

## **Dressing for Confidence: The Influence of Hourglass silhouettes and Slimming designs on Women's Body Image**

How do hourglass silhouettes and slimming features in dress design influence women's confidence and perceptions of body image?

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## **Abstract**

This mini study explores how hourglass silhouettes and slimming features in dress design influence women's confidence, perceptions of their body image, and decisions regarding whether to own or wear a particular dress, demonstrating that such decisions extend beyond simply evaluating whether the design itself is beautiful or attractive. This study uses a strappy, double-layered wraparound mini dress as the main research object to gain deeper insights into participants' relationships with their bodies and levels of self-confidence. A dress without slimming features or a defined hourglass silhouette may have limited the depth of the research, as participants' responses could have focused mainly on negative perceptions of their bodies without allowing for a more detailed exploration of how body-enhancing design features may influence both positive and negative perceptions. For this research, five classmates (S, N, R, J, and A) were interviewed about their views and first impressions towards the dress, and their answers about if they would own the dress if they were given a chance to get one. The findings show two main themes that are closely interconnected: Enhanced Confidence and Positive Body Perception, and Body Image Concerns and Limited Wearability. Although there were some positives from the interviews, most interviewees expressed concerns about whether the dress would suit their own bodies. Despite its slimming, tight-fitting wraparound construction designed to create an hourglass silhouette, many believed that it would appear more flattering and fit more comfortably on slender figures. Overall, the findings suggest that women's perceptions of the dress were strongly influenced by how they imagined it would look like on their own bodies, and comparing this with women who have preferable standards of attractiveness.

## Introduction

Hourglass silhouette is a feature, where some designers choose to cut and design a pattern of a top, or mostly dress, in an hourglass shape, where the measurements of shoulder, hip and bust are almost equal in size, but significantly narrow in the waist area (The Concept Wardrobe, no date). On the other hand, there is also an “extreme hourglass”, where the waist is dramatically narrow than the bust and hips by roughly 30% (Shaun, 2026), and what people knows about this the most is a woman, who has a “curvy” shape. The goal of having an hourglass silhouette and features that assist in slimming women’s bodies is to help women feel confident in their own bodies, be body-positive, be flattering and attractive (Avana Plastic Surgery, 2023), and somehow motivates women of all body shapes to try on and purchase dresses that traditional dresses without advanced features do not offer, when it comes to enhanced body image and confidence.

Source: <https://bodyshapecalc.net/body-shapes/hourglass-body-shape>

This is where this mini study focuses on, the influence of hourglass and slimming features of dresses and the impact on women’s confidence. This research is interesting because it will highlight different aspects on how the added hourglass silhouettes and slimming features impact women’s confidence, both in positive and negative ways. This study also raises questions about how society shapes women’s perceptions of their bodies, particularly through the “perfect body” ideal imposed and reinforced by media and culture (Sadik and Yilmaz, 2025). Women are often pressured to achieve a slim and idealized body shape in order to meet these social beauty standards. This can influence the way women view and evaluate their own bodies, as well as how they imagine themselves looking and feeling when wearing slimming dresses designed to create a more flattering and hourglass-shaped silhouette. This is because according to some interviewees and what is found in research, most women do not tend to keep their clothes for long or do not tend to

Source: <https://gracefulstory.com/fashion-beauty/wrap-dress-makes-woman-look-better/>

purchase at all, if a dress does not flatter or shape her body, no matter how beautiful the design looks (Arentson, 2024).

This issue is further reinforced by social pressure on women to achieve an attractive body, often characterized as slim and toned. Women may pursue these body ideals to gain social acceptance rather than for their own satisfaction (Rose, 2017). This pressure is influenced by repeated exposure to media and advertisements portraying thin and conventionally attractive women, with these ideals often associated with happiness, desirability, and success (Yamamiya et al., 2005). Women who

conform to these ideals may be praised for their discipline and willpower, while those who do not may be unfairly perceived as lazy or lacking self-control. As a result, women may experience judgement based on both their body shape and how clothing appears on their bodies.

Therefore, this study investigates how deliberately designed hourglass silhouettes and slimming features in dresses influence women's confidence and perceptions of their body image, and also aims to understand how these design elements may affect the way women see, feel about, and develop relationships with their own bodies, particularly in relation to their appearance, body shape, and sense of self-confidence.

The selected dress design was this body-hugging little black dress that features a double-layered construction, as seen on the torso where the body is wrapped to give a slim look, and intended to emphasize the waist and creating an hourglass appearance, as a result. These design features were selected because they allow the study to explore how a small group of participants responded to clothing intended to alter or enhance the perceived body silhouette.

## **Methods**

For this mini research study, a body-hugging wraparound dress with slimming design features was selected as the main design object because it was designed to create and enhance the appearance of an hourglass silhouette. The dress uses a double-layered construction for additional coverage

around the abdominal area and wraparound detailing intended to visually define the waist. Rib knit was selected for its stretch, flexibility and ability to follow the body's shape, while the size chart ranges from XS to XL. In this study, terms such as "body-friendly" and "slimming" refer to these intended design effects rather than assuming the same effect on every body.

To gain insight into participants' views and first impressions of the dress, I interviewed five classmates, coded as Person R, Person N, Person S, Person J, and Person A. The participants were recruited informally based on who was available at the time, rather than through a purposive selection process. All five participants freely consented to take part in the interview and to have their responses recorded in separate handwritten notes. The interview questions focused on their perceptions of the overall appearance and design features of the dress, including whether they personally considered it overly revealing and how they perceived someone wearing such a design. The responses therefore represent the views of this small exploratory group and are not intended to represent women more broadly. Participants were also asked whether they would choose to have this dress in their wardrobes and whether they believed the design was suitable only for certain body types. In addition, the questions explored how participants imagined they would generally look and feel when wearing the dress, particularly in relation to its slimming effect and ability to create the appearance of an hourglass figure. Finally, participants were asked about the situations in which they would consider wearing the dress, such as for special occasions, daily wear, or other social settings.

After recording and summarizing the responses from five classmates, similar and recurring answers were identified and grouped into two main themes: positive and negative perceptions of the dress, particularly in relation to participants' views of their own bodies and their relationships with their body image. Some interviewees identified both advantages and disadvantages of a dress incorporating hourglass silhouettes and slimming features at the same time. Therefore, the findings were organized into positive and negative themes based on the responses, first impressions, interpretations, and opinions themselves, rather than separating the interviewees into specific groups, as individual participants could express both positive and negative views towards the dress. Some of the repeated words included "confident", "covering up abs area and flaws", "slim body", and "short". For this research, qualitative data from interview was the main source of data, while quantitative data and secondary sources from websites and Google Scholar were used to support interviewees' answers and to gain further information about the research question itself.

**Rib knit fabric – known for exceptional stretch, form-fitting texture, giving flattering silhouette, and high elasticity.**

Source: <https://corefabricstore.com/products/micromodal-baby-rib-knit-deadstock-black?srltid=AU7gw4V8AG-DwSzoMLHayA2w3okupSKzgSwRrCN8hwSWUarmmjKEbFJi>

**Size Chart**  
**Body Measurements**

| <b>Size</b> | <b>Bust (cm)</b> | <b>Waist (cm)</b> | <b>Hips (cm)</b> |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| XS          | 78-82            | 60-64             | 84-88            |
| S           | 83-87            | 65-69             | 89-93            |
| M           | 88-92            | 70-74             | 94-98            |
| L           | 93-98            | 75-80             | 99-104           |
| XL          | 99-104           | 81-86             | 105-110          |

As the rib knit fabric, that is chosen for the dress, is a stretch fabric, it might look different on everyone's body when they wear this dress. As a result, the size chart is provided as a reference based on body measurements rather than product measurements and does not represent the final measurements of the finished garment.

## Results

Theme 1: Enhanced Confidence and Positive Body Perception. Gathering the data, three interviewees, Person S, N, and R said, “This dress does not have decorative details which is quite ideal for me because it looks minimalist and sexy, which is a symbol of being a confident lady. But what is great here is that the dress is minimalist but I do perceive it as attractive and sexy at the same time, without being overly revealing.” Interviewee N and S also said, “I think wearing this dress, it would enhance and conceal my body, due to its body-hugging, double-layer wrap design, that gives an hourglass silhouette, and what I especially appreciate is the double-layer wrap feature, that would help conceal the flaws, particularly around the abdomen, which is the main area that women are mainly concerned on, when it comes to particular clothes looking good on them. This is true when asked my classmates as well as when found online, where they agreed that several magazines, advertisements, social media, and media mainly promote young, fresh, and feminine-looking women, who has a toned, flattening, and ‘six-pack’ abs, where they usually refer to these women as having ‘sexy body’, having beauty and strength (Meacham, 2022), being summer or beach-ready, and where every woman are meant to look up to (Markula, 2016), and should inspire from, when it comes to living a healthy lifestyle and exercise, to look good on certain clothes. This is because the purpose of fashion brands doing business rarely teaches us how to find our personal styles and tastes when looking for clothes, but rather to market the apparels that brands produce, with their own size charts that usually leave out the plus-size women, and influencing customers to buy them (Key to Fashion, no date). Due to these societal expectations and perceptions, it was observed that when interviewees were asked about their opinions of the dress, they did not evaluate whether the dress was beautiful or attractive based solely on the design itself. Instead, their perceptions were influenced by imagining how the dress would look on their own bodies, and then, appeared to form a connection between the design features and their individual body shapes, and using this imagined appearance to develop their overall judgement and attitude towards the dress. This is also why interviewees highlighted the double-layer wrap and slimming features of the dress, and the importance to be able to conceal the perceived body flaws.

## Theme 2: Body Image Concerns and Limited Wearability.

Interviewees R, J, and A said, “This dress, from its first glance, looks like it chooses wearer and may be more suitable for women who are already slim, muscular, or have toned abdominal areas, over women with larger bodies.” Interviewees R and A also said, “I would not choose to own or wear the dress because the design of it does not align with my individual style, clothing preferences, or just my vibe in general, because I feel quite uncomfortable with wearing short-length, body-hugging or revealing nature of the dress, as I am not an outgoing person. However, this dress would still look good when worn for occasions, such as going to bars or clubs, wedding events, red carpets, and big events.” What is noted for these interview answers is that not every woman looks for looking slim or tight-fit when purchasing clothes because in a daily basis, they would like to feel comfortable and unrestrictive when going out for activities, such as going to supermarkets, have a quick meal with families, or shopping. Previous research has also suggested that dresses designed with body-slimming features and hourglass silhouettes may not always provide a comfortable fit when worn for extended periods. Such garments can become tight and constrictive, potentially causing physical discomfort and making it more difficult for the wearer to breathe comfortably (Lodi, 2025). This discomfort may also negatively affect the wearer’s mood and create a stronger desire to change into looser and more comfortable clothing. While everyone agrees that these dresses promote and enhance women’s natural curves and body confidence at least for a short period of time, it is that body-hugging and slimming dresses are more comfortable and flattering when one is already quite slim (Lodi, 2025). As discussed above, concealing the abdominal area can be an important concern for some women. However, body-slimming features and hourglass silhouettes in dress design may only conceal or reshape the appearance of the body to a certain extent. For example, if the abdominal area remains visible or prominent when wearing a body-hugging dress, the wearer may still experience social judgement or criticism regarding her decision to wear such a design.

The findings above highlight how each interviewee's responses contributed to and supported the identified themes. Overall, the responses primarily centered on confidence and body image, particularly in relation to body-hugging silhouettes and body-slimming design features.

## **Discussion**

By combining the two themes, Enhanced Confidence and Positive Body Perception and Body Image Concerns and Limited Wearability, the findings from the interviewees' responses suggest that women's perceptions of whether a dress is beautiful or attractive are not based solely on the design itself or its appearance on a mannequin in a store. Instead, the findings revealed a connection between participants' body image concerns, perceptions of their own appearance, and how they imagined the dress would look on their bodies. The interview evidence shows that women, when looking at the dress, usually think about having a slim and toned body as this is the only body type, where they perceive that any types of clothes would look good on, no matter the body positivity movement, or the accepting yourself no matter what movement. This finding is consistent with the research of Lau (2016), which suggests that advertisements featuring women often present a narrow representation of the ideal female body, and this can be seen particularly in advertisements for weight-loss products and other media content that frequently portray women with slim and toned bodies as representing an ideal standard of female appearance. For this reason, some women have been reportedly using slimming products to look slim, toned and purposedly more beautiful, due to external societal pressures, rather than actual health reasons (Lubeck, Araujo and Formolo, 2025). For example, from a young age, women may be exposed to the perception that, in order to look as attractive as or more attractive than other women, they are expected to lose weight and exercise more. Such perceptions may also be reinforced in healthcare settings, where discussions about a patient's body size may sometimes focus on weight loss as an initial recommendation (Johnson, 2001).

On the other hand, findings from Amekah (2021) suggest that many women believe they may experience weight stigma and discrimination within the fashion industry and workplace. Fashion designers and brands may reinforce thinness as an ideal through the selection of slimmer models for advertising and through clothing size ranges that can make it more difficult for women with larger bodies to find a variety of suitable styles. As a result, these women may have more limited access to functional, fashionable, and comfortable clothing compared with their smaller-bodied peers (Greenleaf et al., 2019). Such experiences may contribute to body dissatisfaction (Brownbridge et al., 2018) and potentially to negative emotional and eating-related outcomes, which can further reinforce a cycle of poor body image. This can be linked to the finding that, although the dress incorporates a slim hourglass silhouette, body-slimming features, and stretch fabric to make the design more “body-friendly” and adaptable to different body types, these features may not necessarily overcome existing body image concerns. Women who are frequently exposed to thin models and idealised female bodies (Ferdousi et al., 2026), and who associate thinness with beauty, may still choose not to wear the dress because they feel that their own bodies do not conform to these ideals, and fear that the dress may still reveal the abdominal area. As a result, the intended body-slimming and body-friendly features of the design may be overlooked or considered insufficient. In the world where we live on social media, such as Instagram and TikTok, as well as YouTube, where young people these days are now on the most (Marshall, 2024), we see an ever-changing body size trends, that go from cycle to cycle, such as from curvy to being ultra slim to heroin chic (Behounek, 2026). However, they usually are around being fit but thin at the same time, and this is one of the reasons why many women develop negative relationship with food and their bodies at some point in their lives (Behounek, 2026), and as a result, they usually make assumptions that trying on a tight-fit looking dress would not look good on them, although the dress had its hourglass silhouettes and slimming features that are meant to show off and be confident in their natural body curves, rather than body-shaming.

As Markula (1995) noted, women are constantly exposed to media images and social pressure (van Gorp, 2017), and many already believe that they are not obtaining an ideal body, such as firm but shapely, fit but sexy, and strong but thin ideals (Markula, 1995). As a result, these idealized beauty standards influence how women evaluate not only their own bodies, but also the clothes they choose to wear. Although when a dress has slimming features and slim hourglass silhouettes,

women may still feel self-conscious if they think that their bodies do not meet these ideals. Therefore, the confidence in wearing this kind of dress depends as much on their existing body image as the design features of the dress itself.

There is also a finding that concludes that women with lower body satisfaction tends to be less satisfied with the fit of clothes or tight-fitting dress because many women identify themselves based on their clothes size (Grogan et al., 2013), and how friendly the dress looks friendly towards every body type, no matter how much fashion brands claim how friendly their products are towards women of all bodies. This may be influenced by social stigma, negative body image, feelings of dissatisfaction and insecurity, and fear of judgement (Lau, 2016). These concerns were reflected in the interview findings, as most participants expressed a preference for dresses that could conceal perceived body flaws and help create a slender hourglass appearance (Grogan et al., 2013), while still providing sufficient comfort for extended periods of wear, particularly when attending occasions or social events, where women are more likely to choose this type of dress.

Gathering interviewees' data, everyone believes the same quote, "I can't wear this because of my body shape" because many women are stuck in the mindset that a dress that reveals body, shoulders and non-sleeves is meant for certain body types, although anyone could wear this style no matter the body types (Arentson, 2024). Another similarity among interviewees is that they tend to put their self-confidence and happiness on hold until they reach their ideal desired weight, by losing weight (Arentson, 2024), both in healthy and unhealthy ways, but no matter what ways women choose to lose weight, it is always regarded as being 'healthy' (Marie, 2013).

For this reason, a double-layered wraparound dress with an hourglass silhouette was selected as the main object of this study in order to obtain more relevant and accurate data. The double-layered constructed design was intended to provide a flattering effect around the abdominal area (Parr and Smith, 2026), while enhancing the appearance of an hourglass figure. This design was considered particularly suitable for exploring women's perceptions of their own body image and understanding how slimming design features may influence the way they view and feel about their bodies. Therefore, this design demonstrates that a dress may be perceived as beautiful and attractive through its minimalist aesthetic and double-layered wrap construction, but however, women's perceptions of their body image and levels of confidence are closely intertwined with how they evaluate the design and ultimately influence whether they choose to wear it.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this mini study found that most interviewees felt that they have still not achieved the idealized slim and toned bodies, and for this reason, interviewees were having difficult to decide whether they would choose to own the dress that would promise to give them slim hourglass silhouettes and make them look slim. This is because once again, after fashion brands have done many advertisements that contain inclusive models, it was found that most people, including the interviewees, were more attracted to 'good-looking' women (Deacon, 2026), who are slim and toned, but also quite muscular. Women may experience body dissatisfaction not only when they are unable to fit comfortably into non-stretch garments, such as jeans, dresses, or tops designed for particular

body sizes (Grogan et al., 2013), but also when they perceive certain designs as being intended only for specific body types. For example, even though a strappy, stretchy, double-layered wraparound mini dress may physically accommodate a range of body shapes, women may still perceive the design as more suitable for particular figures, such as young and white females, who are slim, have toned abs, and have some muscles. This perception may contribute to body dissatisfaction, as concerns about social judgement or appearing uncomfortable or awkward in the dress may arise even before the garment is tried on. This, in fact, also affects interviewees' personal opinions towards the dress, and their decisions on whether they would choose to own the dress.

The two strongest themes were Enhanced Confidence and Positive Body Perception, and Body Image Concerns and Limited Wearability. Although these themes were separated into two groups, they remain closely interconnected. The interview findings, and the supporting evidences, suggest that confidence and body acceptance play an important role in how women perceive and respond to clothing. When women feel more confident in and accepting of their own bodies, regardless of their body shape or size, they may feel more comfortable when choosing a dress and may develop a greater willingness to wear or own a tight-fitting dress. Women's confidence, body image, and self-perception play a significant role in this context. Although the interviewees appreciated the clean and minimalist design, particularly its double-layered wraparound feature that could hide the flaws around the abdomen area, and generally agreed that the dress would look attractive on individuals with slim and toned bodies, they showed less interest in owning the dress if they did not believe that it would look equally flattering on their own bodies. However, some interviewees indicated that they would consider wearing the dress after losing some weight, as they believed this would allow them to look equally as attractive as, or more attractive than, other women. For example, they may compare their own appearance with that of the model presented in an advertisement and feel that achieving a slimmer body would enable them to look similarly attractive when wearing the same dress.

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