**Styling the self: clothing practices, personality traits and body image among women**

**Abstract**

Research has shown that women tend to use clothes to present or disguise their bodies and that clothing practices can be predicted by body image. Our study explored the relationships among clothing practices, personality traits and body image among Israeli women, using the Big Five personality traits model and a body image measure. We found that poor body image correlates to choosing a casual, minimalist style of dress, whereas a more sophisticated, urban style of dress reflects a healthier body image, as well as higher levels of extroversion and openness to experience. This study indicates that openness to experience may foster body-positive clothing practices that are oriented to self-expression and individuality rather than camouflage. In this way, their choice of clothing can help women overcome objectification and cultural body ideal pressures, promoting self-validation and mastery.

**Key words: Clothing practices, clothing styles, personality traits, body image**

1. **Introduction**

Most psychological research on clothing focuses on social and cultural perceptions of the clothing that people choose to wear. It is conducted primarily in workplaces and reflects how people perceive and judge professionality and reliability of others by their clothes (e.g. Rehman, Mietrt, Cope & Kilpatrick, 2005; Howlett et al., 2015). Thus its focus is on the effect of clothes on the observer, and not on what the choice of clothing indicates about an individual’s body image or personality (Paluchette, Karl & Rust, 2006).

There is a paucity of research on the idiosyncratic meanings of clothes and the emotional functions performed by the decisions made every day by about to wear —even though earlier theorists proposed that clothing is the external manifestation of the self (Cooley, 1902; Flugel, 1930; James, 2007; Sontag & Schlater, 1982). Expressions such as "the second skin" and "the visible self" suggest both the physical nearness of clothing to the body and the psychological proximity of clothing to the self.

Sontag and Lee (2004) define the psychological closeness of clothing is determined by the extent to which clothing is (1) perceived as one with the self or as a component of the self; (2) recognized as an aspect of appearance by which the self is established and validated; (3) recognized as a significant symbol of one’s identity, mood, or attitude; (4) perceived as an expression of self-regard or self-worth, (5) recognized as an element of an affective response to self-evaluation; or (6) related to body cathexis.

 The psychological effect of clothes on the wearers themselves was demonstrated by Adam and Galinsky's (2012) research, which found that simply donning a white lab coat increased physicians’ performance on attention-related tasks and their selective attention. The researchers coined the term "enclothed cognition," which differs from embodied cognition because the link between physical experience and its symbolic meaning is indirect: it is the item of clothing that carries the symbolic meaning.

This concept of clothing’s symbolic and emotional meaning raises an important question: Why do people in the same social cultural environment choose certain clothing styles and not others? Kwon's (1991) research suggests that individuals’ clothing choices can be a reflection of how they feel about themselves, and not only about how they want others to feel about them. Research has shown that individuals reinforce their mood and express their feelings through their clothing (Kallstrom, 2009). Mood can be altered because the clothes selected may be perceived as fashionable, enhancing individuality and confidence, as well as providing physical comfort (Kang, Johnson & Kim, 2013). The sample of female shoppers studied by Tiggerman and Lacey (2009) primarily chose clothes for the positive functions of assurance, fashion, and comfort.

To date, psychological research on dress and clothing practices has focused almost exclusively on Western women. One rationale for this focus is that Western men are less interested in clothing and fashion than women; millennials of all genders are likely to enjoy shopping, but women are still more involved with fashion than men (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010). However, men have come under increasing pressure to conform to the cultural ideal of a lean, well-toned, muscular body, and they also manage their appearance and body image through clothes (Frith & Gleeson, 2004).

The unique relationship of Western women to clothes develops against the background of their socialization into roles that are preoccupied with appearance and how others see them. Clothing thus affects the degree to which women are objectified and evaluated (for more information on objectification theory, see Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009). Women may use clothes to present or disguise their bodies. Kwon and Parham (1994) found that women selected clothes more for camouflage and less for individuality when they felt “fat” than when they felt thinner. Higher body mass index (BMI) and body dysphoria were related to the use of clothing for camouflage. Tiggerman and Andrew's (2012) findings also show interrelationships between women's attitudes toward clothing and their attitude towards their bodies.

Body image is a multidimensional construct that includes perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral components, and dressing bodies is an intentional behavior. In other words, how individuals feel about and perceive their bodies affect how they manage their appearance through their choice of clothing (Rudd & Lennon, 2000, 2001). Hence, clothing practices can be predicted by body image (Tiggemann & Lacey, 2009).

Previous research on body image also explored personality traits. Neuroticism was found to correlate to higher body surveillance, lower appearance control beliefs (Tylka, 2004), and higher body shame (Miner-Rubino, Twenge, & Fredrickson, 2002). Extraversion was associated with a higher appreciation of one's own body and lower body dissatisfaction (Swami et al., 2012). Swami et al. (2012) reported that body appreciation is positively correlated to agreeableness and conscientiousness; conversely, Miner-Rubino et al. (2002) found that body shame is negatively related to agreeableness. All these studies were carried out using an exclusively female population.

Given that body image is correlated with personality traits and that clothing serves psychological functions (e.g., Tiggerman & Lacey, 2009) and is a reflection or expression of an individual’s identity (Sontag & Lee, 2004), this study explores the nuances of the relationship between clothing practices (i.e., styles of dress and clothing functions), personality traits, and body image among women. In doing so, I expanded the types of clothes studied from the commonly used formal and informal categories to various styles of clothing. My main research hypothesis is that clothing practices are related to personality traits and can be predicted by body image.

1. **Method**

**2.1 Sample and procedure**

The sample comprised 727 women from different areas in Israel. The participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 74 (M = 39.18, SD = 10.34). About two-thirds of the sample were married women (*N*= 229, 64.70%) and mothers (N = 468, 67.34%), and more than 80% had academic degrees (N= 551, 80.20%). More than 90% considered themselves as secular (*N*= 650, 93.66%), and nearly two-thirds perceived themselves to be financially secure (*N* = 449, 64.60%).

The BMI of the sample ranged from 16.33 to 46.06, with a mean BMI of 24.74 (SD = 4.49). The participants' heights ranged from 140 to 187 cm (M= 164.74, SD = 6.22), and their weights ranged from 32 to 130 kg (M= 67.10, SD= 12.62).

The sample was recruited online through Facebook and a daily morning TV show on which the author appeared and invited women to participate in the research. Participation was voluntary. All participants filled out the research questionnaires online through the Qualtrics website. The data were analyzed through SPSS 19.0 software.

**2.2 Instruments**

*2.2.1 Function of clothing measure*

The functions served by clothing were assessed using items developed by Kwon and Parham (1994). This scale measures the choice of clothing for its comfort, camouflage, assurance, fashion. and individuality functions. Its 20 items are assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all agree) to 5 (very much agree). Kang, Johnson, and Kim also used this scale in their 2013 study. It was translated to Hebrew through translation/ back translation by the author and an English native speaker. In addition to this measure, the participants were asked to define their clothing style by choosing one of the following five options to best describe their clothes: (1) casual style (jeans, pants, t-shirts or cotton shirts, minimalist styling); (2) romantic style (skirts, dresses, soft fabrics, floral patterns, bohemian style, clothing that is stereotypically perceived as "feminine"); (3) dramatic style (unusual and unique outfits, bright colors and color combinations, may sometimes be tight or revealing); (4) classic style (formal clothing, conventional and representative outfits); and (5) urban or eclectic style (different combinations of all styles, mix and match, playful style of dress with combinations of low- and high-priced clothing, frequent use of accessories).

* + 1. *Body image measure*

The Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ) is a well-validated self-report inventory for the assessment of body image that measures overall body image and satisfaction with body shape (Cash, 1994). This 34-item measure has five dimensions: Appearance Evaluation, Appearance Orientation, Overweight Preoccupation, Self-Classified Weight, and the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS). This study used all the dimensions except for the BASS subscale. Each item was scored from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. The questionnaire is characterized by a reliability of α= 0.789, and the Hebrew version was found reliable with Cronbach's *alpha* of .86 (Shaiovitz, 2014).

* + 1. *Personality traits measure*

The NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Hebrew version by Etzion & Laski, 1998) consists of 60 items; each of the Big Five personality traits is assessed by 12 items: neuroticism (e.g., “I often feel inferior to others”), extraversion (e.g., “I like to have a lot of people around me”), agreeableness (e.g., “I try to be courteous to everyone I meet”), openness to experience (e.g., “I have a lot of intellectual curiosity”), and conscientiousness (e.g., “I keep my belongings clean and neat”). The response format used a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (completely disagree) to 4 (completely agree). Prior research has found good cross-cultural validity of this measure in Israel (Etzion & Laski, 1998).

* + 1. *Sociodemographic and additional variables*

Each participant was asked to indicate her age, height and weight, country of birth, marital status, religious affiliation, educational level, health and financial status, and occupation.

*2.3 Analyses*

The relationship between clothing styles, clothing functions, and body image was analyzed using Pearson's correlation. I performed a series of one-way ANOVA analyses to explore the relationships of clothing style preference groups (casual, romantic, dramatic, classic, and urban) to the Big Five personality traits, body image dimensions, and clothing functions. I then did logistic regressions on the dominant styles of dress (casual and urban) to identify the variables associated with each style.

**Results**

*3.1. The Big Five personality traits, functions of clothing, and clothing style*

The pattern of correlations among the Big Five personality traits and clothing functions is shown in Table 1. As can be seen, extroversion is positively correlated with using clothes for assurance (r = .30, *p* <.001), fashion (r = .19, *p* <.001), and individuality (r = .14, *p* <.001) and negatively corelated with using clothes for camouflage (r = -.19, *p* <.001). Neuroticism is positively correlated with using clothes for camouflage (r = .16, *p* <.001) and negatively corelated with using them for assurance (r =-.01, *p* <.05). Openness to experience is positively corelated with assurance (r = .31, *p* <.001) and individuality (r = .31, *p* < .001) and negatively correlated with camouflage (r = -.24, *p* <.001). Consciousness is negatively correlated with camouflage (r= -.24, *p* < .001) and positively correlated with assurance (r = .17, *p* < .001), fashion (r = .09, *p* < .01), and individuality (r = .15, *p* < .001). Agreeableness is positively correlated with comfort (r = .16, *p* < .0001) and assurance (r= .15, *p* < .001) and negatively correlated with camouflage (r = -.16, *p* < .001) and fashion (r = -.09, *p* < .05).

**Table 1. Pearson's correlations among the Big Five personality traits and clothing functions**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Comfort** | **Camouflage** | **Assurance** | **Fashion** | **Individuality** |
| **Extraversion** | -.01 | -.19\*\*\* | .30\*\*\* | .13\*\*\* | .14\*\*\* |
| **Neuroticism**  | -.03 | .16\*\*\* | -.01\* | -.00 | -.06 |
| **Agreeableness**  | .16\*\*\* | -.16\*\*\* | .15\*\*\* | -.09\* | -.05 |
| **Consciousness**  | -.03 | -.24\*\*\* | .17\*\*\* | .09\*\* | 0.15\*\*\* |
| **Openness**  | .01\* | -.24\*\*\* | .31\*\*\* | 0.07 | 0.31\*\*\* |

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the Big Five personality traits on clothing style preferences. As seen in Table 2, there was a significant effect of extroversion (F (4,624) = 5.76, *p* = .0001), consciousness (F (1,624) = 6.80, *p* = .0001), and openness to experience (F (1,624) = 7.38, *p* = .0001) on clothing styles. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average score of extroversion was significantly lower in the casual style condition (M = 3.45, SD = .74) than in the urban style condition (M = 3.8, SD = .63). The average score of consciousness was significantly higher in the classic style condition (M = 4.04, SD = .53) than in the dramatic style (M = 3.6, SD = .74) and the casual style (M = 3.83, SD = .56). The average score of openness to experience was significantly higher in the urban style condition (M= 3.9, SD= .54) than in the casual style condition (M= 3.62, SD = .59) and the classic style condition (M= 3.64, SD = .50).

**Table 2. One-way ANOVA for testing the effect of Big Five personality traits on clothing styles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| F (4,624) | Classic | Urban | Dramatic | Romantic | Casual | Measure |
|  | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) |  |
| 5.76\*\*\* | 3.54 (.67) | 3.8 (.64) | 3.31 (.89) | 3.5 (.75) | 3.45 (.74) | **Extraversion** |
| 6.80\*\*\* | 4.04 (.53) | 3.9 (.54) | 3.6 (.71) | 3.8 (.64) | 3.83 (.56) | **Consciousness**  |
| 4.86 | 3.88 (.53) | 3.47 (.75) | 3.92 (.58) | 3.92 (.49) | 3.9 (.49) | **Agreeableness** |
| 1.98 | 2.85 (.76) | 2.69 (.75) | 3.05 (.71) | 2.79 (.81) | 2.85 (.79) | **Neuroticism** |
| 7.38\*\*\* | 3.64 (.50) | 3.9 (.54) | 3.57 (.75) | 3.78 (.62) | 3.62 (.59) | **Openness**  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | \*\*\**p* < .001. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

*3.1. Body image, functions of clothing and clothing style*

The pattern of correlations between body image dimensions and clothing functions is given in Table 3. As can be seen, appearance evaluation correlates negatively with using clothes for camouflage (r = -.58, *p* < .001) and positively with other clothing functions: assurance (r = .34, *p* < .001), fashion (r = 0.276, *p* < .001), and individuality (r = .30, *p* < .001). Appearance orientation is positively correlated with assurance (r = .43, *p* < .001), fashion (r = .40, *p* < .001), and individuality (r =.37, *p* < .001). Weight preoccupation is positively correlated with camouflage (r = .30, *p* < .001) and fashion (r = .14, *p* < .001) and negatively correlated with comfort (r = .10, *p* < .01). Weight classification is positively correlated with comfort (r = .08, *p* < .05) and camouflage (r = .45, *p* < .001) and negatively correlated with assurance (r = -.09, *p* < .05), fashion (r = -.10, *p* < .05), and individuality (r = -.19, *p* < .001).

**Table 3. Pearson's correlations among body image dimensions and clothing functions**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Comfort** | **Camouflage** | **Assurance** | **Fashion** | **Individuality** |
| **Appearance evaluation** | .01 | -0.58\*\*\* | .34\*\*\* | 0.276\*\*\* | .30\*\*\* |
| **Appearance orientation**  | -.15\*\*\* | -.14\*\* | .43\*\*\* | 0.494\*\*\* | .37\*\*\* |
| **Overweight preoccupation**  | -.10\*\* | 0.30\*\*\* | -.07 | 0.112\*\* | .01 |
| **Weight classification** | .08\* | 0.45\*\*\* | -.09\* | -0.132\*\* | -.19\*\*\* |

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p <* .001.

A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of body image dimensions on clothing style preferences. As seen in Table 4, there was a significant effect of appearance orientation (F (4,635) = 8.24, *p* = .0001) and appearance evaluation (F (1,635) = 13.35, *p* = .0001) on clothing styles. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average score of appearance evaluation was significantly lower in the casual style condition (M = 3.2, SD = .78) than in the urban style condition (M = 3.63, SD = .72). The average score of appearance orientation was significantly higher in the urban style condition (M = 3.71, SD = .50) than in the dramatic (M = 3.25, SD = .71) and casual styles (M = 3.37, SD = .56).

**Table 4. One-way ANOVA for testing body image dimensions and clothing styles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| F (4,635) | Classic | Urban | Dramatic | Romantic | Casual | Measure |
|  | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) |  |
| 8.24\*\*\* | 3.45 (.71) | 3.63 (.72) | 3.43 (.70)  | 3.52 (.75)  | 3.2 (.78)  | Appearance evaluation |
| 13.36\*\*\* | 3.68 (.58) | 3.71 (.50) | 3.25 (.72) | 3.61 (.56)  | 3.37 (.56)  | Appearance orientation  |
| 1.13 | 2.9 (.64) | 2.89 (.63) | 3.0 (.70) | 2.9 (.69) | 2.81 (.74) | Weight preoccupation  |
| 2.19 | 3.42 (.68) | 3.25 (.57) | 3.4 (.63) | 3.33 (.66) | 3.4 (.68) | Weight classification |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | \*\*\**p* < .001. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

To further understand the relationship between clothing style preferences and body image, I conducted an additional one-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare the effect of clothing functions on clothing style preference. As seen in Table 5, there was a significant effect of comfort (F (4,662) = 12.8, *p* = .000), camouflage (F (4,662) = 8.1, *p* = .000), assurance (F (4,662) = 13.04, *p* = .000), fashion (F (4,662) = 39.0, *p* = .000) and individuality (F (4,662) = 44.67, *p* = .000) on the choice of clothing styles. Post hoc analyses using the Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average score of all clothing functions was significantly different in the casual style condition than in other clothing style conditions. Most relevant in the context of body image, the average score of camouflage was significantly higher in the casual style (M = 3.32, SD = .71) than in the urban style condition (M = 2.89, SD = .71). The average score of assurance was significantly lower in the casual style condition (M = 3.36, SD= .63) than in the urban style condition (M= 3.77, SD = .65).

**Table 5. One-way ANOVA for testing clothing functions and clothing styles**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| F (4,662) | Classic | Urban | Dramatic | Romantic | Casual | Measure |
|  | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) | M (SD) |  |
| 12.8\*\*\* | 3.97 (.75) | 3.86 (.75) | 3.57 (1.03) | 4.02 (.72) | 4.27 (.63) | Comfort |
| 8.10\*\*\* | 3.13 (.80) | 2.89 (.71) | 3.17 (.93) | 3.03 (.77) | 3.32 (.71) | camouflage  |
| 13.04\*\*\* | 3.56 (.62) | 3.77 (.65) | 3.20 (.79) | 3.63 (.60) | 3.36 (.63) | assurance  |
| 39.0\*\*\* | 3.18 (.81) | 3.43 (.77) | 3.41 (.65) | 3.2 (.84) | 2.5 (.78) | Fashion |
| 44.67\*\*\* | 3.09 (.77) | 3.65 (.68) | 3.44 (.89) | 3.24 (.75) | 2.65 (.76) | individuality |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | \*\*\**p* < .001. |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Finally, separate logistic regressions were done to identify the variables associated with each clothing style and thereby to predict choices of casual style versus the urban style. The variables that showed a significant association to the casual style by univariate logistic regression were lower levels of appearance evaluation (beta = -.50, *p* = .000), lower levels of appearance orientation (beta = -.55, *p* = .001), and higher levels of comfort seeking (beta = .72, *p* = .001). Thus, women with lower appearance evaluation (OR = .61; IC 95%: .47–.79), with lower appearance orientation (OR =.48; IC 95%: .42–.80), and who seek comfort through their choice of clothes (OR = 2.06; IC 95%: 1.52–2.78) are more likely to exhibit a casual style of dress.

An urban style of dress was indicated by higher levels of appearance evaluation (beta = .37, *p* = .006), appearance orientation (beta = .62, *p* = .000), and openness to experience (beta= 65, *p* = .000). Thus, women who are more open to experience (OR = 1.92; IC 95%: 1.35–2.73), with higher levels of appearance evaluation (OR = 1.45; IC 95%: 1.11–1.90) and appearance orientation (OR = 1.87; IC 95%: 1.34–2.61), were more likely to wear an urban style than others.

1. **Discussion**

This study explored the relationships of clothing practices to personality traits and body image among women. Overall, the results supported that clothing practices are related to personality traits and can be predicted by body image.

Using the Big five personality traits model, this study found that consciousness was related with a classic style of dress, defined as formal, conventional, and representative clothing. The Big Five model describes people with high levels of consciousness as organized, reliable, punctual and neat (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and wearing formal clothing was found to support a self-perception of neatness, cultivation and restraint (Hannover & Kuhenen, 2002). This research also found consciousness to negatively correlate with camouflage and positively correlate with assurance, fashion and individuality. These findings correspond with previous findings that people who wear formal clothes perceive themselves as most competent, trustworthy, and authoritative (Peluchette & Karl, 2007).

Extroversion was related to an urban style of dress, defined as an eclectic and playful style characterized by creative combinations of clothes. It was also correlated with individuality, fashion, and assurance. These findings correspond with the Big Five model characterization of extroverts as sociable, person-oriented, active, optimistic, and fun loving (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Moreover, extroverts were found to prefer exciting fashion brands that are typically perceived as active, adventurous, and cool (Mulyanegara, Tsarenko & Anderson, 2007), characterizations that resonate with the definition of urban style.

This research showed a negative correlation between extroversion and camouflage, a function characteristic of the casual clothing style—a minimalist style featuring jeans and t-shirts. It was correlated with high levels of camouflage, low levels of extroversion, and low openness to experience, suggesting that women who identified with this style were the most introverted and conventional thinking among the research population.

Openness to experience was the highest among women who identified with the urban style. The Big Five model describes people with high levels of openness to experience as being curious, creative, and untraditional and having broad interests (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Women who identified with the urban style were more open-minded and creative than those wearing the casual style. Moreover, body image played an important role in the choice between the urban and the casual style.

The final logistic regressions reinforced this distinction: women with lower appearance evaluation and lower appearance orientation were more likely to adopt a casual style, and those with higher levels were more likely to adopt an urban style. Women who identified with the urban style, a creative and expressive style of dress, were more likely to feel confident in and comfortable with their bodies. They also tended to be extroverted, which reflects research that shows extroversion is related to a higher appreciation of one's own body (Swami et al., 2012). In contrast, women who identified with the casual style were distinguished by higher levels of camouflage and lower assurance. This corresponds with Trautmann, Lokken, and Lokken's (2007) findings that women who were more dissatisfied with their bodies were more likely to camouflage their bodies with dark-colored and baggy tops and avoid wearing revealing, brightly colored, or tightly fitting clothing.

This research reinforces previous findings on the relationship between body image and clothing practices. Appearance evaluation was negatively correlated with camouflage and positively correlated with assurance, fashion and individuality, as was appearance orientation. That is, the better women feel about their bodies, the higher is their ability to use clothes for self-expression and enjoyment. These findings align with Tiggerman and Andrew's (2012) research on the interrelationships between women's attitudes towards clothing and their attitude towards their bodies.

This study showed that weight preoccupation correlated with camouflage and that weight classification correlated both with camouflage and comfort and negatively with assurance, fashion, and individuality. These results are in line with Kwon and Parham's (1994) findings that women select clothes more for camouflage and less for individuality when feeling “fat."

Since there were no BMI differences among the different groups, the urban style seems to foster body-positive clothing practices, and openness to experience may play an important role.

Openness to experience is associated with nonconformity (Feist & Brady, 2004), suggesting that these women are able to enjoy and play with their clothes despite Western society's pressures to conform to a strict beauty standard and conceal possible “imperfections”.

Openness to experience is also related to psychological flexibility, including body image flexibility. Having a flexible body image decreases body dissatisfaction and increases flexible responses to body-related thoughts and feelings (Sandoz et al., 2013). A lack of flexibility may then drive women's tendency to choose concealing clothes when they see themselves as “fat” (Trautmann, Lokken & Lokken, 2007).

It is likely that women who identified with the urban style are more flexible both in their body image and their clothing practices. The urban style group may be made up of those women whom Cash (2008) defines as “flexible groomers,” those characterized by a playful and enjoyable use of clothing styles, fabrics, colors, cosmetics, hairstyles, jewelrym and fragrances. Flexible groomers use grooming for mastery and pleasure, and not in a rigid effort to maintain positive appearance.

This study highlights the relationship between clothing practices and body image among women. It finds that personality traits—especially consciousness, extroversion, and openness to experience—play a role in clothing choices, which suggests that one’s clothing is a kind of manifestation of the self (e.g., Sontag & Lee, 2004).

Openness to experience may foster body-positive clothing practices that are oriented to self-expression and individuality rather than camouflage. In this sense, the choice of clothes can help women overcome objectification and cultural body ideal pressures (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) by enabling them to dress for their own validation and pleasure. Clothing selection can be addressed in clinical practice and be explored productively by encouraging women to experience and play with their clothes—thereby facilitating construction of a more flexible body image and lessening their rigid perception of clothing practices.

There are several limitations of this study that must be noted when interpreting its results. First, the definition of clothing styles was designed for this research, and subjects were asked to identify only one style of dress that is most relevant to them. Second, only female subjects were included, and they were predominantly secular, financially secure, and well educated. Further research is needed to understand the impact of religiousness, educational level, and financial status on women’s body image and clothing practices. Men should be included in future studies as well.

The ever-increasing cultural pressure to attain the ideal body highlights the importance of understanding the role of clothing practices in fostering positive body image. Moreover, the relationship between clothing practices and personality traits sheds light on the psychology of dress, a neglected field of research.

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