Bringing a Personal Touch to Plus-Size Fashion

Nadia Boujarwah knows personally that shopping for plus-size clothes can be difficult. But it was only while she was a student at Harvard Business School that she realized something else: the lack of options presented a commercial opportunity.

5 A year after graduating, Ms. Boujarwah and a business school classmate, Lydia Gilbert, began testing the market by acting as personal shoppers. And they saw their opening: offering women sizes 14 and up five articles of clothing chosen by a stylist who takes into account individual preferences. In 2015, they started an online retail site, Dia & Co.

"I hadn't intended for retailing to be a career choice," Ms. Boujarwah said. "But when 10 I was in business school, I realized that my formative experiences were shared with millions of women. It was a call to arms for me. This was a problem for many women that I could play a role in."

The scarcity* of larger sizes comes from a deeply rooted stigma in the fashion industry — many designers either ignore or reject requests to offer their styles above 15 a certain size. There are also manufacturing complications: progressing from size 2 to 12 can be a simple matter of scale, but larger sizes often require a separate pattern to account for different proportions and entail more fabric, raising the production cost.

"I sat in on hundreds of meeting with designers, and this customer was never part of 20 the conversation," said Mariah Chase, an industry veteran and the chief executive of Eloquii, an e-commerce site devoted to plus sizes.

A 2016 study in the International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education found that the average American woman wore a size 16 or 18. Yet annual spending on larger-size apparel accounts for only 16 percent of the $112 billion 25 market in the United States because the inventory was not available.

By Ellen Rosen, adapted from *The New York Times*, February 8th, 2018

* scarcity = rarity