

## RESEARCH PAPER

**PROXIMITY OF CLOTHING TO SELF AS RELATED TO APPEARANCE MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS**

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of proximity of clothing to self with appearance management and social participation among three different socio-economic groups, to find the moderating effect of socio-economic status on this relationship and to find the percentage of variance in appearance management and social participation as predicted by proximity of clothing to self of adolescent girls. Participants were 600 adolescent girls (200 each from low, middle and high socio-economic group) aged between 15-18 years from only girls schools of Jaipur city. They completed a questionnaire that included measures of socio-economic status, proximity of clothing to self, appearance management and social participation. Correlation analysis, sub-group analysis and regression analysis indicated significant positive relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management. No relationship was found between proximity of clothing to self and social participation for the overall sample and for adolescents belonging to low and middle socio-economic group. For high socioeconomic group, significant positive correlation was found between proximity of clothing to self and social participation. Socio-economic status does not have any moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self with appearance management and social participation.

**KEY WORDS:** Clothing, clothing behavior, proximity of clothing to self, appearance management, social participation.

**Clothing and clothing behavior**

Clothing is a major aspect of personal appearance that often bears culturally shared meanings. Clothing not only satisfies basic physiological needs for survival along with food and shelter, but also satisfies psychosocial needs. Many studies have shown that higher order needs, such as belonging and self esteem can be satisfied through clothing (Kwon, 1997).

Horn & Gurel, (1981) referred clothing as a second skin or extension of the bodily self that represents the nearest aspects of one's environment. It has been noted that the way one feels about oneself affects the choice of clothing and the clothes one decides to wear also affects one's feelings about the self. Clothing is often used to strengthen self-concept, especially for people who tend to perceive themselves negatively. Depressed individuals use clothing as a tool to boost their morale (Kwon, 1988).

Clothing behavior, in a broader sense, refers to the choice and selection of clothing, the amount of time and money spent on clothing and the manner in which clothing is worn (Hwang, 1996).



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Through clothing behavior one can beautify the appearance, make the physical self more desirable, increase acceptance by a group and prevent rejection. Since the mid-50's, researchers have attempted to break down the all-encompassing "clothing behavior" into more narrowly defined constituent concepts. Clothing behavior is a multidimensional discipline and its dimensions have been delineated, defined, and conceptualized into various behavioral elements such as clothing attitudes, clothing awareness, clothing values, clothing consciousness, proximity of clothing to self, clothing interest, importance of clothing and perceived clothing deprivation. Theoretical orientations drawn upon to direct and explain clothing behavior research stem primarily from the disciplines of psychology, sociology and social psychology (Davis, 1984).

**Clothing during adolescence**

Adolescence is known to be the most troublesome period of life of an individual. Adolescents may experience vagueness, confusion, and discontinuity of the self due to redefinition of their roles as they emerge from childhood. During adolescence peers exert an increasing influence relative to parents and play an important role in their identity formation and in the socialization process (East et. al, 1992). The peers constitute a reference group to which the adolescent wants to belong and with whom he compares himself. Yet, not all adolescents are able to gain acceptance into a peer group. Items and artifacts that promise peer acceptance receive considerable attention, particularly items related to physical aspects of personal appearance.

Adolescents normally have a great interest in clothes and in their own appearance. Of all the social groups, teenagers are one of the groups that are most attached to fashion and physical appearance in general (Bouchard, 2002). They use clothes to feel better about their bodies, to conform to their peer group and to conform to specific role models (MacGillivray & Wilson, 1997).

Clothing therefore becomes an important domain of life in the process of redefinition of the self and in the attraction to different groups of significant others. Adolescents identify with their peers and develop their self-concepts, in part, through conformity to preferred styles of clothing, attitudes or actions established in the adolescent subculture (Steinberg, 1985).

**Proximity of clothing to self**

The proximity of clothing to self concept has evolved within the context of quality of life theory building and assessment; and has been useful in explaining the contribution of clothing to perceived life quality (Sontag, 1978/1979). Fulfillment of physical as well as psychological needs is important to a sense of positive quality of life and clothing is one such thing which satisfies both. Sontag and Schlater (1982) proposed proximity of clothing to self (PCS) as a relational concept pertaining to the psychological closeness of clothing to the self.

The perceived quality of life of adolescents may be influenced about their feelings about their clothing because clothing is very salient to them. Adolescents develop a high proximity towards clothing. But they differ in the extent to which they perceive clothing as the second skin i.e. they have varying proximities towards clothing. Such variation helps explain other clothing variables such as awareness, interest, use, satisfaction or dissatisfaction and also help to clarify the correlation among clothing variables such as self-concept and self-esteem (Creekmore, 1974).



Sontag et al. (1997) determined that adolescents who have high proximity of clothing to the self may anticipate that their clothing should help them gain a sense of personal competence or make them feel good about themselves.

### **Socio-economic status**

Socioeconomic status (SES) refers to a person's overall social position as determined by their achievement in education; occupational status; and income and wealth (Smith, 1994). There is overwhelming evidence that socioeconomic status influences quality of students' social and cognitive development, decisions they make, and ultimately, the quality of task performance. Children who are raised in poverty often experience problems at school, which can lead them on a path towards developing either conduct problems or withdrawn behaviors (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). In contrast, advantages to having a higher level of socioeconomic status include being able to afford an array of services and goods and social connections that potentially benefit children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Socioeconomic background also influences the development of instrumental (e.g., price and fabric) and social (e.g., look and brand) motivations in consumption (Page & Ridgway, 2001).

### **Appearance management**

Emphasis on the importance of physical attractiveness as a means of conveying desirable information has led people to manipulate their appearances through the use of cosmetics, plastic surgery, weight reduction, hair dressing, ornaments, accessories, and clothing in order to attain at least an approximation of attractive physical appearances. Appearances are positively or negatively evaluated by others (e.g., peers, parents, significant others) in an appreciation process; those perceived evaluations in turn influence the appearance-management behaviors of the creators themselves. Positive assessments from others increase self-esteem, whereas negative assessments lower the self-esteem.

Individuals construct and interpret images through processes of appearance management (Kaiser, 1997). According to Kaiser (1997), appearance management includes not only the process of thinking about how one looks, but also carrying out any activities pertaining to the way one looks. It encompasses attention, planning, organizing, decisions, and acts related to one's personal appearance.

When adolescents receive compliments or criticism about their clothing from others, they internalize these and form certain personal standards for their appearance depending upon their proximity towards clothing (Sontag, Lee & Peteu, 1997). If these personal standards are not met, the adolescent may or may not engage himself in more appearance management behaviors to construct and maintain an attractive appearance. Those behaviors are further reinforced by evaluations from family members, peers and significant others, as well as messages from the media (Pinhas, et.al, 1999)

### **Social participation**

Social participation is defined as an individual's participation in groups outside the family, the political arena and the workplace (political parties, unions, pressure groups). The beneficial effect



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of social participation on adolescent development has been generally accepted (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Organized activities help adolescents meet their need for social relatedness, potentiating a broad range of social developmental opportunities. Poor social competence and poor peer relationship in children, on the other hand, can contribute to later problems such as juvenile delinquency, school dropouts and psychiatric problems. Therefore, it is important to facilitate opportunities for social participation within this age group.

Values and attitudes toward oneself and one's society may influence levels of social participation. This indicates that people who value clothing differently, that is have different proximities towards clothing, will differ in their pattern of social participation (Gordon, 1975). Kaiser (1983-84) demonstrated the importance of clothing and appearance through linking stages of social acceptance with participation in a variety of situations. Since appearance is what is presented to others in social situations, normative dress may enhance social participation on one hand, while on the other hand dissatisfaction with one's appearance or dress, may hinder social interaction. Putnam (2000) argues that where positive roles, social trust and norms of reciprocity flourish, individuals participate socially. Since clothing today serves primarily a social function, it should support, if not encourage, the wearer in his or her social transactions.

Based on the above discussion, the present study was formulated with the specific objective of finding a) the relationship between proximity of clothing to self with appearance management and social participation, b) the moderating effect of socio-economic status on this relationship and c) the amount of variance in appearance management and social participation as predicted by proximity of clothing to self.

The specific hypotheses of the present study are:

1. There will be a significant relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management.
2. Socio-economic status will have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management.
3. A considerable part of variance in appearance management would be predicted by proximity of clothing to self.
4. There will be significant relationship between proximity of clothing to self and social participation.
5. Socio-economic status will have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and social participation.
6. A considerable part of variance in Social participation would be predicted by proximity of clothing to self.

## METHODOLOGY

Subjects undertaken for the present study were drawn from six schools (only for girls) within the Municipal Corporation of Jaipur city, Rajasthan. Adolescent girls from the age group of 15-18 years participated in the study. A total of 600 questionnaires were administered to get data from



200 girls belonging to each socioeconomic group (low, middle and high). Purposive sampling technique was used for selection of sample. Correlation design was used for the study since none of the variables were manipulated by the investigator.

Measures were selected for the current research based on their successful use in previous research with an adolescent sample to promote comparability to the findings of the previous research.

Following tools were used to measure different variables:

- 1) **Socio-Economic Status Scale (SES):** The socioeconomic status scale by Dubey and Nigam (2005) was used to find out the socio-economic status of the adolescents. The test-retest reliability for this scale is 0.81. There are 30 items in the SES scale. The items consist of a list of statements which help differentiate the adolescents as belonging to the high, middle or low socio-economic group. There are four alternatives for each statement. The adolescents were asked to tick the alternative which best describes their socioeconomic condition. Scoring was done according to the instructions given in the manual. On the basis of the overall score obtained the subjects were classified as belonging to the high (score of 80 and above), middle (score of 60-79) or low (score of 59 and below) socio-economic group
- 2) **Proximity of clothing to self-scale:** The proximity of clothing to self scale developed by Sontag and Schlater (1982) was used to measure the psychological closeness of clothing to the self of the adolescents. The construct reliability of the scale is 0.83 and the extracted variance is 0.46. The PCS scale has a total of 24 items. The items consist of a list of statements describing the way clothing may or may not relate to a person. There are six alternatives for each statement. The adolescents were asked to place a number between 1 and 6 using a 6-point Likert scale. All the items in the PCS scale are positively coded; there are no reverse coded items in the scale. Scoring was done according to the instructions given in the manual. The summated score of all the 24 items provides the PCS score of the adolescent. Since all the items are positively coded; higher the score, higher the proximity towards clothing of the sample.
- 3) **Appearance management Scale:** Appearance management behavior of adolescent girls was measured by using the multi-dimensional body self –relations questionnaire (MBSRQ) developed by Brown, Cash & Mikulka (1990). There are seven subscales of the MBSRQ scale namely appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, fitness evaluation, fitness orientation, health evaluation, health orientation and illness orientation. Only first two subscales appearance evaluation and appearance orientation were used for the present study to assess the appearance management behavior of adolescent girls. The Chronbach's alpha reliability of appearance evaluation dimension is 0.88 and for appearance orientation is 0.85.

There are a total of 19 items in the two subscales randomly placed in the appearance management scale which consists of a list of statements about how subjects might think, feel, or behave about their appearance. Some items are positively coded while some are negatively coded. There are five alternatives for each statement. The adolescents were asked to place a number between 1 and 5 using a 5-point Likert scale. Total sum of scores was taken according to the instructions given in the manual to obtain the final



appearancemanagement score. A higher score on the appearancemanagement scale indicates higher satisfaction with one's appearance and more investment of time and money into one's appearance.

- 4) **Social participation scale:** Social participation of the adolescents was measured by The Perceived Adolescent Relationship Scale developed by Andrews and Francis (1989) to find out the level of participation of the sample in groups outside the family. The Chronbach's alpha reliability for the social participation scale is 0.68. The subscale has 3 items that describe the pattern of social participation of individuals. There are seven alternatives for each statement. The adolescents were asked to place a number between 1 and 7 on a 7-point Likert scale. All the 3 items in the SP scale are positively coded; there are no reverse coded items in the scale. The summated score of all the 3 items provides the Social participation score of the adolescent. Since all the items are positively coded; higher the score, higher the social participation of the subjects in social activities.

### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS:

Raw data was analyzed with the help of SPSS software using the following statistical techniques: Coefficient of correlation was calculated to find out the degree and form of relation between proximity of clothing to self with appearance management and social participation. Sub-group analysis was done to examine the moderating effect of socio-economic status on the relationship of proximity of clothing to self with appearance management and social participation. Regression analysis was used to find the percentage of variance in proximity of clothing to self as predicted by appearancemanagement and social participation among adolescent girls.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Proximity of clothing to self and appearancemanagement

**Table 1: Coefficient of correlation between proximity of clothing to self and appearancemanagement for the overall sample (N=600)**

Proximity of clothing to self	Appearance management	.252 (**)
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\*\* Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$

**Table 2: Critical ratio between the coefficient of correlation between proximity of clothing to self and appearancemanagement in the three sub-groups of socioeconomic status**

Sr. no.	Socio-economic status Sub-groups	Correlation coefficient between Proximity of clothing to self & appearance management	Critical Ratio (z)	Level of significance (p)
1	Low	$r = 0.306 (**)$	0.22	0.83
	Middle	$r = 0.286 (**)$		
2	Middle	$r = 0.286 (**)$	-1.67	0.09
	High	$r = 0.432 (**)$		
3	Low	$r = 0.306 (**)$	-1.45	0.15
	High	$r = 0.432 (**)$		

\*\* Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$



**Table 3: Regression Analysis of proximity of clothing to self on appearance management**

Multiple R	0.252
R square	0.063
Adjusted R square	0.062
Standard error	8.719
F	40.618
Significance of F (p)	0.000

The table 1 reveals significant relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management in the overall sample ( $r = 0.252^{***}$ ). The results of table 2 shows that socioeconomic status does not have any moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management in all the three sub-groups namely low-middle, middle-high and low-high, since all critical ratios are found non significant ( $p > 0.01$ ). Therefore we reject hypothesis 2. The findings of table 3 show that proximity of clothing to self-account for 6.3% of the variance in appearance management. Therefore, we partially accept hypothesis 3.

Adolescence is a stage when an individual is most anxious about the image he or she presents before others. Since clothing is a part of image that is visible in social context, concerns about acceptable and favorable clothing motivates him to experiment with his clothing. In the process of this experimentation, adolescents become psychologically linked with their clothing and develop proximity towards their clothing. clothing is used as appearance management tool to present a favorable image, which will not only help him, receive positive responses from the peers but also acceptance and inclusion into the peer group. Greater the psychological closeness towards clothing more is the indulgence in clothing use as an appearance management tool. This is apparent as adolescents are often seen investing more time and energy in clothing practices. They consciously select clothing to construct and maintain an attractive appearance which is further reinforced by positive evaluations from peers and family members. Their clothing helps them gain a sense of personal competence and makes them feel good about themselves (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004).

These days adolescents from all socioeconomic groups are exposed to latest clothing and fashion trends through one common channel i.e. media. Moreover, dress or clothing items are available in the market in every price range so that adolescents from all socioeconomic groups have the accessibility to the same kind and design of clothing or dress in their own budget. Therefore, adolescents from all socioeconomic groups, with their respective proximities towards clothing can indulge into similar appearance management behaviors within their own means. This indicates that there is a relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management irrespective of the socioeconomic group to which an adolescent belongs. Therefore socioeconomic group does not have any moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management.

The present results are in harmony with the results of earlier studies which found relations between various clothing and appearance variables. Smucker & Creekmore (1972) and Steinberg (1985) confirmed that adolescents identify themselves through conforming to preferred styles of clothing, attitudes or action established in the adolescent subculture. They become more



conscious and interested in their clothing and use it as a tool for validation of the self and inclusion in social interactions. They manage their appearances to a great extent through clothing. They value clothing more than other objects as part of the self and psychologically become linked to clothing, i.e. develop proximity towards clothing.

Roach and Eicher, (1979), noted that the perceived quality of life of adolescents may be influenced about their feelings for their clothing because clothing is very salient to them. Adolescents become more conscious about and interested in their clothing than younger children and develop a high proximity towards clothing. Managing their appearances through clothing practices becomes a second nature to the adolescents as this helps them to gain social acceptance in their peer group. Therefore, a significant correlation between proximity of clothing to self and appearance management is inevitable, which is clear from the results.

Kaiser, (1990); Bouchard, (2002) confirmed that adolescents normally have a great interest in clothes and in their own appearance. Of all the social groups, teenage is one of the group for whom fashion and physical appearance are the most important. They use clothes to feel better about their bodies, to conform to their peer group and to conform to specific role models. MacGillivray & Wilson, (1997) and Kaiser (1990) believed that teens' conformity to clothing patterns occurs as part of social interactions and represents a major factor in peer acceptance.

**Table 4: Proximity of clothing to self and social participation coefficient of correlation between proximity of clothing to self and social participation for the overall sample (n=600)**

Proximity of clothing to self	Social participation	.059
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\*\* Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$

**Table 5: Critical ratio between the coefficient of correlation between proximity of clothing to self and social participation in the three sub-groups of socioeconomic status**

Sr. no.	Socio-economic status sub-group	Correlation coefficient between proximity of clothing to self and social participation	Critical Ratio (z)	Level of Significance (p)
1	Low	$R = 0.055$	-0.74	0.46
	Middle	$R = 0.129$		
2	Middle	$R = 0.129$	-0.75	0.46
	High	$r = 0.202 (**)$		
3	Low	$R = 0.055$	-1.49	0.14
	High	$r = 0.202 (**)$		

\*\* Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$



**Table 6: Regression analysis of proximity of clothing to self on social participation**

Multiple R	0.059
R square	0.003
Adjusted R square	0.002
Standard error	3.612
F	2.061
Significance of F (p)	0.152

Table 4 shows that there is non-significant correlation between proximity of clothing to self and social participation in the overall sample ( $n=600$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is being rejected. The results in the table 5 show that socioeconomic status does not have any moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and social participation (as all critical ratios are non significant). Therefore, we reject the hypothesis 5. The results of regression analysis of proximity of clothing to self on social participation (table 6), showed that proximity of clothing to self does not have a significant effect on social participation. Therefore proximity of clothing to self does not account for any variance in social participation. Hence, we reject the hypothesis 6. Adolescents are often critical about their feelings towards clothing and personal appearance. Clothing or dress influences acceptance of an adolescent into a particular group. Dress limits the social participation of adolescents when they judge their clothing as inappropriate for the situation. Conversely, dressing in a way that ensures social comfort in the presence of peers contributes significantly to their social survival. But the given results show that there was no correlation between proximity of clothing to self and social participation of adolescents for the overall sample and for adolescents belonging to low and middle socioeconomic group. For high socioeconomic group, significant positive correlation was found between proximity of clothing to self and social participation. This difference may be because of the other social and cultural factors responsible for adolescent development such as family environment, upbringing, values, priorities and status in society.

Clothing patterns of adolescents are more or less the same in all socioeconomic groups. In a casual situation, it is difficult to classify the adolescents into different socioeconomic groups on the basis of their dress or clothing, as all are dressed according to the prevailing fashion. Cheaper as well as expensive versions of a dress pattern are available in the market to cater to the demands of a wide range of consumers belonging to different socio-economic groups. The easier accessibility to same pattern of dress within one's own means makes the adolescents belonging to different socioeconomic groups equally competitive in the field of fashion and therefore, they do not feel that they are inappropriately dressed in any situation. This reflects in the results as there is no correlation between proximity of clothing to self and social participation for overall sample. This also explains why socioeconomic group does not have any moderating effect on the relationship between proximity of clothing to self and social participation and why proximity of clothing to self does not account for any variance in social participation.

Only for adolescents belonging to high socioeconomic group, significant correlations between proximity of clothing to self and social participation were found. This may be because values and attitudes toward oneself and one's society influence levels of social participation. This indicates that people who value clothing differently i.e., have different proximities towards clothing; differ



in their pattern of social participation. Adolescents belonging to high socioeconomic group are expected to wear much more expensive and branded clothing according to their social status and therefore their social participation is more dependent on the appropriateness of their clothing compared to adolescents belonging to lower and middle socioeconomic status. Their social participation becomes limited as every time they enter a social situation they are expected to wear new and luxurious clothing which shall not be repeated next time.

The present findings are not in harmony with the results of previous studies which show possible linkages between different clothing variables and various forms of social participation. The results of Harrison's study (1968) of college males indicate that interest in clothing related positively to social participation, while Strickland (1969) found that girls who participated more than others and also held positions in organizations demonstrated greater clothing awareness. Kaiser (1983-84) demonstrated the importance of clothing and appearance through linking stages of social acceptance with participation in a variety of situations. Since appearance is what is presented to others in social situations, normative dress enhances social participation.

### CONCLUSION:

Adolescence is a stage when an individual is most anxious about the image he or she presents before others. Clothing being a part of image that is visible in social context, concerns about acceptable and favorable clothing motivates adolescents to become psychologically linked with their clothing and develop proximity towards their clothing. Clothing is used as an appearance management tool to present a favorable image, which helps the adolescent receive positive responses from the peers and favor his or her acceptance and inclusion into the peer group. Adolescents are seen investing more time and energy in clothing practices, consciously selecting clothing to construct and maintain an attractive appearance which is further reinforced by positive evaluations from peers and family members. Since similar patterns of dress or clothing items are available in the market in every price range, adolescents from all socioeconomic groups, with their respective Proximities towards clothing can indulge into similar appearance management techniques within their own means. Proximity of clothing to self is positively correlated, with and accounts for variance in appearance management irrespective of the socioeconomic group.

Social and cultural factors are responsible for adolescent development such as family environment, upbringing, values, priorities and status in society result in different correlations between proximity of clothing to self and social participation among different socio-economic groups. Only for adolescents belonging to high socioeconomic group, correlation exists between proximity of clothing to self and social participation. Adolescents belonging to high socioeconomic group are expected to wear much more luxurious and branded clothing in accordance to their social status and therefore their social participation is more dependent on the appropriateness of their clothing compared to adolescents belonging to lower and middle socioeconomic status. Their social participation becomes limited as they are expected to wear latest and lavish clothing in every social circumstance.



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