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Clothing Styles and Social Anxiety: Unpacking Self-Esteem's Mediating Role in Teen Social Dynamics

Maryam Khurshid ¹ Asma Riaz Hamdani ^{2*}  Waqas Ahmed ³ Hafsa Riaz ⁴ Amna Shahid ⁵

Corresponding Author: Asma Riaz Hamdani (Email: asmariaz@gcuf.edu.pk)

Abstract: The purpose of the current study was to look at teenage fashion preferences. Additionally, the relationship between teenage social anxiety and fashion choices would be examined, with a focus on the mediating role of self-esteem. A cross-sectional study approach was employed. Using the simple sample technique, adolescents (n=215) of both sexes participated. The main associations were examined using the Social Anxiety Scale, the Self-Esteem Scale, and the Clothing Preference Scale (FCPS). The results of the study showed that people's clothing preferences and social anxiety are fully mediated by their sense of self-worth. The current study emphasized how Pakistani teenagers' fashion preferences, social anxiety, and self-esteem relate to one other.

Key Words: Clothing Preferences, Self-esteem, Social Anxiety, Adolescents, Pakistan

Introduction

Clothing preferences and styles are determined by any culture or social values. It varies from country to country and region to region. Clothing aids in fulfilling multiple functions including protection from different elements and state as an acceptable public attire (Jevnik et al., 2012; Chang, 2014), works as a comfort to move in different settings as well as regulating body's temperature (Karjalainen, 2007; Havenith, 2002) along with freedom of clothing choices. Religion, culture and norms of society are major influencers in determination of clothing choices. In most of the western countries, clothing preferences are more relaxed than the eastern culture. It is more rigid in most of the Middle Eastern countries. Nevertheless, individual choices are being impacted by the societal norms and values.

Social anxiety related to the clothing preference arises when an individual is concerned about being judged or being stigmatized. In conservative societies, if female prefers to choose clothing that is inappropriate according to the norms of the culture or it may include aspects of body exposure, then there is a pressure of being stigmatized by the society as well. Reverse is the situation in western culture that if any female covers her hair and face, she will be stigmatized in terms of conservativeness. Individuals may also suffer social isolation and may feel it difficult to communicate with others as many individuals avoid any social interaction with stigmatized person. Stigmatization is considered in all the cultures. Clothing aids in repressing or enhancing our interaction with the society providing the opportunity to stimulate normality, ease and comfort, positive self-image and positive emotions as well as improved quality of life (McDermott, 2015). As clothing is also associated with the emotional wellbeing; research has viewed clothing as an emotional self-protection in sensitive and high threat environments (Gruber et al., 2023).

¹ Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: msmaryamkhurshid@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: asmariaz@gcuf.edu.pk

³ PhD, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: waqas.ahmad@gmail.com

⁴ Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: hafsah.riaz@iiu.edu.pk

⁵ MS, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: aaminah.shahid79@gmail.com

Nevertheless, clothing is also associated with person's status and worth. People often assume and judge others based on their social worth and status as an outlook of their clothing preferences. Therefore, it is assumed as a fundamental part of our social communication and interaction with others. Thus, many people feel anxious when interacting with others in their social circle which stimulates their social anxiety. For instance, anxiety is defined by the feeling of worry, uneasiness, tension including physiological change specifically increased blood pressure (APA, 2020). Research highlighted the way people perceive others leading to self-perception. Therefore, it establishes the cognitive bases of preferences for clothing proposed that clothes have a cognitive effect on individuals wearing them.

Social anxiety refers to the demands requires to encounter present situation, where situation is assumed as meaningful and response to that situation may determine our social standing. Many people experience social anxiety at any time in their life. Therefore, social rejection is associated with social anxiety which effects individual's confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem and mental wellbeing (Nelemans et al., 2019). Many anxieties can be improved, exaggerated, or expressed through clothing by making a good impression and practicing appearance management including following clothing trends and beauty procedures as a coping strategy (Weatherhead, 1988). People describe more formally of themselves whose preference is tilted more towards the formal clothing as compared to the people who prefer more casual clothes. Clothing is also associated with the feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Clothing preferences and choices are determinants of one's feelings towards themselves as well as how they want others to perceive them. A study showed that people who feel positive about their clothing choices were found to have enhanced self-perception, and less negative feelings towards their own self.

This current study is based on the adolescents' clothing choices and preferences while dealing with social anxiety and self-esteem. This study is exceptional in context with the Pakistani culture and Society. As Pakistan is a Muslim country with conservative thought patterns when it comes to clothing choices. Therefore, it becomes difficult for both males and females to choose wisely when making their clothing choices. This study is significant in providing the insight to the choice individuals make and choices they want to make but due to societal pressure they are not able to comprehend.

Objectives

1. To investigate the indirect association between teenage social anxiety and clothing preferences and self-esteem.

Hypotheses

1. Adolescent self-esteem, social anxiety, and clothing in attire are significantly correlated.
2. The association between teenage social anxiety and clothing choices is mediated by self-esteem.
3. The study factors differ according to gender.

Research Method

Design

The association between the Clothing Preference Scale (FCPS), the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A), and the Interaction Anxiousness Scale was assessed using a cross-sectional study methodology.

Sample

215 individuals, 83 males and 132 women, between the ages of 18 and 25, who resided in Islamabad, Pakistan, were recruited as a convenient purposive sample. They received an invitation to complete a survey. The inclusion criteria only applied to male and female teens. The study's exclusive criteria excluded housewives, pupils, and employees.

Measures

Clothing Preference Scale (CPS): In 2024, Khurshid, Hassan, Parveen, and Hassan developed three subscales for the Clothing Preference Scale, which included 14 items with a six-point Likert type scale (none of the time = 1, rarely of the time = 2, a little of the time = 3, some of the time = 4, most of the time = 5, all of the time = 6). There are 3 subscales with seven items in self-reflection, four in self-satisfaction, and three in self-acceptance.

Scale of Self-Esteem: The Self-Esteem Scale was created by Rosenberg in (1965) and is used to gauge a person's degree of self-esteem. There are ten statements in it. The Likert scale has four possible answers: strongly disagree, strongly agree, and strongly disagree. A set of statements about one's own dignity made by people with high and low self-esteem makes up the self-esteem scale. A high score, which ranges from 10 to 40, denotes a strong sense of self-worth.

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A): Social Avoidance and Distress-New, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Social Avoidance and Distress-General are the three subscales that Nelemans et al. (2019) reduced from this scale to a 12-item assessment. With 0 representing "totally not applicable to me" and 4 representing "totally applicable to me," participants rated their responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Total scores ranged from 0 to 48. Higher scores correspond to more symptoms of social anxiety.

Procedure

The researchers reached out directly to participants from various universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The participant was able to comprehend the purpose and nature of the study, its duration, and the intended use of the data because of the consent letter. Participants were told that their information would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any moment. It was mentioned that the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A), the Interaction Anxiousness Scale, and questionnaires with questions about preferred attire were utilized to ascertain the impact of these two measures on fashion choices. They were also guaranteed anonymity regarding their identification. After completing the survey, participants were given a debriefing. They were also thanked for their involvement, collaboration, and time.

Table 1

Descriptive values of Scales (N=215)

Scales	k	M	SD	α
Clothing Preference Scale	14	68.54	14.23	.85
Social Anxiety Scale	12	19.98	5.96	.71
Self Esteem Scale	10	64.76	12.87	.70

Note: Clothing Preference Scale (CPS), Social Anxiety Scale (SAS), Self Esteem Scale (SES)

The CPS, SAS, and SES descriptive data are displayed in Table 1. All scales are dependable for measuring teens' scores, according to the dependability results.

Table 2

Alpha Reliability Coefficients of CPS and its Factors (N=215)

Scales	k	α
Self-Reflection	7	.76
Self-Satisfaction	4	.86
Self-Acceptance	3	.79

Table 2 shows the reliability for the 14 items on the CPS and its three components. The link and trajectory of the association between the variables under consideration were examined using alpha reliability coefficients and the pertinent analysis.

Table 3

Correlation of Sub Scales of CPS (N=215)

	Self-Reflection	Self-Satisfaction	Self-Acceptance
Self-Reflection	-	.74**	.68**
Self-Satisfaction		-	.69**
Self-Acceptance			-

** $p < .01$

Table 3 findings show a strong positive correlation between the sub scales of CPS three components: self-acceptance, self-satisfaction, and self-reflection. It demonstrates that a person may have strong feelings of self-satisfaction towards herself if she has a greater level of reflection of self.

Table 4

Correlation of the Scales (N=215)

	CPS	SC	SES
CPS	-	.55*	.65*
SAS	-	-	.64*
SES	-	-	-

* $p < .05$,

Table 4 shows a substantial correlation between the CPS and the SAS ($r = .55^*$, $p < .05$) and SES ($r = .65^*$, $p < .05$). Additionally, it shows a substantial positive correlation ($r = .64^*$, $p < .05$) between the Self Esteem and Social Anxiety Scale. It demonstrates that a person with a high level of self-esteem can enjoy every part of life and has a higher level of social anxiety.

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations and t Values on the Scales Scores of Teens

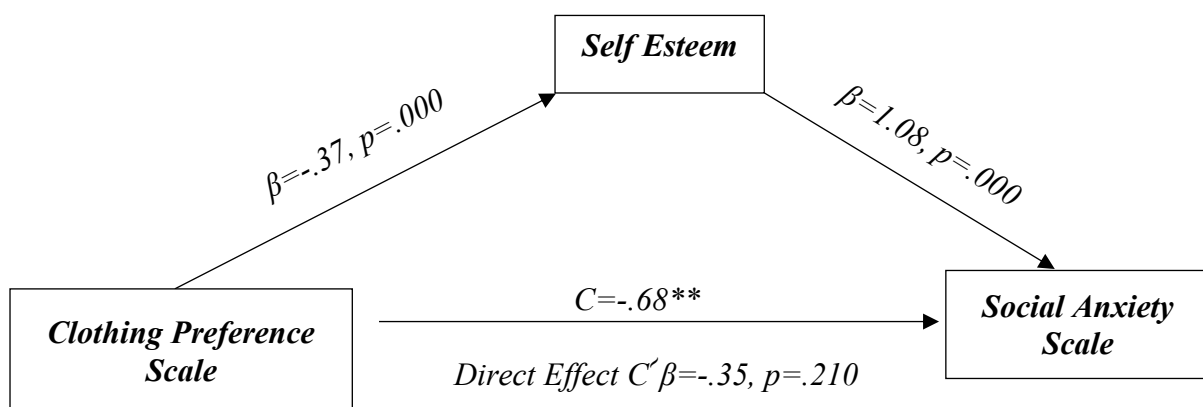
	Male Female		(n=83) (n=132)		t(198)	P	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
CPS	24.23	7.09	26.89	8.17	.56	.004	2.86	1.66	.341
SES	25.09	3.23	26.87	3.89	.45	.654	-.915	1.46	-
SAS	15.02	3.32	16.98	6.98	.70	.782	-1.06	2.24	-

The mean scores on the CPS, SES, and SAS for male ($n = 83$) and female ($n = 132$) teens are displayed in Table 5. However, there is no significant difference in the ratings of male and female teens on the Self Esteem and Social Anxiety Scale.

Mediation Analysis

Figure 2

Path analysis of SES as a mediator between CPS, SAS among Male and Female teens (N=215)



Indirect effect, $b = -.35$, 95% BCa CI [-.61, -.07]

The influence of Clothing Preference on social anxiety, self-esteem (the mediator) positively predicts social anxiety ($b=1.06$, $t=3.76$, $p=.000$, 95% BCa CI [.51, 1.62]). Clothing Preference is also found to negatively predict self-esteem ($b=-.25$, $t=-3.61$, $p=.000$, 95% BCa CI [-.39, -.11]). The direct effect indicates that, after adjusting for the influence of self-esteem on social anxiety, there is no significant correlation between clothing preference and social anxiety ($b=-.29$, $t=-1.28$, $p=.201$, 95% BCa CI [-.76, .16]).

Table 6

Multiple Regression Analysis on CPS and SES as Predictors of SAS among Teens (N=215)

	Social anxiety				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Step I					
Constant	22.59	1.37		17.89	24.29
CPS	-.15	.05	-.21**	-.25	-.05
Step II					
Constant	7.87	3.43		1.10	14.63
CPS	-.08	.05	-.11	-.18	.02
SES	.42	.09	.31***	.23	.62

For Step I: $R^2 = .06$, $F = 9.87^{**}$
 For Step II: $R^2 = .23$, $F = 16.11^{***}$
 $\Delta F = 19.23^{***}$
 $\Delta R^2 = .09^{***}$

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CPS is a significant predictor of feelings related to one's social anxiety, according to the first model in Table 6. The aforementioned variable can predict 6% of the variance in teens' social anxiety, according to the R^2 value. The fact that the β value is negative indicates that the prediction is incorrect. Stated differently, a greater CPS score would result in a lower sense of social anxiety. In the second model, social anxiety is also predicted by self-esteem. The self-esteem of college teens can predict 23% of their social anxiety, based on the R^2 value of .23.

Discussion

The majority of fashion preference social science measures were created and used in both Asian and Western cultures. Although these are extremely applicable to the general population and standardized, extrapolating them to those particular cultures is difficult. Consequently, there was a great need to create an indigenous scale that is also more pertinent to the concerns surrounding the fashion choices of college teens in Pakistan, an Islamic nation. Teens, who are in the age range that absorbs fashion and contemporary trends more quickly than adults, were the focus of the current study, which sought to establish a legitimate and accurate metric for addressing their clothing preferences. It also aimed to contribute to the corpus of current knowledge. We created a scale to handle the main facets of college-employed teens' wardrobe selections in their new settings.

The first hypothesis states that there is a substantial correlation between young people's fashion choices and their self-perception, self-esteem, and social anxiety. The correlation matrix of the CPS components, sometimes referred to as the variables of CPS, revealed a substantial positive association between self-acceptance, self-satisfaction, and self-reflection. Significant feelings of self-satisfaction with one's appearance have been linked to higher degrees of self-reflection. These findings aligned with research on business attire conducted by Piray et al. (2009). The second hypothesis states that the association between adolescent fashion preferences and social anxiety is mediated by self-esteem. The Clothing Preference measure was found to negatively predict self-esteem, and path analysis shows that it has a significant negative impact on social anxiety. The direct effect demonstrates that there is no observable correlation between social anxiety and fashion preferences in clothes when examining the impact of self-esteem on social anxiety. This non-significant connection showed that the teen styling of clothing in CPS and the Social Anxiety Scale completely mediated self-esteem (Woodward, 2005)

Teens usually place a great deal of importance on how they look and what they wear. One of the social groups that values fashion and physical appeal the most is teenagers. To demonstrate their belonging and differentiate themselves from others, groups of young people dress in ways that reflect their unique identities. In order to be accepted by their classmates, adolescents follow clothing norms when interacting with others. It was described that teens clothing is a straightforward means of illustrating college campus culture. A pleasant appearance may result from a variety of factors.

According to Johnston, (2002), a school's environment and location greatly influence the clothes that its teens wear. Teens who attend art schools, of course, dress differently than those who attend technical and business campuses. Universities in the north usually dress differently than colleges in the south. Since they have blended in with the school culture, new pupils are less noticeable by the second week.

Men categorize themselves in a variety of ways. Men use their clothing choices as a means of self-expression (Piray et al., 2019; Conseur et al., 2008). For instance, some men may express who they are through their physical attributes, while others may do it through their clothing choices in regard to women. Many women also think about what they wear, how they wear it, and how other people see them. College teens take their time choosing their attire because they are part of the school community. While some male teens choose to wear loose-fitting basketball shorts or sweatpants to school, others prefer to wear casual slacks and polo shirts. How the differences in the identities and personalities of teens are reflected in their clothing choices by Lunceford (2010).

Problems and Limitations

There is a gender imbalance since there are more women than men. Examining the relationships between gender and perceptions of fashion in clothes might have been feasible with a more equal distribution of the two sexes. The results of this study cannot be broadly applicable because the sample was limited to Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Determining what participants were wearing as they completed the survey form was one aspect of the study that was overlooked.

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