



FASHION AND BODY IMAGE : INVESTIGATING THE CLOTHING CHOICES ON BODY PERCEPTION AND SELF ESTEEM AMOUNG ADULTS

Aarzo verma , Dr. Shivani Bhambri

Student, Associate Professor

Amity University, Noida, India

Abstract: This study examines how clothing choices affect body perception and self-esteem among young adults. A comprehensive review of existing literature reveals a nuanced relationship between fashion choices and self-esteem, highlighting both positive and negative impacts across various demographics. Factors such as body dissatisfaction and the influence of digital media further complicate individuals' perceptions of themselves through clothing. To delve deeper into this relationship, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 young adults aged 18-25 (6 females and 4 males), focusing on clothing choices, body image, and self-esteem. Thematic analysis of these interviews aims to illuminate the influence of clothing and fashion choices on young adults' body perception and self-esteem, contributing to a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of fashion decisions.

Index Terms: Fashion, Clothing styles/ choices , Body image and Self esteem.

1. Introduction

Fashion holds a significant role in shaping individual identity and self-perception, particularly among young adults who are navigating the complexities of self-identity and societal expectations. Clothing choices are not merely about aesthetics; they are powerful tools for self-expression and social signaling. Clothing choices have a profound impact on how we perceive our bodies and how others perceive us. They can either enhance or distort our body image, affecting our self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. Clothing is not just about covering our bodies; it's a form of self-expression that reflects our personal style, values, and identity. However, it also influences how we view ourselves. The styles and fits we choose can highlight or downplay different aspects of our physique, shaping our body image perceptions.

Clothing choices directly impact self-esteem, as they are a primary means through which individuals express their identity and negotiate their self-image. fashion choices affect self-esteem among emerging adults, highlighting factors such as clothing fit, style preferences, and perceived societal norms (Gonzalez and MacCormack 2021). The way individuals dress can either bolster their confidence or contribute to feelings of inadequacy, depending on how well their clothing aligns with their self-image and societal expectations. For instance, wearing clothes that fit well and reflect one's personal style can enhance self-esteem and foster a positive body image(Gonzalez and MacCormack 2021). When we select clothing that aligns with our personal style and makes us feel comfortable and confident, it can boost our self-esteem. Wearing outfits that we love and feel good in can enhance our sense of self-worth and empowerment. On the other hand, wearing clothing that we dislike or feel uncomfortable in can have the opposite effect, undermining our confidence and self-assurance. clothing choices can significantly influence self-perception, with certain garments boosting self-confidence and positively impacting social interactions. (Park et al. 2018) . clothing choices can influence how we are perceived by others, which in turn affects our self-esteem. When we receive positive feedback or compliments on our attire, it can validate our sense of style and boost our confidence. Conversely, negative reactions or feeling out of place in our clothing can lead to self-doubt and insecurity. Gender differences also play a significant role in the fashion-body image nexus. Mahoney (2022) explores the influence of clothing size on self-esteem among both men and women, highlighting that while both genders care about appearance, their focus differs. Men often face societal pressures to attain a muscular physique, as noted by Mair (2018), which can lead to body dissatisfaction and impact their clothing choices and self-esteem. This pressure is often exacerbated by media representations that glorify muscularity as the ideal male body type. Women, on the other hand, frequently confront ideals of thinness, which similarly affect their body image and fashion decisions. The societal pressure for women to achieve a slender figure can lead to significant body dissatisfaction and influence their choices in fashion to either conform to or rebel against these standards. This dynamic is further complicated by the phenomenon of "vanity sizing," where clothing sizes are manipulated to appeal to consumers' desire for a smaller size, impacting their self-esteem and body image perceptions.

Additionally, societal beauty standards and fashion trends can exacerbate body image issues. Pressure to conform to unrealistic ideals portrayed in media and fashion can breed feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Clothing choices influenced by these standards may reinforce negative body image beliefs and contribute to low self-esteem and unhealthy behaviours. Lee young (2022) and kumar (2023) exposures the advent of social media that has dramatically transformed the landscape of fashion and body image. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest have become influential arenas where trends are set, and beauty standards are perpetuated. Influencers and celebrities on these platforms play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of beauty and fashion. Fashion influencers and celebrity endorsements significantly impacts clothing choices and self-esteem mostly among college students (Lee and Young 2022). The pervasive presence of these digital personalities creates a constant comparison, influencing young adults to adopt certain fashion trends in an effort to align with perceived societal ideals. social media influencers shape young people's perceptions of what constitutes beauty (Kumar 2023). He also suggests that fashion serves as a medium for self-discovery and identity exploration, offering young adults a way to express their evolving sense of self.

The pressures and representations perpetuated by media and societal standards further complicate the relationship between fashion and body image. Fredrickson et al. (2019) discuss how different portrayals of beauty standards in social media and the fashion industry create divergent body image concerns for young men and women. Media often presents an idealized version of beauty that is unattainable for most people, leading to increased body dissatisfaction among young adults who compare themselves to these unrealistic standards. In contrast, the rise of body positivity movements offers a counter-narrative by promoting body diversity and challenging unrealistic beauty standards. Bryder et al. (2018) and Evans & Swami (2017) highlights the role of social media in promoting body positivity movements. These movements celebrate body diversity and encourage acceptance of all body types, providing young adults with a more inclusive and empowering perspective on fashion and body image. By promoting a wider range of body types and advocating for self-love and acceptance, these movements can positively impact young adults' self-esteem and body image.

The growing emphasis on sustainable fashion introduces another critical dimension to the relationship between fashion and body image (Smith and Jones 2022). engagement in environmentally friendly clothing practices affects self-esteem and perceptions of social responsibility among Generation Z . Sustainable fashion choices can foster a sense of ethical alignment and social responsibility, positively impacting self-esteem and body image (Smith and Jones 2022). This shift towards sustainability reflects a broader trend in which young adults seek to reconcile fashion consumption with their values and identity. The adoption of sustainable fashion practices can serve as a form of self-expression that aligns with one's ethical beliefs, further enhancing self-esteem and positive body image. McNeill and Moore (2015) examined the attitudes of fashionable consumers towards sustainability in clothing choice. Which highlighted the conundrum of fast fashion and its impact on sustainable fashion consumption. The findings suggested that fashion consumption patterns are linked to individuals' attitudes towards sustainability, which can influence body image and self-esteem.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide advanced insights into how clothing choices influence the psychological well-being of young adults. As we navigate the recent years, understanding the intricate relationship between fashion choices and self-perception, self-esteem, and body image becomes increasingly vital for shaping therapeutic interventions and promoting positive mental health outcomes among young adults.

II. Methodology

2.1 Aim

To understand the psychological impact of clothing choices between body perception and self-esteem and among young adults

2.2 Objectives

1. To investigate the intricate relationship between clothing choices and their psychological impact on body perception or self-esteem among individuals.
2. To investigate the impact of societal fashion trends, particularly through media and advertising on self-esteem and body perception.

2.3 Hypothesis

H0 Young adults' clothing choices are NOT influenced by their body perception, which in turn impacts their self-esteem.

H1 Young adults' clothing choices are influenced by their body perception, which in turn impacts their self-esteem.

2.4 Sample and its selection

1. The sample for this study comprised 10 young adults aged 18-25 years, consisting of 6 females and 4 males. representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds.
2. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences related to clothing choices, body image, and self-esteem.
3. Efforts will be made to achieve a balanced gender distribution and include participants from various cultural backgrounds.

2.5 Description of tools employed.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to guide the data collection process. The interview schedule included open-ended questions addressing clothing choices, body image perceptions, self-esteem, and the influence of social media and fashion trends. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in probing participants' responses and exploring emergent themes in-depth.

2.6 Procedure:

1. Participants are provided with detailed information about the study objectives and procedures and are asked to provide informed consent before participation.
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a comfortable and private setting, allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely.
3. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions related to their clothing preferences, perceptions of body image, and self-esteem.
4. Probing questions were used to elicit detailed responses and explore nuanced aspects of participants' experiences.
5. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure accuracy in data collection.
6. Participants are assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and they have the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

2.7 Statistical Analysis

As this study employs a qualitative research design, statistical analysis is not applicable. Thematic analysis will be utilised to analyse the data collected from the interviews. This method involves identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The analysis process will involve coding the transcripts, identifying recurring themes, and interpreting the findings to address the research objectives and hypotheses.

III. Analysis of Results

3.1 Overview

The study delves deeply into the intricate relationship between clothing choices, body image, and self-esteem, offering valuable insights that support the hypothesis that young adults' clothing choices are influenced by their body perception, ultimately impacting their self-esteem. One notable finding is the recognition of clothing as a potent medium for self-expression, with an overwhelming 70% of participants attributing significance to the connection between clothing and personality. This aligns seamlessly with the hypothesis, suggesting that individuals may select clothing that reflects how they perceive their bodies, thereby influencing their self-esteem.

Moreover, the responses from participants underscore the multifaceted nature of clothing selection, revealing a complex interplay of factors such as age, gender, cultural norms, ethnicity, and occasion. This suggests that individuals may be influenced by their perceptions of their bodies when navigating these various influences in curating their wardrobes. Of particular note is the emphasis placed on comfort, with participants emphasising the paramount importance of feeling at ease and confident in one's clothing choices. This aligns with the hypothesis, indicating that individuals may choose clothing that makes them feel comfortable and confident in their bodies, thus positively impacting their self-esteem.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of fashion trends, characterised by a spirit of experimentation and boldness. Street style, oversized garments, and fusion wear emerge as prominent trends identified by participants, fostering a sense of positivity and self-assuredness. This supports the hypothesis by suggesting that individuals may gravitate towards clothing trends that align with their body perceptions and contribute to a positive self-image. Additionally, the emphasis on flexibility and open-mindedness in modern fashion trends signals a growing acceptance of diverse styles and identities within the fashion landscape, further empowering individuals to explore and celebrate their unique aesthetic sensibilities, potentially enhancing their self-esteem in the process.

Within the context of body image, participants offer nuanced perspectives, with some acknowledging the undeniable influence of body size and shape on clothing choices. Individuals express a desire to find attire that flatters their height, weight, and skin tone, reflecting a conscious effort to feel comfortable and confident in their own skin. This underscores the integral role of clothing in shaping perceptions of body image and nurturing self-esteem. By selecting clothes that accentuate their best features and align with their individual preferences, individuals can cultivate a positive self-image and enhance their overall sense of confidence and well-being, providing further support for the hypothesis.

IV. Interpretation of the Result

The present study aims to understand how clothing choices impact on one's body image and self esteem. We are living in the world of social media where how one is viewed by their peers and society plays a dominant role especially among teens and young adults. An average teen / young adult spends a considerable amount of time deciding which photos to share on their stories and social media accounts. When it comes to posting their best, clothing and how they look plays a very big role.

Everyone wants to portray themselves as their best version which comes from looking their best. Early adulthood is the age of self-exploration where they experiment with their fashion choices as well. Following latest fashion trends, trends set by fashion/ lifestyle vloggers, creates a sense of pressure to be updated with the latest fashion trends. Clothing plays a dominant role when it comes to how one views oneself in terms of body image, feeling confident and positive view about themselves (high self esteem). We are living in an era where how one "looks", their sense of clothing and clothing choices impacts how other people view them impacts their levels of self esteem and that in turn further impacts their psychological well being.

Therefore, to explore how clothing choices have an impact on one's body image and self esteem interviews were conducted with 10 young adults within the age range 18-25 years of age. Out of 10 adults 6 were females and 4 were males. A semi structured interview schedule was prepared addressing clothing choices, body image and self- esteem related questions. Once the interviews were collected, thematic analysis was done.

With the analysis it was found out that clothing choices does have a significant role to play when it comes to one views their body and their self - esteem as well. 7 out of 10 participants reported that the way we dress does reflect a lot about our personality and who we are as a person. With the responses collected it was inferred that everyone has their own clothing style and choices which are influenced by multiple factors such as age, gender, cultural norms, ethnicity and occasion. Another prominent factor that was important when it came to having clothing choice as per adults is comfort "*One should feel comfortable and confident in whatever they are wearing*". While making clothing choices, we choose clothes that reflect our inner personality. Participants reported that today's fashion is more about experimentation and being bold. Street style, oversized, and fusion wear is at peak and such fashion styles make them feel "positive and confident". One of the participants also reported that the modern fashion trends that are being followed today by our youth reflects flexibility and open mindedness, that people are open to new experiences where they are experimenting with not only their fashion trends but makeup and looks as well.

In relation to clothing and body image, there were both explanations. Where some participants reported that, the kind of clothes we wear are also influenced by our body size. People want to feel good about their bodies where they are not insecure of their height, weight and colour. They go for clothes that compliment all three of them.

Clothing not only impacts one's perception of their bodies but their self- esteem as well. It was mentioned during the interview that individuals have their own style and choice of clothing and following the recent trends / being updated makes them feel connected to the social world. There is a sense of confidence that automatically comes in when one feels good about him/herself which somewhere does come from the aspect of positive body image which is highly influenced by one's clothing.

With the information collected, what can be summarised is that clothing style is an essential part of everyone's daily routine which is influenced by multiple factors such as age, gender, cultural norms etc. under the time of social media where there's huge impact of fashion and lifestyle bloggers upon teenagers and young adults especially. Youth too wants to be updated with recent fashion trends, growing brands, accessories so that they know "what's happening around them". They don't want to be perceived as someone who wears outdated clothes, as clothing is also viewed as a "social status" where one's class is dependent on what one is wearing. And need for recognition is prominent in young adulthood and thereby comes in the usage of fashion styles and clothes wherein an individual gains confidence and has a healthy position within his/her peers which in turn leads to positive self - image and hence high self - esteem.

V. Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides significant insights into the intricate relationship between clothing choices, body image, and self-esteem, particularly among young adults. Through interviews with a diverse group of participants, it becomes evident that clothing serves as more than just a form of covering; it is a means of self-expression, a reflection of personality, and a tool for shaping one's self-perception.

In today's digital age, where social media exerts a profound influence on how individuals present themselves, the pressure to conform to societal standards of beauty and fashion is palpable. The findings of this study underscore the extent to which clothing choices are intertwined with perceptions of body image and levels of self-esteem. Participants emphasised the importance of feeling comfortable and confident in one's attire, suggesting that clothing not only affects how others perceive us but also how we perceive ourselves.

Moreover, the study reveals a nuanced understanding of fashion trends and their impact on self-expression and confidence. From street style to experimental fashion, participants highlighted the role of clothing in fostering a sense of openness to new experiences and self-discovery. Additionally, the link between body size, clothing selection, and self-esteem underscores the need for inclusivity and acceptance within the fashion industry and society at large.

Overall, this research contributes valuable insights into the psychological dynamics of clothing choices and their implications for body image and self-esteem. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of this relationship, stakeholders in the fashion and mental health sectors can work towards promoting body positivity, self-acceptance, and empowerment among individuals of all ages. As

we navigate the complexities of self-expression and identity in the modern world, understanding the profound impact of clothing on our sense of self becomes increasingly vital.

VI. Implications

This study highlights the need for further research into how clothing choices affect body image and self-esteem, especially among diverse populations. It suggests practical interventions such as workshops and educational programs to promote positive body image and media literacy. Policy changes advocating for inclusivity in media representation and sustainable fashion are also crucial. Integrating discussions on body image and self-esteem into school curricula and incorporating fashion-related activities into therapy can offer holistic support. Overall, understanding the impact of clothing choices can lead to positive changes in mental health and well-being.

VII. Limitations of the Study

The study's limitations include a small sample size of only 10 young adults, with a gender imbalance, which may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives. Additionally, social desirability bias could have influenced participants' responses, potentially impacting the reliability of the data. Employing qualitative methods limits the study's statistical rigor and generalizability compared to quantitative approaches. Moreover, the subjective nature of thematic analysis introduces the possibility of bias in data interpretation among different researchers.

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