

The psychology of dressing: body image

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ABSTRACT

We select dress that we're purchasing and wearing according to the meaning we believe them to have, or the messages we believe them to send. There are some psychological consequences of dressing and dressing expresses something about the wearer. Clothing serves many purposes; it protects the wearer by enhancing safety; it protects by providing barrier between the skin and the environment; it can insulate against cold or hot conditions. It may also function as the form of adornment & expression of the personal taste and style. Body image is the mental picture we have of our bodies, has both perceptual and affective components, affects how we interact with clothes, and affects how that clothed appearance is presented publicly. Body holds significant meaning to the people as individual and as group members. Body image is a personal characteristic that impacts people appearance, feelings of worth, shopping practices and social interaction.

Keywords: *Body Image, Dressing*

People don't buy dress, they buy an identity

The quest to cover the nakedness of mankind plays a critical role in defining the original purpose and intent of dress. Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992) have defined dress as "an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body". Thus, dress is not only about the clothing for covering but consists of all adornments. Theoretically, researchers on dress and fashion have often isolated dress as the stimulus variable. Out of such orientation emerges inquiry into areas such as dress effects on impression formation and social perception (Lennon & Davis, 1989) and dress effect on human behaviors (Johnson et al., 2008; Johnson & Lenon, 2014; and Johnson et al., 2014).

Dressing is essential components of human life. As human beings are not animals; they will undoubtedly need a dress to cloth themselves. The kind of dress made by individuals is influenced by many essential elements ranging from cultural, social and economic conditions (Powell & Gilbert 2009). A person's identity is very much Identical with or his or her dress (Twigg et al., 2009). Historically, dressing or fashion style of people was very well-mannered but as history unfolds and science and technology began to take the world's centre stage, the manner of dressing has sharply changed from decency to a dress-sense of nudity.

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Our dressing sense is quite important to our reputation, because the clothes we wear send powerful signals to our peers and strangers, projecting self-image of us that we display. Dress plays an important role in identifying status and identity of the wearer. Dress functions as an important and necessary tool that interface our bodies with collective affinities. As soon as dress is put on the body, it can influence one's mood. It has been documented that individuals reinforce their mood and express their feelings through their dresses. Also, a dress can reflect the self-the identity, the material practice we engage with our daily life.

The psychology of dressing uncovers how dress used by humans to shape their behavior with others on the daily basis. Dress affects one's idea about the self (e.g. attitudes, values, beliefs) as well as self-directed behaviors. Rudd & Lennon (2000) as well as Lee & Johnson (2009) believe that one's body is in anyway unacceptable to others an motivate individuals to engage in risky body modification behaviors in an attempt to achieve acceptable body shape or size. Dress researcher Sally Francis (1992) found in her research that believing that one did not own the appropriate items of dress or that chosen body modifications were somehow unacceptable to others could prevent individuals from participating in some events and interacting with others. Studying the psychology of dress assists in uncovering the role of dress in shaping self-directed attitudes and behaviors as well as the attitudes and behaviors of others towards individuals so that the prediction of possible future consequences (e.g., prejudice, body esteem) stemming from our choices concerning dress is possible.

Dressing can be perceived as one's medium or channel for self- expression. Every day people communicate ideas and express feelings about them to others through the use of clothing, and vice versa. This way of thinking leads to the idea of the social self, which is that the idea of self- reflection is a social construction.

Body image, our mental age of our bodies, is an important issue affecting cognitive functioning (Frederickson et al., 1998), mental health (Fallon & Rozin, 1985; & Grogan, 1999) and physical health (Mellin et al., 1992; and Mintz & Betz, 1988). Like other personal characteristics related to dress (e.g., clothing interest, fashion opinion leadership, fashion innovativeness), body image is a personal characteristic that affects how we interact with dress and how that dressed appearance is presented publicly. As a result, our dress and the body image we develop have similar consequences for what we look like and how we feel about ourselves.

Body image is the mental picture we hold of our bodies as well as our affective response to it (Fisher, 1986). Scholars in the broad area of appearance and human behaviour study the ways in which we modify the body as we present the "self" to others. "Of all the ways people think of them-selves, none is as essentially immediate and central as the image of their own bodies: The body is experienced as a reflection of the self" (Fallon, 1990). Most of the work in body image has been undertaken in the fields of clinical psychology (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990; and Thompson, 1996), nutrition (e.g., Chandler et al., 1994; and Rand & Kuldau, 1990), child development (e.g., Lerner & Javonovic, 1990), and sports psychology (e.g., Wang et al., 1993). Body dissatisfaction among women is pervasive in western culture and is becoming so in other cultures as they adopt Western standards of beauty (Furnham & Alibhai, 1983; Hall, 1995; and Nasser, 1988). Beauty is both a cultural construct and a social construct. Cultural standards of appearance are often narrowly defined (Fallon, 1990), tend to describe what is rare rather than what is commonplace (Fallon, 1990), are reinforced

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through media images (Mazur, 1986; and Stephens et al., 1994), are ubiquitous, and are powerful (Freedman, 1984; and Rodin et al., 1985). For example, attractiveness is so powerful that some social scientists believe that physical unattractiveness may be considered a risk factor in the development of psychological disorders (Burns & Farina, 1990; and Cash et al., 1986). Beauty is a social construct in that we use the process of social comparison (Festinger, 1954) to monitor our appearances in relation to others (Rudd & Lennon, 1994). We often accord social worth on the basis of appearance, using narrowly defined cultural standards of beauty, and we stigmatize those who deviate from the ideal (Beuf, 1990).

Psychologist Flugel (1930) concluded that styles of dress affected one's appearance, yet triggering feelings that enable role performance. This means that when an individual's body and clothes fuse together to form one, the individual's sense of importance increases. Increments in one's sense of importance yields to feelings and behaviours of being able to control the environment in which one is in. At the same time, this may work backwards. In other words, if one's body and clothes don't come together as a whole, then one may feel embarrassed, and therefore belittle its sense of importance. Flugel called this idea Image Contrast.

Body image is a multifaceted psychological experience relating to physical appearance and self-perceptions and attitudes encompassing perceptual, affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects (Cash, 2004; and Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). It is the picture we have in our minds of the size, shape and form of our bodies and our feelings concerning these (Slade, 1988). Body image constitutes both "perceptual" and "attitudinal" components that are influenced by historical, cultural, social, individual and biological factors.

Clothes/dress and body image have similar consequences on what one looks like and how one feels about themselves. Rudd & Lennon (2001) posit that body image includes how one perceives the physical body and thereby influences how the body is present to others through the medium of dress. Because body image is a mental picture we have of perceptual and affective components of our bodies, it affects how we interact with clothes, and how the "clothed appearance" is presented publicly (Rudd & Lennon, 2001). Individuals utilize clothes to make their bodies social and gain an identity (Entwistle, 2000; and Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

The psychologists have spent a considerable amount of effort on investigations of the effect of dress on impression formation (also referred to as person perception or social perception) and identifying the content of information that people link to dress. Their focus has been on dress as a stimulus that affects impressions of others. Damhorst (1990), in studying dress, conducted an analysis of 109 impression formation studies to determine the kind of information that was communicated by dress; she found that in the majority of the studies (81%), the content of the information communicated by dress was competence, power, or intelligence and in nearly 67% the messages were about character, sociability, and mood.

A typical example of this type of research is a study conducted by Williams (1991). The researcher investigated impressions of intelligence and scholastic ability among high school students and teachers. They presented their participants with photographs of male and female students that were unknown to the participants. The clothing styles of the students were varied so that half of the time the students were wearing cut-off jeans and t-shirts and the other half they were wearing a suit. For both students and teachers, the clothing style

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worn affected the impressions formed. When wearing the cut-off jeans and a t-shirt student were rated lower in intelligence and scholastic ability than when wearing a suit.

While the fat talk (negative body talk) literature clearly establishes the normative occurrence of this type of communication, as well as establishes the negative impact on the self, the literature has not delved into theoretical explanations for its existence. Arroyo (2014) has posited a relationship between fat talk and three body image theories (self-discrepancy, social comparison, and objectification), and suggested that degree of body dissatisfaction could serve as a mediating mechanism. Self-discrepancy theory suggests that the discrepancy between one's actual self and one's ideal self on any variable, such as weight or attractiveness, motivates people to try to achieve that ideal (Jacobi & Cash, 1994). Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) explains that we compare ourselves to others on some variables of comparison. When we compare ourselves to others who we believe to be better than ourselves (upward comparison) on this variable (say, for example, thinner or more attractive), we may feel worse about ourselves and engage in both non-risky and risky behaviours such as extreme weight control to try to meet those expectations (Ridolfi et al., 2011; and Rudd & Lennon, 1994). Objectification theory, as mentioned earlier in this paper, states that bodies are treated as objects to be evaluated and perceived by others (Szymanski et al., 2011); self-objectification occurs when individuals look upon themselves as objects to be evaluated by others.

Teen boys see themselves as more physically effective than teen girls. While at the same time, teen girls perceive themselves as being more effective by means of attractiveness. Recently these perceptions among men and women have changed. Women are increasingly concerned with their physical effectiveness, while men have become more interested in their physical attractiveness. Today, unlike men, women are more critical when assessing their bodies in terms of physical fitness, appearance, health and sexuality. However, both men and women tend to be equally satisfied when it comes to their bodies and their self-perceptions.

Arroyo (2014) surveyed 201 college women to see what effect weight discrepancy, upward comparison, and objectified body consciousness had on fat talk; a mediating variable of body dissatisfaction was investigated. She found that how satisfied or dissatisfied the women did indeed impact how they felt about each variable. Each of the three predictor variables was positively associated with body dissatisfaction and higher body dissatisfaction predicted fat talk. She concluded that fat talk is more insidious than other social behaviours; it is a type of communication that perpetuates negative perceptions among women as well as the attitude that women should be dissatisfied with their bodies. Future research suggestions included examining the impact of downward social comparisons (in which the individual assumes they are better than peers on the variables of comparison, such as weight), and examining all three phenomena of self-discrepancy, social comparison, and objectification together to determine their cumulative impact on self-disparaging talk.

Negative body talk or fat talk is related to perceptions about the self and to appearance-management behaviours in presenting the self to others. In a sample of 203 young adult women, negative body talk was related to body dissatisfaction and poor self-esteem, and was associated with stronger investment in appearance, distorted thoughts about the body, disordered eating behaviour, and depression (Rudiger & Winstead, 2013). Positive body talk was related to fewer cognitive distortions of the body, high body satisfaction, high self-esteem, and friendship quality. Another form of body talk, co-rumination or the mutual

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sharing between friends of negative thoughts and feelings, is thought to intensify the impact of body talk. In this same study, co-rumination was related to frequent cognitive distortions of the body as well as disordered eating behaviours, but to high perceived friendship quality. Thus, negative body talk achieved no positive outcomes, yet co-rumination achieved negative outcomes for the self, but positive outcomes for quality of friendship. Thus, future research could tease apart the specific components of the social phenomenon of co-rumination in relation to self-perceptions and appearance management behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Clothing serves many purposes: it protects the wearer from the elements by enhancing safety; it protects by providing a barrier between the skin and the environment; it can insulate against cold or hot conditions; it can provide a hygienic barrier.

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Clothing style is influenced by the reaction received from the others as most of the people dressed up for the social occasion, especially when meeting someone or going out for shopping. Clothing provides psychological satisfaction to the people. Few people also expressed dissatisfaction with clothing sizes available to them and also to those people who were not able to find fashionable clothing more readily. Body size and image influenced their clothing choices as thinner people were able to select clothing to reveal their body shapes. For most of the people clothing reflects their personality and their figures influenced by their clothing. It is also possible to conclude that clothing expresses a lot about the people. It is an intuitive to think clothing as simple covering, or the means by which we project body image to the other people, because it influences ourselves too.

Body image is manipulated by natural aging and our life experiences. We have distinct thoughts about our bodies when our bodies change. Human society has at all times considered the human body of prime importance, but a person's perception of their own body may not correspond to society's standard. Our body image is influenced by our emotional state. Individuals who acknowledge the way they appear and sense fine about their bodies mostly have a positive body image.

One's attitude towards body image consists of two sub-constructs, which are body images affects an individual's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their appearance. An individual's body image is affected by the positive or negative thoughts person's have about themselves. Positive thoughts can increase self-esteem level and lead to success in many aspects of life. On the other hand, negative thoughts can decrease self- confidence and, in some cases, lead to depression. This article provides a comprehensive approach that shows how clothing affects, reflects and express about the person's and the others.

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Conflict of Interest

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