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# Apparel and Its Impact on Self-Perception

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# Apparel and Its Impact on Self-Perception

A Research Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of STEM and Professional  
Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Masters of  
Science Degree  
Old Dominion University

Autumn Heart

January 2011

## Signature Page

This project was prepared by Autumn D. Heart under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in SEPS 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the graduate program director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science.

Approved By:

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John M. Ritz

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Apparel is a part of everyday life. People choose what they wear for a variety of reasons including comfort, work, or as a means of self-expression. Society has placed a great deal of emphasis on clothing throughout the ages and this emphasis continues into the present day. Apparel is a part of the first impression that individuals convey about themselves to the world surrounding them (Barnard, 2002).

With an understanding of the significance of apparel, it takes very little to make a connection between apparel and the wearer. However, understanding how far this relationship truly goes is also important. It stands to reason that if individuals wear garments to communicate an element of themselves that this communication, in turn, may also have an impact on that person psychologically.

When discussing the psychological impact of clothing, there are several primary questions to consider related to the relationship between what is worn and how it affects the individual wearing it. It is important to explore the impact or significance of apparel on the wearer. Conversely, it is also important to explore the relationship between an individual's garments and how they are treated or perceived by those around them.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of the study was to determine if alterations in one's dress has an impact on an individual's self-concept.

## **Research Goals**

The goals of this study were to answer the following questions:

1. Does apparel have an impact on how a person perceives themselves?
2. How does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others?
3. Does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer?

## **Background and Significance**

What an individual chooses to wear is a visual reflection of that person. Originally used to primarily communicate social status, clothing is now indicative of many other characteristics about the wearer (Crane, 2000).

It is important to use research to identify any differences in how a person is perceived as well as how they feel about themselves based on what they wear. If clothing can indeed change self-perception, then as a whole, with this awareness, individuals may become more interested in what they wear. This awareness could impact consumer behavior in a positive way. Increased demand for soft goods, increased spending on apparel, and increased frequency on spending could impact the apparel industry and cause a surge in purchases. This information is also important to apparel marketers because it can aid them in determining how to effectively reach their target audience.

This study is also significant because there is limited research available on the topic of dress and self esteem and how these relate to each other. Although there is more research available on the impact of apparel on how a person is

viewed, significantly less research is available on the topic of the impact of apparel on the wearer. In addition, much of the research on the topic of apparel and self concept is out of date, over ten years old. Many changes have occurred in society since then, so it is important, therefore, to revisit this topic.

### **Limitations**

This study was conducted with the following limitations:

1. The participants of this study were limited to the student population who resided on campus in the Scotland House residence hall, second floor, wing B, at Old Dominion University during the fall of 2010.
2. Students were solicited using advertising mediums such as email, word of mouth, and fliers posted throughout the residence halls.
3. This study was limited to the subject of apparel and its effects on self concept or self esteem.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made in this study:

1. The participants were concerned about their outward appearance to at least some degree, reflected through their choice of attire.
2. The participants had previously worn or had a level of familiarity with different categories of apparel (e.g., casual, formal, etc.).
3. The participants had prior knowledge of the existence of the different categories of attire.

## **Procedures**

The participants of this study were asked to complete a survey that employed Likert scales as well as open-ended short answer questions. The survey consisted of three sections addressing the research goals. Each section contained six closed-form questions and one open-ended question for additional comments. The first section addressed the question of apparel and self perception. The second section addressed the question of apparel and its impact on the wearer's behavior. The third section addressed the question of apparel's influence on those around them.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms will be used within this paper:

Apparel – Clothing, garments, or attire that adorns or covers the body.

Business Casual – A term relating to apparel. Attire associated with relaxed office workplace environments. It includes apparel such as modest blouses and skirts, professional button-up shirts and slacks, and dress shoes.

Business Professional Apparel – A term relating to apparel. Attire required for the professional workplace. This includes suits, ties, button up shirts, and modest length skirts that fall below the knee.

Casual – A term relating to apparel. It is attire appropriate for typical day to day situations on a non-professional level. This includes items such as denim jeans, tee shirts, fashion sneakers, and casual shoes.

Dress – A term used to describe apparel.

Dressy Casual – A term relating to apparel. Attire that is casual but more likely worn for specific occasions. This includes dresses, blouses, skirts, or button up shirts, loafers, and dressy shoes.

Dressy or Formal Wear – A term relating to apparel. Attire reserved for special occasions. This includes items such as ball gowns, cocktail dresses, suits, tuxedos, high heels, and dress shoes.

Loungewear – A term relating to apparel. It includes articles of clothing worn while relaxing, working out, or while in the comfort of one's home. This includes sweatshirts, sweat pants, hooded sweatshirts, basketball shorts, yoga pants, Softe shorts, and athletic sneakers.

Professional Uniform – A term relating to apparel. It is attire required by a workplace to give all employees a distinguishable and uniform look. This includes military and police officer uniforms, company polo shirts, and jumpsuits.

Self-Esteem or Self-Concept – Perception of oneself.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter I presented the problem and asks: does apparel have an impact on an individual's self concept? In order to address this, three research goals were developed: Does apparel have an impact on how a person perceives themselves, does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer, and how does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others? The limitations defining the parameters of the study included that the

study was limited to Old Dominion students living in the Scotland House residence hall and the topic of dress and its influence on self-esteem. Terms relating to the study, including categories of apparel and other potentially ambiguous terms were defined. Survey procedures were described, outlining how the survey would be developed and distributed, as well as, how the privacy of participants would be maintained.

In Chapter II, a literature review based on the research goals will be conducted. These include the impact of apparel on a person's self-perception, the influence of apparel on the wearer's behavior, and the influence of dress on how individuals are perceived.

Chapter III will discuss the methods and procedures that will be used to generate findings for this study. These will include defining the following: the population to be studied, the variables of research, the design of the instrument, the methods employed to collect data, and the statistical analysis.

Chapter IV will focus on the actual findings and will include statistical analysis of data. Finally, Chapter V will summarize the study. It will point to ways for the study to be improved when replicated, as well as make recommendations for new directions in future research.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

Apparel and fashion play a larger role in our lives than we may willingly ascribe. Fashion influences the way people view themselves and others around them. According to Entwistle (2003):

Despite its global reach, economic significance, and obvious cultural appeal, fashion has been marginalized within mainstream sociology and economic sociology, and thus a sociologically informed account of fashion has only partially emerged. Related areas, like cultural studies and business, may study fashion, but the focus is either on the 'cultural' or 'economic' aspects, respectively, without analysis of the obvious hybridity of fashion and business and culture. (p. 3)

According to Jarnow & Dickerson (1997):

'Fashion is a social phenomenon which reflects the same continuing change that rides through any given age.' Changes in fashion, he emphasized, 'correspond with the subtle and often hidden network of forces that operate on society....In this sense, fashion is a symbol. (p. 37)

Conducting a review of literature on the topic of apparel and how it relates to self esteem is an important step before gathering new information. Research was conducted on relevant material and divided into two categories based on the research goals. These include: dress and self-esteem, dress and behavior, and the impact of an individual's apparel on others.

## **Dress and Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is also referred to as an individual's perception of their own self-worth. The concept of self-esteem, however, has been described as mainly an ethnocentric one, adopted primarily by Americans. By loose definition, self-esteem is love and respect for oneself which enables a person to live up to their full potential as a human being. This concept potentially has great power, and thereby plays an important role in comprising an individual's personality (Hewett, 1998).

According to Webster (2000), the individual is comprised of three components that come together in order to form the core individual. These are the body, the persona, and the spirit. These elements are separate but overlap within an individual to work together harmoniously. Svendsen (2006) also proposes that the body and self-esteem are interconnected; "The ego is very much constituted via presence of the body" (p. 75). He continues, "We seek identity in the body, and clothes are an immediate continuation of the body. That is why clothes are so important to us: they are the closest to our body" (p. 77). Although apparel is not the only factor which can influence self-esteem, it can greatly influence someone who already has issues with their self-esteem (Lee, 2003).

Clothing is one of the few aspects of our body that we can change about ourselves (Lee, 2003). Clothing is a form of body modification, although it is temporary, like cosmetics. There are also long lasting modifications, such as

permanent changes to the flesh and skin, such as tattoos, brandings, piercings, plastic surgery, and other body modifications.

In the present day, the concept of a “makeover” is prevalent. This is primarily a change in dress, but prevails as a means for boosting self-esteem and self-image (Weber, 2000). There are instances where changes in body modification and changes in behavior are thought to be related. For instance, according to Weber (2000), women have claimed to observe changes in their personalities after dramatic changes to the color of their hair have taken place.

### **Dress and Behavior**

According to Lee (2003), “We’re a society hooked on – and bombarded with – fashion. Style, once a commodity reserved for the elite, is being marketed to the masses at an ever-quicken pace” (p. x). Designers are partnering with discount retailers such as Target, Kmart, and Old Navy. “Fashion has not only begun to meld with the mainstream, it is the mainstream” (p. x). Women are most commonly portrayed as victims to fashion, which may be tied to their self-esteem. Fashion is the quest that never ends. It is “the constant search for the perfect look” (Lee, 2003, p. xiii). Psychologists say that compulsive shopping can be attributed to the cause of this constant search: internal sense of self-worth (Lee, 2003). Many seek social acceptance through apparel. This is the essence of fashion (Jarnow & Dickerson, 1997).

An example of the impact of apparel on behavior is the relationship between the shift to more casual attire in the workplace and productivity. CEO of

McGrath/Power Public Relations, Jonathan Bloom (2007) says the productivity level of his company went down. "We went through a too-casual period...In the aftermath of the dot.com bubble, we tightened things up a little. When we were very casual, the quality of the work wasn't as good " ([http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-07-09-business-casual-attire\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-07-09-business-casual-attire_N.htm)).

Uniforms have also been credited with changing a person's behavior. The cause may be in part due to the social pressures associated with wearing of a uniform. While wearing a uniform, an individual is no longer just themselves, but also has an identity as part of a group and is representative of that group. "Uniforms are all about control, not only of the social self but also of the inner self and its formation" (Craik, 2005, p. 4).

### **Dress and Its Impact on Others**

Beauty is important to all of us, regardless of whether we are willing to admit it or not. "The idea that beauty is unimportant or a cultural construct is the real beauty myth...We have to understand beauty, or we will always be enslaved by it" (Riordan, 2004, p. xxiii).

The word fashion, by definition, implies a required cultural acceptance. A style does not become fashion until it has been accepted by consumers. Therefore, it will only remain in style or fashionable as long as consumers consider it to be so. "Among the countless definitions of fashion, the one from Webster's latest unabridged dictionary comes very close to what professionals mean when they use the word: the prevailing or accepted style in dress or

personal decoration established or adopted during a particular time or season” (Jarnow & Dickerson, 1997, p. 35).

Dress can have a variety of effects on others. Makeovers are a common modern approach to improving one’s aesthetic appeal to society. One of the reasons cited for undergoing makeovers is: “I do it to feel good about myself” (Weber, 2000, p. 48). Many products and modifications in dress make claims of having the ability to make an individual appear more attractive, youthful, or healthy-looking by society standards.

In contrast, individuals who use many of these products can be perceived by others as deceitful, artificial, or not genuine. “...you do it to misrepresent yourself to me” (Weber, 2000, p. 48). Modifications of dress and body can be deemed in this manner if the end result is a dramatic change such that others feel the person is masking their true self. “Clothes rewrite the body, give it a different shape, and a different expression” (Svendsen, 2006, p. 77).

However, it can also be argued that instead of masking an individual, clothing acts as a means of presenting oneself to the world. Much like a woman who applies makeup before leaving her home and starting her day, dress is an additional medium that an individual may utilize to assimilate and find cultural acceptance (Svendsen, 2006).

Dress can also be used as a communicatory device. It is a first impression that an individual makes without speaking. “Fashions in clothing have always been more than merely a manner of dressing...Fashions are social expressions; they document taste and values of their era just as painting,

sculpture, and other art forms do. Fashions are a fact of social psychology” (Jarnow & Dickerson, 1997, p. 37).

An example of this is the custom of Ghanaian women of the Asante tribe. These women wear strings of beads beneath their clothing as a part of their daily dress. The beads go across their hips and waist and are considered to be very sexual. They are worn never to be seen in a public setting. In this culture, the beads communicate sexuality and fertility. The very sound or sight of these beads is considered to be very sexually alluring to men (Gott, 2007).

Throughout history, there has been a desire for both fashion and function in apparel. Clothing has been used as a form of communication throughout the ages, most frequently as a way to exclude others (Lee, 2003). Since only the most elite and affluent could afford the handmade, one of a kind couture items, this style was equated with higher ranks within society. A similar reaction can be observed today. According to Lee (2003), a study conducted by *Psychology Today* in 1995 caused 70 percent of participants to feel “depressed, guilty, and shameful” after looking at models in fashion magazines for three minutes.

Uniform is an example of how dress can be used to communicate a message, for instance, one of societal authority. As Woolf wrote, as found in Sopher (2005):

Your dress in its immense elaboration has obviously another function. It not only covers nakedness, gratifies vanity, and creates pleasure for the eye but it serves to advertise the social, professional, or intellectual standing of the wearer. If you will excuse the humble illustration, your

dress fulfills the same function as the tickets in a grocer's shop. But here instead of saying 'This is margarine; this is pure butter; this is the finest butter in the market,' it says, 'This man is a clever man – he is Master of Arts; this man is a very clever man – he is Doctor of Letters; this is a most clever man – he is a Member of the Order of Merit. (p. 34)

However, dress can relay mixed messages. According to Craik (2005) on the topic of uniforms, although they can be associated with words such as "order, control, confidence, and conformity," they can also be associated with words such as: "subversion, transgression, punishment, and shame" (p. 4). In the case of military men, their uniforms may also communicate bravery and heroism.

How individuals view themselves and how they are viewed by those around them can often be two very different viewpoints (Weber, 2000). For instance, according to a survey conducted in 2006 by an online job service, TheLadders.com, those who dress casually in the workplace are viewed as being more creative. However, 49% of respondents also said that casual dress could be taken less seriously ([http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-07-09-business-casual-attire\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2007-07-09-business-casual-attire_N.htm)). Inevitably, self-concept and how others view an individual may be two different viewpoints that will not coincide. An individual may see themselves in one way, but may portray themselves through their dress in another way, whether this is a conscious decision or not.

## Summary

Chapter II provided a review of literature on the topics outlined by the research goals: the impact of apparel on a person's self-perception, the influence of apparel on the wearer's behavior, and the influence of dress on how individuals are perceived.

Self-esteem or self-concept is primarily an American notion which can be described as a love and respect for oneself. However, the idea of seeking identity through clothing is not an ethnocentric one. Weber (2000) spoke of three parts of the body and how they relate to each other, as well as how clothing helps us to identify ourselves.

Body modifications have been thought to influence behavior. Putting on a uniform, change of dress code in the workplace, and even change of hair color have all been cited as creating a change in an individual's behavior.

Dress is a communicatory device that leaves a first impression with an individual. However, the impact of dress on others can have some backlash. Some of the methods employed to modify the body can be perceived as insincere or deceitful by others. Although the wearer may be trying to culturally assimilate or express their personality, the message that the clothes and body modifications worn actually may be very different than what was intended.

In Chapter III, methods and procedures for the study will be discussed. The subjects include population, research variables, instrument design, methods of data collection, and statistical analysis.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods and Procedures**

The methods and procedures discussed in this chapter were used to generate findings in relations to the study's research goals. This study utilized a survey that was developed using information gathered from the review of literature regarding the influence of apparel on self-perception. This survey was designed by the researcher with relation to the research goals: the impact of apparel on a person's self-perception, the influence of apparel on the wearer's behavior, and the influence of dress on how individuals are perceived. The subsections within this chapter included population, research variables, instrument design, methods of data collection, statistical analysis, and a summary.

### **Population**

The population for this study consisted of students currently enrolled in Old Dominion University and living on campus on the second floor, B wing, of Scotland House during the fall semester of 2010. The number of individuals living in this area was 56. To determine the sample size needed for this study, the formula  $n = \frac{N}{1 + n(e)^2}$  was used. For this equation, n is equal to the sample size, N is equal to the population, and e is the percentage of validity of this group. Therefore,  $n = \frac{56}{1 + 56(.05)^2}$ , or n was approximately equal to 49.

## **Research Variables**

The research variables for this study were the preconceived perceptions of the participants in relation to apparel. For the survey, this included the participant's perception of others based on dress as well as the participant's self-concept as it relates to apparel.

## **Instrument Design**

The instrument designed for this study was a survey which employed a combination of five-point Likert scale questions and open-ended short answer questions. The questions within the survey attempted to gauge participant attitudes toward different categories of dress, as well as determining if and to what degree apparel affects the wearer's self perception.

The survey was divided into three categories, each addressing one of the research goals. The questions in each section were based on six categories of apparel: loungewear, casual apparel, dressy casual apparel, business casual apparel, business professional apparel, and formal wear. The participants were asked to describe how they felt about themselves, how they perceive others, and how their behavior is influenced in each section in the previously listed categories. A space at the end of each section was allowed for open-ended comments. See Appendix A for copy of the survey.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

The survey was distributed at random to willing participants solicited through advertising mediums (email, flyers) and word of mouth to on campus residents at Old Dominion University living in the Scotland House residence hall second floor, B wing, during the fall of 2010. Participants were given no incentive for their participation.

Surveys were distributed by the researcher in person. The survey was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the study and ensuring the participants' confidentiality. Completion of the survey was not timed. Instructions were also included with the survey. Completed surveys were returned by the participant and collected by the researcher. See Appendix B for a copy of the cover letter that accompanied the survey.

## **Statistical Analysis**

Once all distributed surveys were returned, the researchers used descriptive statistics including number, frequency, and mean to interpret survey responses.

## **Summary**

Chapter III discussed the methods and procedures concerning the collection of data. A survey was created based on research goals. The study was confidential and posed questions regarding the following questions: does apparel have an impact on how a person perceives themselves, does the type of

apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer, and how does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others? The survey was comprised of five-point Likert scale questions, but also contained an open-ended section where participants could add comments if they chose. The population for this study consisted of students residing on campus in the Scotland House residence hall during the fall semester of 2010 at Old Dominion University. This random selection allowed for a varied cross section of respondents. Surveys were distributed and collected by the researcher to ensure confidentiality. These surveys were completed by participants in the researcher's absence. Results were tabulated using central tendency statistics and responses occurring most frequently within data.

Chapter IV contains data found as results from the survey. The findings are directly related to the research goals. Central tendency and frequency will be used to tabulate this information.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine if alterations in dress have an impact on an individual's self-concept. In this chapter, the findings related to this problem will be explored. The sections of this chapter include: response rate, the impact of apparel on self-perception, the impact of apparel on perception of others, apparel's influence on behavior, and summary.

#### **Response Rate**

Fifty-six surveys were distributed by the investigator. Fifty surveys were returned. The response rate for this study was 89.3%.

#### **The Impact of Apparel on Self-Perception**

Part one of the study was based on the Research Goal 1 concerning apparel and if it has an impact on how a person perceives themselves. The first section asks for participants to describe how they feel about themselves when wearing different categories of apparel. A mean score of 1 to 1.49 indicated a response of "worst," 1.5 to 2.49 indicated "below average," 2.5-3.49 indicated "average," 3.5 to 4.49 indicated "above average," and 4.5 to 5.0 indicated "best."

Question 1 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing loungewear. Fifty participants responded to this question. Among them, no respondents indicated they felt "worst" when wearing loungewear. Thirteen respondents said they felt "below average." Twenty-six respondents said they felt

“average.” Eight respondents said they felt “above average.” Five respondents said they felt “best.” The mean response for this question was 3.02, indicating an “average” response.

Question 2 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Among them, zero respondents indicated they felt “worst” or “below average” when wearing this clothing category. Thirty-four respondents said they felt “average.” Eight respondents said they felt “above average.” Eight respondents also said they felt “best.” The mean response for this question was 3.48, indicating an “average” response.

Question 3 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing dressy casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Three respondents indicated they felt “worst.” No respondents indicated that they felt “below average.” Seven respondents said they felt “average.” Thirty-three respondents said they felt “above average.” Seven respondents said they felt “best.” The mean response for this question was 3.82, indicating an “above average” response.

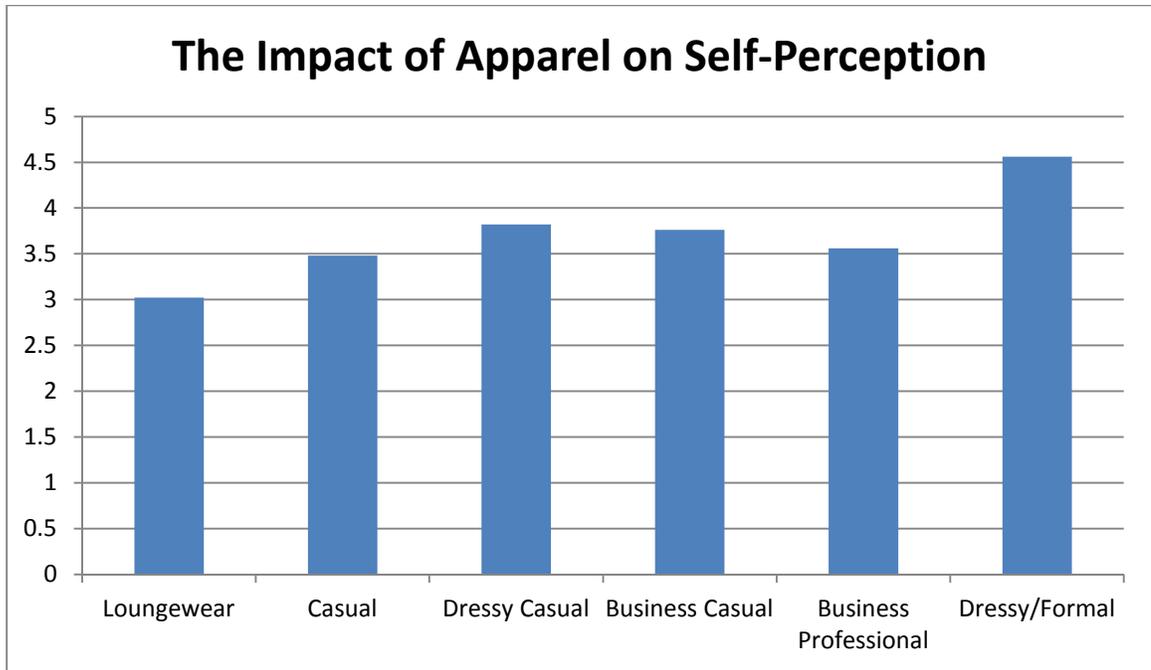
Question 4 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing business casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. No respondents indicated they felt “worst.” Two respondents indicated that they felt “below average.” Eleven respondents said they felt “average.” Thirty-one respondents said they felt “above average.” Five respondents said they felt

“best.” The mean response for this question was 3.76, indicating an “above average” response.

Question 5 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing business professional apparel or occupational uniform. Fifty participants responded to this question. Among them, no respondents indicated they felt “worst.” Four indicated that they felt “below average.” Twenty-two respondents said they felt “average,” sixteen said they felt “above average,” and eight said they felt “best.” The mean response for this question was 3.56, indicating an “above average” response.

Question 6 asked participants how they felt about themselves when wearing dressy or formal apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Two respondents indicated they felt “worst” when wearing loungewear. One respondent said they felt “below average.” No respondents said they felt “average.” Eleven respondents said they felt “above average.” Thirty-six respondents said they felt “best.” The mean response for this question was 4.56, indicating a “best” response. See Figure 1.

In the additional comments portion of this section, one respondent wrote that the impact of apparel on self-perception “Depends on if I have my makeup on as well.”



**Figure 1**

*The Impact of Apparel on Self-Perception*

### **The Impact of Apparel on the Perception of Others**

Part two of the study addressed the Research Goal 2: How does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others? The questions asked participants how they perceive others when they are wearing the six different categories of clothing. The scale for this question was the same, but different words were used: poorly, below average, average, above average, and very highly. A mean score of 1 to 1.49 indicated a response of “poorly,” 1.5 to 2.49 indicated “below average,” 2.5-3.49 indicated “average,” 3.5 to 4.49 indicated “above average,” and 4.5 to 5.0 indicated “very highly.”

In Section 2, Question 1 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing loungewear. Fifty participants responded to this question.

Among them, no respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” when wearing loungewear. Twenty respondents said they perceived individuals as “below average.” Thirty respondents said they perceived individuals dressed in loungewear as “average.” No respondents said they perceived individuals “above average” or “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 2.60, indicating an “average” response.

Question 2 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” or “below average” when wearing casual apparel. Thirty-nine respondents said they perceived individuals dressed in casual apparel as “average.” Five respondents said they perceived individuals “above average.” Seven respondents said they perceived individuals wearing casual apparel “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 3.44, indicating an “average” response.

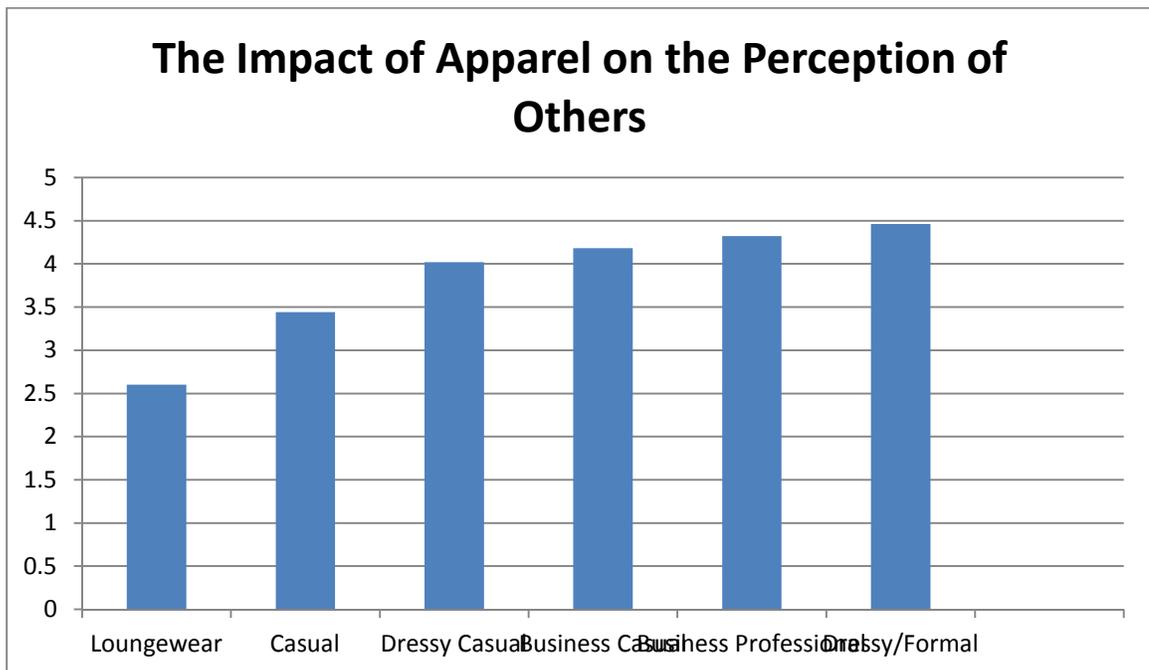
Question 3 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing dressy casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” or “below average” when wearing dressy casual apparel. Seven respondents said they perceived individuals dressed in casual apparel as “average.” Thirty respondents said they perceived individuals “above average.” Twelve respondents said they perceived individuals wearing dressy casual apparel “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 4.02, indicating an “above average” response.

Question 4 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing business casual apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” or “below average” when wearing dressy casual apparel. Three respondents said they perceived individuals in business casual apparel as “average.” Thirty-five respondents said they perceived individuals in business casual attire as “above average.” Twelve respondents said they perceived individuals wearing business casual apparel “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 4.18, indicating an “above average” response.

Question 5 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing business professional apparel or occupational uniforms. Fifty participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” or “below average” when wearing business professional apparel or occupational uniforms. Eight respondents said they perceived these individuals as “average.” Eighteen respondents said they perceived these individuals as “above average.” Twenty-six respondents said they perceived individuals wearing business professional apparel “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 4.32, indicating an “above average” response.

Question 6 asked participants how they perceived others they observed wearing dressy or formal apparel. Fifty participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they perceived individuals as “worst” or “below average.” Three respondents said they perceived these individuals as “average.”

Twenty-one respondents said they perceived individuals in dressy attire or formal wear as “above average.” Twenty-six respondents said they perceived these individuals “very highly.” The mean response for this question was 4.46, indicating an “above average” response. See Figure 2.



**Figure 2**

*The Impact of Apparel on the Perception of Others*

In the additional comments section regarding the impact of apparel on the perception of others, participants wrote several comments. One participant wrote: “Your image shows how you are; if you look the part you’ll feel the part.” Another participant wrote: “Please note that this also is based on the individual’s looks as well. Just because they’re dressed nicely doesn’t mean they look above average.”

## **Apparel's Influence on Behavior**

Part three of the survey addressed Research Goal 3: does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer? The questions in this section asked participants to indicate to what level they agreed with statements about apparel's influence on their own behavior. The scale used and the categories of apparel remained the same, however, the response choices on the scale were changed to properly address the question. The categories for this section were: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. A mean score of 1 to 1.49 indicated a response of "strongly disagree," 1.5 to 2.49 indicated "disagree," 2.5-3.49 indicated "neither agree nor disagree," 3.5 to 4.49 indicated "agree," and 4.5 to 5.0 indicated "strongly agree."

Question 1 asked participants if they felt that wearing loungewear influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question. Four respondents indicated they "strongly disagree" that wearing loungewear influences their behavior. Three respondents indicated that they "disagree" that wearing loungewear influences their behavior. Twelve respondents indicated that they "neither agree nor disagree" that loungewear impacts their behavior. Twenty-two respondents indicated that they "agree" that loungewear influences their behavior. Four respondents indicated that they "strongly agree" that loungewear influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 3.42, indicating a "neither agree nor disagree" response.

Question 2 asked participants if they felt that wearing casual apparel influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question.

Zero respondents indicated they “strongly disagree” that wearing casual apparel influences their behavior. Seven respondents indicated that they “disagree” that wearing casual apparel influences their behavior. Twenty-four respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” that casual apparel impacts their behavior. Ten respondents said they “agree” that casual apparel influences their behavior. Four respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that casual apparel influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 3.24, indicating a “neither agree nor disagree” response.

Question 3 asked participants if they felt that wearing dressy apparel influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question. No respondents indicated that they “strongly disagree” or “disagree” that wearing dressy apparel influences their behavior. Four respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” that dressy apparel impacts their behavior. Thirty respondents said they “agree” that dressy apparel influences their behavior. Eleven respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that dressy apparel influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 4.16, indicating an “agree” response.

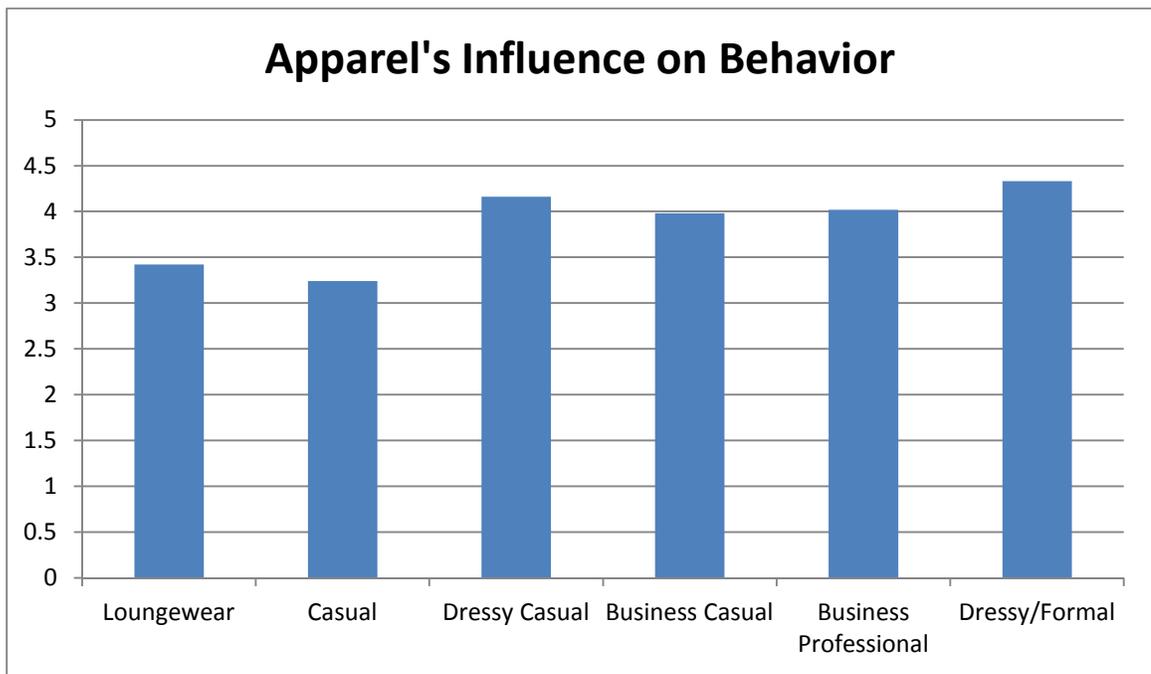
Question 4 asked participants if they felt that wearing business casual apparel influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question. Zero respondents indicated they “strongly disagree” that wearing business casual apparel influences their behavior. Zero respondents also indicated that they “disagree” that wearing business casual apparel influences their behavior. Eight respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor

disagree” that business casual apparel impacts their behavior. Thirty respondents said they “agree” that business casual apparel influences their behavior. Seven respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that business casual apparel influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 3.98, indicating an “agree” response.

Question 5 asked participants if they felt that wearing business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question. No respondents indicated they “strongly disagree” that wearing business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influences their behavior. Two respondents indicated that they “disagree” that wearing business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influences their behavior. Two respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” that business professional apparel or an occupational uniform impacts their behavior. Twenty-eight respondents said they “agree” that business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influences their behavior. Eleven respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 4.02, indicating an “agree” response.

Question 6 asked participants if they felt that wearing dressy or formal apparel influenced their behavior. Forty-five participants responded to this question. No respondents indicated they “strongly disagree” that wearing dressy or formal apparel influences their behavior. No respondents indicated that they “disagree” that wearing dressy or formal apparel influences their behavior. Three

respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” that dressy or formal apparel impacts their behavior. Twenty-four respondents said they “agree” that dressy or formal apparel influences their behavior. Eighteen respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” that dressy or formal apparel influences their behavior. The mean response for this question was 4.33, indicating an “agree” response. In the additional comments section, no comments were written. See Figure 3.



**Figure 3**

*Apparel's Influence on Behavior*

## Summary

For part one of the survey, the research goal concerning apparel and its impact on self-perception was addressed. Participants were asked to describe how they felt about themselves when wearing various categories of apparel. Mean responses to each apparel category were taken. The mean responses for these questions ranged from average to above average.

For part two of the survey, the third research goal was addressed. Does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others? Participants were asked how they perceive others when they are wearing the six different categories of clothing. The mean responses in this section ranged from below average to above average.

For part three of the survey, the second research goal was addressed. Does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer? Participants were asked to indicate to what level they agreed or disagreed with statements about apparel's influence on their behavior. The mean responses in this section ranged from "disagree" to "neither agree nor disagree."

In Chapter V, the study will be summarized. Conclusions will be drawn based on findings from the study outlined in this chapter. In addition, recommendations for future research will be given.

## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter will discuss the outcome of the research from this study. The study will be summarized. Findings will be used to make conclusions. After conclusions on this study, recommendations for future research will be made.

#### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine if alterations in dress have an impact on an individual's self-concept. To further investigate this problem, three research goals were constructed to guide the study. These were does apparel have an impact on how a person perceives themselves, does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer, and how does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others?

The significance of this study was twofold. First, to serve as an update since much of the literature that had been written on the topic of apparel and self-esteem was dated. Second, if clothing does influence self-perception, then the awareness of this could prompt individuals to become more interested in what they wear. This awareness could result in increased demand for soft goods, increased spending on apparel, and increased frequency on spending for apparel. This information is also important to apparel marketers because it can aid them in reaching their target audience.

This study was limited to Old Dominion University students residing in the Scotland House residence hall during the fall of 2010. The students were

solicited using email, word of mouth, and flyers posted throughout the residence hall. The study was limited to the subject of apparel and its effects on self esteem. The population for this study was based on the wing's current occupancy of 56 residents at the time that the study was conducted.

The instrument designed for this study was a survey which employed a five-point Likert scale with questions analyzing six different categories of apparel. The questions in the survey attempted to gauge participant attitudes towards different categories of dress, as well as determining if and to what degree apparel affects the wearer's self perception. The survey was divided into three categories, each addressing one of the research goals. Space at the end of each section was allowed for open-ended comments.

Data were collected by the researcher in person or via email. Respondents were not timed, but filled out the survey in the researcher's absence. After completing the survey, respondents gave the survey back to the researcher in the manner which it was received, either in person, or via email. Once all distributed surveys were returned, the researchers used descriptive statistics including number, frequency, and mean to calculate and interpret survey responses.

## **Conclusions**

This study was guided by three research goals. Below are the conclusions to each.

1. Does apparel have an impact on how a person perceives themselves?

According to this study, participants responded that a difference in apparel category had varying levels of influence on the wearer. The mean response for the category that participants felt best wearing was dressy or formal apparel. For loungewear, the mean response was 3.02, indicating that participants felt “average.” The mean response for casual apparel was 3.48, also indicating that participants felt “average” when wearing this category. In all other categories, the mean score indicated an “above average” response for how participants felt in dressy casual, business casual, and business professional apparel or occupational uniform.

With this information, it can be concluded that certain types of apparel did have an impact on self-perception. The mean response of participants indicated that they felt “average” in loungewear and with dressy casual apparel, business casual apparel, and business professional apparel or occupational uniform causing study participants to feel “above average” and the category of dressy or formal apparel causing participants to feel “best.”

## 2. How does dress influence how individuals are perceived by others?

Part two of the study asked participants how they perceive others wearing different categories of clothing. According to this study, participants responded that a difference in apparel category worn by an individual had an impact on how they were perceived.

Highest mean scores were given to the apparel categories of dressy or formal apparel, business professional apparel or occupational uniform, business

casual apparel, and dressy casual apparel. All of these categories received a mean score between 4.02 and 4.46. This indicated that study participants perceived individuals wearing these categories to be “above average.” Lower mean scores were given to the apparel categories of loungewear and casual apparel. These categories received mean scores of 2.60 and 3.44 respectively, indicating an “average” response.

It can be concluded that the type of apparel an individual is wearing has an impact on how they are perceived. Individuals wearing more casual and relaxed dress are viewed as “average.” Dressy and formal styles of clothing cause the wearer to be perceived as “above average” by others.

3. Does the type of apparel a person is wearing influence the behavior of the wearer?

Part three of the survey asked participants to indicate what level they agreed or disagreed with statements about apparel’s influence on their behavior. The mean response for the category that most participants felt influenced their behavior best was dressy or formal apparel. This category received a mean score of 4.33, indicating that participants agreed that wearing dressy or formal apparel influenced their behavior. The category in this section that received the lowest mean response (3.24) was casual apparel, which indicated a neither “agree nor disagree” response. The loungewear category received a response of 3.42, also falling into the neither “agree nor disagree” category. The categories of

dressy casual, business casual, and business professional with mean responses of 4.16, 3.98, and 4.02 respectively, all indicating an “agree” response.

It can be concluded that certain types of apparel do influence the behavior of the wearer to some degree. The mean response of study participants indicated that they “agree” that dressy casual, business casual, business professional apparel or occupational uniform, and dressy or formal apparel have an impact on the wearer’s behavior. Study participants neither “agree nor disagree” that loungewear or casual apparel has an impact on an individual’s behavior

### **Recommendations**

In the future, expansion of this research to larger populations could yield results that can be used for marketing of soft line products. By means of this study, understanding has been gained that individuals feel better about themselves in clothes other than loungewear, but they do not feel that apparel influences their behavior. However, it is important when marketing any products to consider this study because the findings indicate that individuals perceive others most favorably when wearing business casual or business professional apparel.

This study could be modified and improved in other ways. Methods for improving this study could include obtaining additional participants and using a different sample to see if results vary. Age, income level, gender, and race are variables that could result in differing responses.

Further research could explore such questions as: why are individuals more likely to care about what others are wearing than themselves and what is the motive in perceiving those who wear business attire more favorably? Does the way we dress also influence how we are treated?

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## Appendix A

### Survey



**The purpose of this study is to determine if alterations in dress have an impact on an individual’s self concept. This study is being conducted in cooperation with Old Dominion University. All responses to this survey will be kept confidential. The responses you provide will be summarized with other responses from all other participants. Your participation is voluntary and you may opt out at any time for any reason.**

**Directions:** For the following questions, please indicate your choice by marking the appropriate box with an “X”. Please mark only one “X” per row. At the end of each section, there is a space allowed for any additional comments. Please see below for instructions on how to return this survey.

**Part 1:** Using the scale below, describe **how you feel about yourself** when wearing the following styles of apparel

	Worst	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Best
<b>1. Loungewear</b> (Sweatshirts, sweat pants, hooded sweatshirts, basketball shorts, yoga pants, and athletic sneakers)					
<b>2. Casual Apparel</b> (Jeans, tee shirts, fashion sneakers, and casual shoes)					
<b>3. Dressy Casual Apparel</b> (Dresses, blouses, skirts, or button-up shirts, loafers, and dressy shoes)					
<b>4. Business Casual Apparel</b> (Modest blouses and skirts, professional button-up shirts and slacks, and dress shoes)					
<b>5. Business Professional Apparel or Occupational Uniform</b> (Suits and ties for professional workplaces, as well as required work apparel such as military or police uniforms)					
<b>6. Dressy or Formal Apparel</b> (Dresses, formal gowns, suits, tuxedos, and dress shoes)					

**Additional Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2:** For the following questions, use the scale provided to describe **how you perceive others** you observe wearing the following categories of apparel

	Poorly	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Very Highly
<b>1. Loungewear</b> (Sweatshirts, sweat pants, hooded sweatshirts, basketball shorts, yoga pants, and athletic sneakers)					
<b>2. Casual Apparel</b> (Jeans, tee shirts, fashion sneakers, and casual shoes)					
<b>3. Dressy Casual Apparel</b> (Dresses, blouses, skirts, or button-up shirts, loafers, and dressy shoes)					
<b>4. Business Casual Apparel</b> (Modest blouses and skirts, professional button-up shirts and slacks, and dress shoes)					
<b>5. Business Professional Apparel or Occupational Uniform</b> (Suits and ties for professional workplaces, as well as required work apparel such as military or police uniforms)					
<b>6. Dressy or Formal Apparel</b> (Dresses, formal gowns, suits, tuxedos, and dress shoes)					

**Additional Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 3:** For the following statements, indicate to what level you agree or disagree about **apparel's influence on your behavior.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>1. Wearing loungewear influences my behavior</b> (Sweatshirts, sweat pants, hooded sweatshirts, basketball shorts, yoga pants, and athletic sneakers)					
<b>2. Wearing casual apparel influences my behavior</b> (Jeans, tee shirts, fashion sneakers, and casual shoes)					
<b>3. Wearing dressy casual apparel influences my behavior</b> (Dresses, blouses, skirts, or button-up shirts, loafers, and dressy shoes)					
<b>4. Wearing business casual apparel influences my behavior</b> (Modest blouses and skirts, professional button-up shirts and slacks, and dress shoes)					
<b>5. Wearing business professional apparel or an occupational uniform influences my behavior</b> (Suits and ties for professional workplaces, as well as required work apparel such as military or police uniforms)					
<b>6. Wearing dressy or formal apparel influences my behavior</b> (Dresses, formal gowns, suits, tuxedos, and dress shoes)					

**Additional Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your time and input. When you have completed the survey, please return it in the manner it was received. All hard copies of this survey should be physically returned to the investigator, Autumn Heart. All electronic copies should be submitted via email to [ahear001@odu.edu](mailto:ahear001@odu.edu).

**Appendix B  
Cover Letter**

<<Date>>

Greetings,

Information regarding consumer opinions on apparel is important. It influences what products are sold and how they are marketed. The purpose of this study is to determine if clothing impacts self-esteem or the way we view each other. Your input on this topic is important.

Attached you will find a survey on the subject of clothing and self-concept. Completing this survey should take 10 to 15 minutes. Please be assured that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may opt out at any time if you so choose. However, your participation in this study will have a positive impact on the research. Any information you provide in this survey is kept completely confidential. By completing and returning this questionnaire, you give consent for your responses to be used for this study.

Your time and input are greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you in advance for your efforts.

Sincerely,

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