham Zwiebelson's brassiere design "constitute[d] an appliance for promoting the proper distribution of the fat roll of the upper

[335] Anne Elizabeth Miller, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,362,027 (1920).
[336] Aline Godchaux, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,426,727 (1922).
[337] Isidor Roth, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,432,477 (1922). Roth worked for the Benjamin & Johnes Company in New Jersey. They sold the Bien Jolie brassiere. They mass produced brassieres in high quantity in fixed size and sold their products through catalogues, corset departments, and specialty stores. They usually sold to an older clientele.
[338] Viola Smith, "Adjustable Bust Confining Garment," Patent No. 1,406,692 (1922).

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abdomen and which tends to further distribute the same below the breast and flare of the ribs."[339] It also tended to stay in place with movement and allowed for comfortable breathing.

Brassieres were improved upon to be cool to the wearer, comfortable, and easy to take on and off.[340] Chafing and irritation from perspiration was a stated problem. One invention to ensure that this did not happen was a brassiere "of simple construction" designed to "keep the breasts of the wearer separated and will tend to avoid irritation and chafing sometimes caused when brassieres of the conventional form are worn."[341]

Combination Corset and Brassiere

A new category was added in the 1920s for plus sized women. This category included a combination corset and brassiere. Eleven percent of patents in the 1920s (*n*=3) fit into this category. All three patents were designed by women. Combination corsets and brassieres were designed to support the figure, give a fashionable silhouette, and prevent excess flesh from bulging out of the top or bottom of the garment. These garments provided support and gave the wearer pleasing lines and a flat front.[342] Inventor Christine Petersen stated that

> The modern corset is worn rather well down on the body, in such manner that the lower part envelopes the hips and abdomen and the result of this had been that excess flesh or fat has been forced downwardly, producing an undesirable bulge at or about the lower part of the abdomen and a great pelvic organs.

Petersen's invention was comprised of elastic sides with a pair of front corset panels and larger back corset panel that was comfortable and corrected "this condition, which is often uncomfortable, unfashionable, and unsightly."[343]

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[339] Abraham Zwiebelson, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,516,658 (1924).
[340] Ruth Block Oppenheimer, "Brassiere and Drawers," Patent No. 1,354,207 (1920); Isidore Panes, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,379,416 (1921).
[341] Ida Gladstone, "Brassiere," Patent No. 1,512,417 (1924).
[342] Catherine Trenholm, "Combined Corset and Brassiere," Patent No. 1,358,660 (1920); Daisy K Wolf, "Combined Corset and Brassiere," Patent No. 1,499,897 (1924).
[343] Christine Petersen, "Combined Corset and Brassiere," Patent No. 1,718,000 (1929).

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Menstrual Products

Twelve percent, or three out of the 25 total patents in the 1910s, were menstrual products. Menstrual products included an anti-chafing and menstrual garment along with a garment protector. Three of three patents were designed by woman; one product was authored by two patentees: a man and a woman. The products were invented to prevent menstrual leakage, protect a woman's garments during her menstrual cycle, and to prevent chafing from the inner thigh area. The Anti-chafing and Menstrual Garment was a pair of drawers with attached shield which had a dual purpose. One purpose was that the garment prevented clothing from being ruined from staining. The other purpose was that it prevented chafing on the upper part of the thighs and crotch area.[344] The Combining Garment Protector prevented the skirt from clinging to a woman's backside and prevented any undue embarrassment. The protector was a pad made of waterproof fabric that tied around the waist.[345] Cora Dudley's Catamenial Sack was a waterproof undergarment that prevented menstrual leakage as well as "to provide a device of the above character wherein the construction permits of the device being readily worn by stout people especially in hot weather and serves to protect the limbs of the wearer to prevent chafing thereof."[346]

Only one, or 4%, menstrual product was patented for plus sized women in the 1920s. This product, a Catamenial Bandage and Support, provided not only protection from a woman's menstrual cycle, but had a non-stretchable panel across the front of the garment that provided support and a smooth fitting front.[347]

[344] Lewis McPherson and Mary Grundy, "Antichafing and Menstrual Garment," Patent No. 1,031,861 (1912).
[345] Eva Tacon, "Combining Garment Protector," Patent No. 1,262,136 (1918).
[346] Cora Dudley, "Catamenial Sack," Patent No. 1,288,848 (1918).
[347] Elizabeth Whitlock, "Catamenial Bandage and Support," Patent No. 1,560,890 (1925).

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Undergarments

Twelve percent, or three out of the 25 total patents, were undergarments in the 1910s. Undergarments included combinations and union suits. All undergarments were patented by men. Undergarments were placed in a different category from corsets and brassieres; in this case, undergarments were soft in nature and not worn to constrict the body. Similar to corsets and brassieres, patented undergarments were worn to be comfortable and to produce a tidy appearance. Edward Quigley's combination garment was made with a combined shirt and drawers open at the front. The purpose of this invention was that it was "easy to put on and take off and also affords the wearer a certain amount of freedom of movement without inconvenience" with "minimum amount of trouble to the wearer."[348] One undergarment designed for plus sized women were a pair of open crotch drawers with reinforced seams at the waist and sides which gave support for the extra stress and weight plus sized women placed on garments.[349] The third undergarment patented in the 1910s was a combination style undergarment with an adjustable drawstring waistband to account for various sizes with extra fullness for the plus sized figure. Even with a significantly stout woman, the garment would still close in the front and the back.[350]

Fourteen percent, or 4 out of the 28 total patents, were undergarments in the 1920s. Undergarments included a nether garment, combination, union suit, and stockings. These products supported and helped plus sized women obtain the fashionable silhouette from the inside out. The undergarments were designed to allow plus sized women freedom and ease of movement. The nether garment for plus sized woman looked similar to a union suit. This knit garment flattened the bust, molded the figure, and reduced the appearance of the figure. The

[348] Edward Quigley, "Combination Garment," Patent No. 1,128,360 (1915).
[349] Harry Fox, "Garment," Patent No. 1,175,514 (1916).
[350] Charles Shedaker, "Undergarment," Patent No. 1,321,560 (1919).

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inventor stated that it was comfortable and easy to move in.[351] Irene Kelly improved upon the combination undergarment because she found that regular combination undergarments became uncomfortable and was apt to rip at the stress points when the plus sized woman sat or bent over. Her improved combination undergarment was stated to be comfortable, easy to remove, and non-constricting in the positions that a woman experienced in everyday life activities.[352] May Belle Vizzard's combination undergarment stated that it permitted "quick dressing and….[was] easily packed for traveling and also easy to launder."[353]

Another undergarment that aided in improving the plus sized woman's appearance was the improvement in stockings. With shortened skirts and more leg exposure in the 1920s, plus sized women complained that their large legs and ankles were "ungainly" in appearance.[354] New inventions stated to present an optical illusion "whereby the wearer's leg slenderized" to "conform more nearly to a generally accepted standard of leg beauty." This was accomplished by "a double thickness of material of the same character and shade or tint as that of the stocking itself, or if desired to accentuate the indications they may comprise strips of different character or different shade or tint, or even of different color."[355] Using a different color or tint represented unusual advice during the 1920s since a different color would draw attention to the plus sized woman's legs. An optical illusion to slenderize the leg was Wolff's intention (Figure 5.5). A similar product was manufactured and sold by the Kayser Company five years *before* Wolff's patented stockings They advertised a "slipper heel" stocking that was trademark registered. The slipper heel was illustrated as a triangular double knit section that was darker than the rest of the

[351] Alonsita Walker, "Nethergarment," Patent No. 1,334,823 (1920).
[352] Thresa Newman, "Union Suit," Patent No. 1,596,681 (1926).
[353] May Belle Vizzard, "Combination Undergarment," Patent No. 1,655,300 (1928).
[354] Harry Wolff, "Stocking," Patent No. 1,697,255 (1929).
[355] Harry Wolff, "Stocking," Patent No. 1,697,255 (1929).

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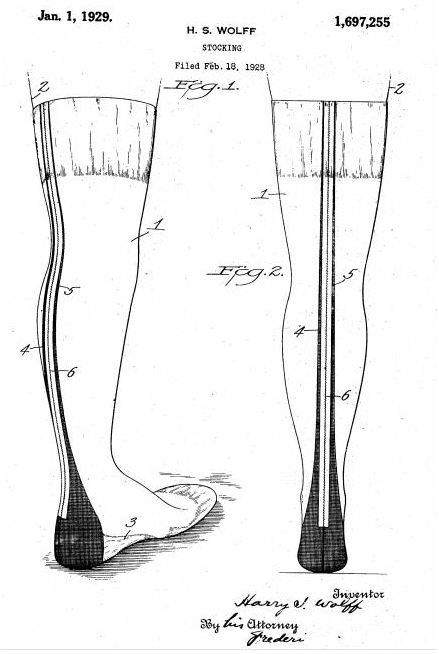
stocking at the wearer's heel and up the thigh in the back (Figure 5.6).[356] Wolff stated in his patent that he was "aware no attempt has heretofore been made of according such treatment to a stocking as will have the effect of slenderizing the appearance of the leg upon which it is worn."[357] No lawsuits were found for this trademark violation.



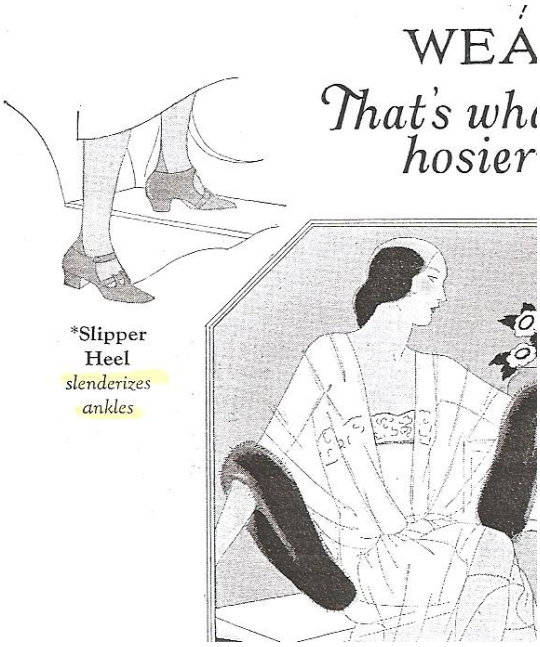


Figure 5.5 (left) "Stocking," 1929.

Source: Harry Wolff, "Stocking," Patent No. 1,697,255 (1929).

Figure 5.6 (right) Kayser Full-Fashioned Thread Silk Hosiery advertisement, 1924.

Source: *Good Housekeeping*, November 1924.

Support Devices

Twelve percent (*n*=3) of the patents were considered support devices in the 1910s. Support devices included a chafing shield, hose supporter, and stays. Two out of the three support devices were authored by men. A major issue that plus sized women faced in everyday activities was the chafing in the inner thighs caused by friction of the legs. Chafing was

[356] Kayser. Advertisement. *Good Housekeeping* November 1924, 231.
[357] Harry Wolff, "Stocking," Patent No. 1,697,255 (1929).

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uncomfortable and could be painful. One device, Blanche Hall's Chafing Shield, was a leather harness that wrapped around a woman's waist and upper thighs. The leather straps contained 6 pockets with talcum powder. When the woman walked, the movement would distribute the powder to the interior portions of the thighs to prevent chafing. Hall claimed that the chafing shields were efficient to use, durable, easy to wear, and of simple construction. It was not mentioned, however, what happened to the excess powder that fell out of the bottom of the skirt while the woman walked.[358] The Hose Supporter prevented plus sized women from ripping holes in their hose when they sat down. George Chandlee, the inventor, stated that "The stouter the individual who wears the garter the greater the bulge of the hip when the individual is seated and the greater lengthening of the rear festoon is necessary to prevent undue strain on the rear elastic." The Hose Supporter had an elastic and loop construction to prevent undue strain.[359]

Hugh McCormick developed a method of designing and improving corsets for women of "special size." As was stated previously in this chapter, corset design was a challenge for the plus sized woman. They didn't stay in place and were not properly designed for the extra size of a plus sized woman. McCormick stated that "It is obviously impossible to give the calculations required for what manufacturers call 'specials.'" His method instructed corsetieres to start with a base corset pattern that was in proportion of the three different "standard" sizes of women (slender, medium, and large stout women) most similar to woman in question. This method would allow for better fit rather than using one standard size for every figure and trying to enlarge or reduce the pattern. McCormick experimented and perfected his system of a graded sizing for corsets over eleven years "to invent, compare and prove the rules and processes herein

[358] Blanche Hall, "Chafing Shield," Patent No. 956,341 (1910). The patentee, Blanche Hall, stated that she lived in Brooklyn, New York when the patent was filed. A Blanche Hall was found in living in New York during the time the patent was filed as a prominent New York stage actor.
[359] George Chandlee, "Hose Supporter," Patent No. 1,143,506 (1915).

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set forth and to reduce same to both accuracy and simplicity. The reason so many experiments were necessary is because of the immense variety of shapes of women's figures. No part of a woman varies in size and shape to the extent of her abdomen."[360]

Only one (4%) support device product was patented in the 1920s. This support device was a skirt clasp. The skirt clasp's purpose was to help close and extend the size of the skirt an inch or two to accommodate the larger figure.[361]

Garments

Eight percent, or two out of the 25 total patents in the 1910s, were garments. These garments were a house dress and a burial robe. The house dress was patented by a male and the burial robe by a female. Robert Lowe's garment was a house or work dress that could fit a variety of sized women with a drawstring waist. He wanted to provide a garment that was easy for manufacturers to make that emphasized the fashionable flat front effect.[362] A burial robe was patented in 1918 and included a drawstring waist to fit a variety of women to present a graceful and orderly appearance.[363] There were no garments patented for plus sized women in the 1920s.

Conclusions

Patents provide a historical viewpoint that the popular press media does not. Products designed and patented from 1910 to 1929 attempted to improve upon the plus sized woman's life. Both men and women patented corsets, brassieres, menstrual products, undergarments, support devices, garments, and combination corset and brassiere. The majority of the patentees authored independently, whereas a few were affiliated with a company.

[360] Hugh McCormick, "Method of Designing Stays," Patent No. 1,221,811 (1917). McCormick was the assignor to the Uplift Corset Company in Phoenix Arizona.
[361] Arthur Wilke, "Skirt Clasp," Patent No. 1,401,453 (1921).
[362] Robert Lowe, "Garment," Patent No. 1,136,822 (1915).
[363] Katherine Fenneman, "Woman's Burial Robe," Patent No. 1,264,911 (1918).

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Corsets were a necessity in the 1910s for all women and a necessity for plus sized women in the 1920s. To fit and support properly, a corset needed to be specially designed for the plus sized woman. The corsets patented for the plus sized woman attempted to prevent the unsightly appearance of extra flesh protruding from the corset. These corsets also (supposedly) stayed in place when the plus sized women sat, stooped, or bent over. In addition, corsets were expected to be comfortable, easy to put on and take off, and be simple in construction. A final stated benefit of some patented corsets was weight loss by gentle massage.

Women wore brassieres in the 1910s, but their use escalated in popularity in the 1920s. Brassieres often accompanied low-busted corsets in the 1910s to conceal the roll of flesh that tended to appear between the corset and brassiere. These brassieres were also designed to stay in place with movement and allowed comfortable breathing. Brassieres were improved upon to be easy to take on and off, cool to the wearer, and comfortable. Menstrual products designed at this time served dual purposes for the plus sized woman. Not only did they protect the wearer's garment from menstrual stains, but they also prevented chafing on the upper part of the crotch area and thighs. Undergarments were worn to produce a tidy appearance, to be comfortable, and to allow ease of movement and freedom. Support devices included hose supporters, chafing shields, stays, and skirt clasps. These products aided in the plus sized woman's life in a variety of ways. Few garments of special design were patented for larger women. Patents provided a different view of life for the plus sized woman in the 1910s and 1920s by placing into words the problems with fit and support that women faced. Patents further illustrate and support findings from magazine advice.

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CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to examine the fashionable styles available to women in the 1910s and 1920s, the advice, both prescriptive and proscriptive, given to plus sized women in the 1910 and the 1920s, and the apparel-related patents issued during the 1910s to 1929 to aid the plus sized woman. Primary sources analyzed included *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping*, and utility patents. They provided multiple viewpoints regarding the plus sized woman during this period. This research demonstrated that plus sized women were able to purchase ready-to-wear clothing in the years 1910 to 1929. These years were important to analyze to see if the plus sized woman's ready-to-wear industry evolved simultaneously with the rest of the ready-to-wear industry or if it lagged behind other industry sectors.

Summary

The dramatic shift from an acceptance of stoutness in the 19th century to slenderness in the early 20th century changed the look and expectations of fashion. In the mid-19th century, excess fleshiness on a woman was oftentimes wanted and women would pad their bodies to appear larger. Weight was viewed as a sign of success by the upper socio-economic classes. The emergence of the Gibson Girl in 1890 ended the fashion appeal and acceptance of the voluptuous woman. Advertisements, motions pictures, and physical education in school also helped cement the slender woman as the "It" or All-American ideal girl. Extra weight was also seen as un-American and negatively associated with immigrants. People often ridiculed the plus size woman for her stoutness calling her names such as "butter-legs" and "helpless."

At the turn of the century, weight loss was still an undeveloped science. Scientists had only just started to understand how people gained and lost weight, but efforts to improve nutrition on a national scale occurred during the first part of the twentieth century. Height and

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weight charts and bathroom scales also impacted the perception of weight in the Progressive Era in America. In the 1840s, insurance companies developed average height and weight charts to determine healthfulness because they believed that it was a visible indicator of well being. Height and weight charts reflected the medical ideals of the time and did not necessarily reflect the social ideals of weight. For example, while 143 pounds was considered ideal medically in 1920s for a woman 5'7" tall, socially this was still thought of as "heavy." Today's ideal height and weight chart now include a range of ideal weights and are classified into three categories: small frame, medium frame, and large frame. Current ideal weights are similar to those in the 1910s and 1920s, but do not represent the societal ideal, especially to many adolescents who view excess weight as a societal burden. This emphasis on slenderness in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries has led to an increase in eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.[364] By the turn of the century, average weights had evolved into ideal weights. Small scales that fit inside of peoples' homes gained popularity in the 1910s. The bathroom scale "heralded an era in which weight was quantified into pounds of flesh, and a new concern emerged—the fight against fat."[365]

The 1890s saw an increase in dieting due to advertisements for weight control methods. Americans became increasingly interested in dieting due to fashion, the increased public discussion about weight, and new fat controlling and reducing devices. Dr. Lulu Peter's diet book, *Diet and Health With Key to the Calories*, was the first to appear on the *Publishers Weekly* Best Sellers list. Though this diet book was not the first weight loss book written, it showcases

[364] Height and weight chart for a "medium frame" (2011): 4'10" 109-121; 4'11" 111-123; 5'0" 113-126; 5'1" 115-129; 5'2" 118-132; 5'3" 121-135; 5'4" 124-138; 5'5" 127-141; 5'6" 130-144; 5'7" 133-147; 5'8" 136-150; 5'9" 139-153; 5'10" 142-156; 5'11" 145-159; and 6'0" 148-162. http://www.healthchecksystems.com/heightweightchart.htm

[365] Czerniawski, "From Average to Ideal," 273.

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American's growing obsession with weight loss. Numerous other diet books were written during this time period to capitalize on this trend.

The ready-to-wear industry grew exponentially during the time studied. In the 19th century and before, women needed to construct her clothing by herself or with the help of a dressmaker. In the 20th century, women could visit department and other stores to purchase ready-to-wear clothing. Purchased clothing was convenient and offered women the opportunity to easily update her fashionable wardrobe. Homemade clothing was seen as inferior to ready-to-wear and with clothing available to be purchased at all price points, all classes of women could participate. Sizing and fit was often an issue with ready-to-wear clothing. Standard sizing for women varied from store to store and women of all sizes found this aspect of the ready-to-wear industry challenging. Plus sized women manufacturers did exist at this time, though in much smaller numbers than manufactures of average sized women's clothing. The well known plus sized women's retail store, Lane Bryant (among others), supplied quality clothing to women of larger sizes. The Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers, Inc. was formed "To secure and provide co-operation and united effort in all matters relating to the improvement of conditions in the stout wear apparel industry."[366]

The ready-to-wear industry did exist for plus sized women in the 1910s though it was just in its infancy. Plus sized women, sizes 39" to 51" bust in dresses and 46" to 56" for separate waists oftentimes had to frequent the dressmaker to aid in limited readymade styles. The plus sized woman was said to have been "sadly neglected in the early development of the manufacture dress."[367] By the latter half of the 1910s, the ready-to-wear clothing industry had expanded for the plus sized woman. Plus sized woman strayed away from dressmakers clothing

[366] Associated Stylish Stout-Wear Makers, Inc., Incorporation Papers, September 1916, New York Department of State.
[367] "Variety the Keynote of Millinery Show." *The New York Times*, 1 Aug. 1926, 39.

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because of the satisfaction and convenience of ready-to-wear clothing. Fabrication and design were adapted from fashions for the "average" woman to fulfill the needs of plus sized women. Advice urged plus sized women to wear dark and concealing colors such as black, brown, and dark blues. Corsets were deemed a plus sized woman's "best friend" and never abandoned for any reason. Flattering styles for the plus sized woman included the Empire style popular in the early 1910s, longer skirts, and adding extra panels to dresses to camouflage a large figure.

Advice for the plus sized woman was much more prevalent in the 1920s than the 1910s. By the 1920s, plus sized women were able to purchase ready-to-wear clothing specially designed for their size. More clothing manufactures saw the potential and purchasing power of the plus sized woman. Manufacturers specially designed garments for her and catered to her needs. Separate departments in department stores were created. Plus sized women in the 1920s were advised to dress to accentuate her best features and hide her defects. Plus sized women were advised to wear garments that were stylish, but age and size appropriate. Styles did not drastically change for the plus sized woman, but were adapted and modified from the current styles to flatter a larger figure (darker colors, longer sleeves, etc.). Many specialty and department stores featured and sold plus sized women's clothing and accessories at the beginning of the 20th century. Surprisingly, this is different from the 21st century as it seems plus sized women have less options today than they did in the 1910s and 1920s.

Patents provided a unique look at the plus sized woman in the 1910s and 1920s. It is important to note the inventors of these plus sized focused products specifically stated their intentions to provide solutions and improve upon aspects of the plus sized women's life that other inventors did not. These products were not invented for all women, but for an exclusive category of women. Categories for patents included corsets and accessories, brassieres and

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accessories, menstrual products, undergarments, support devices, garments, and combination corset and brassieres. Newly patented corsets were stated to be unique from other products available in that they were designed to be easy to put on and take off, simple in construction, to provide support, be comfortable, and would not ride up when sitting or stooping. Brassieres and accessories were often designed to be more supportive and conceal excess flesh for the plus sized woman. Menstrual products for the plus sized woman not only functioned as a garment protector, but also provided an anti-chafing component. Anti-chafing was a repeated stated problem for the plus sized woman. Undergarments were designed to produce a tidy appearance and be comfortable. Support devices varied in their design for a chafing shield to a hose supporter. Garments patented for the plus sized woman included a burial robe and house dress. Combination corset and brassiere were designed to provide a fashionable silhouette, support the figure, and prevent excess flesh from bulging out the bottom or top of the garment.

Future Research

Additional research would aid to the strength of this study. An analysis of garments designed for the plus sized woman that could be compared to the advice literature provided in this study would greatly add to our understanding of the plus sized woman. It is important to understand if advice literature was followed by manufacturers. I have already identified two plus sized garments from the Emily Reynolds Historic Costume Collection at North Dakota State University and one garment from Iowa State University's Textiles and Clothing Museum for a future material culture study. Further analysis into the advertisements featuring both photographs and illustrations during this period is needed to determine perceptions between plus size and slender models. Additionally, access to plus sized manufacturers and retailers business archives

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would provide another dimension to understanding the plus sized woman from a business perspective.

This study has diverse and wide contributions to retailing history, general history, social history, women's history, and medical history. Retailing history is often void of information related to selling tactics geared toward a specific demographic of customer. This research also highlights the emergence of different departments for different sizes of women though this topic would need to be further researched. This research further adds to general history of early 20th century America. This research adds to social and women's history by examining differences between an average sized versus a plus sized woman in terms of dress along with prejudices against them. It's important to note that not all American women fit into a certain look and size that is perpetuated in history books. Other future research topics related to this topic include analysis of advice for the plus sized woman in different decades in the 20th and 21st centuries. As well as a consumer behavior study that examined plus sized woman's clothing satisfaction.

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