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Clothing and Self Concept in Cisgender and Transgender Individuals

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Clothing and Self Concept in Cisgender and Transgender Individuals

Abstract

Clothing serves as an expression of the self and means for self-evaluation and self-enhancement. Gender, which is central to one's self-concept is performed through adherence to prescribed gender roles and dress. Using discrepancy theory and self-image congruity, the authors examined the relationship between gender identity and proximity of clothing to self, under the moderating effect of internalization. An online survey of 406 participants (150 cisgender women, 55 cisgender men, 101 trans men, and 100 trans women). MANOVA findings confirmed gender as a central component of self-concept which affects one's relationship with their clothing specifically when they are used to create a common understanding of the body. Results indicated clothing to be more important for cisgender women (Clothing in Relation to Self as Structure, Self-Esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant, and Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant) as an expression of their self-perception than transgender individuals. Further, cisgender women engaged more in self-evaluation with social standards, with no significant moderating effect of internalization observed. The current study contributes to the growing body of literature on gender and dress behaviors, specifically how transgender identities impact one's relationship with their clothing.

Keywords: gender identity, clothing, internalization, self-discrepancy, body image

Introduction

Embodied clothing practices are a compelling and relevant topic because of how personal and public clothes are in everyday life. Because we use our appearance to construct and visually represent our identity, clothing is a universally important form of appearance management characterized by the endless process of checking and evaluating one's visual self-presentation. Clothing is a communication system that can be used to simultaneously express individuality and affirm expected behaviors in social interactions (31, 32, 37). How others respond to us depends on their perception or interpretation of our appearance, and we construct an understanding of others through our interpretations of their appearance (31).

Despite the extensive research on clothing and identity (e.g., 12, 19, 36, 64), how one's gender identity plays an active role in their clothing practices and identity management, specifically from a consumer behavior perspective, remain less understood. For example, while clothing has been reported as a primary means for one to achieve social affirmation and comfortability on gender identities (e.g., 33, 50), most of the gender-oriented consumer studies take a more feminist approach with limited equal gender representation (14). Today, although gender identity is beyond the polarity of masculinity and femininity (8), the gender-issues scholarship related to consumers continues to focus on a more biased concern, such as gender-based pricing (23). As one's gender identity and related gendered body expectations may contribute to their consumption preferences (7), this current void in the consumer behavior literature regarding transgender individuals can be concerning. Thus, this research aims to fill the research gap by introducing a gendered context to understand clothing behavior, specifically by investigating the role of gender identity with respect to one's relationship with their clothing.

Clothing, as an extension of the self, allows us to organize our individual beliefs about

ourselves while simultaneously defining ourselves in social relations. This is perhaps even more important for individuals who are negotiating social acceptance and self-actualization. Therefore, by investigating the role of gender identity in relation to clothing behaviors and identity management, this study envisioned to make important theoretical and practical contributions. The study findings are expected to guide clothing experts to better fulfil market needs by acknowledging the fluid gender spectrum of current times and understanding how consumers variably behave based on gender identity.

Literature Review

A person's self-concept (i.e., the perception or impressions of oneself) is motivated by self-esteem (i.e., seeking enhancement to the self-concept) and self-consistency (i.e., internal stability; 25). The manner in which we define ourselves includes our collective beliefs and feelings as well as the assessment of our physical self, which can be expressed through our dress behavior. Identity is the self-constructed, mental representation of who we are within various social contexts (11). A person's identities (past, present, and aspirational) are constructed through the various roles they occupy in society (e.g., gender) and constitute one's global self-concept, which is perceived and presented to both the self and to others through visual imagery (11). Therefore, our behavior is often determined by expectations of us by others.

Proximity of clothing to self (PCS) is a concept concerned with the psychological relationship of clothing to one's expression of the self and adaptive functioning of the self (60). More specifically, it is used to explain clothing practices as (a) a component of the self, (b) a symbol of one's identity or mood, (c) an aspect of appearance by which the self is established, (d) an expression of self-worth, (e) a response to self-evaluation, (f) and/or one's degree of body satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Clothing, thus, serves as an expression of the self and a modality for self-evaluation, which results in an estimation of one's self-worth (60). Through the management of one's appearance, a person may satisfy the need for self-consistency, which may improve their body satisfaction and enhance their self-esteem (31; 63).

Self-Discrepancy and Self-Image Congruity Theoretical Framework

This study uses discrepancy theory and self-image congruity as conceptual frameworks to explain the relationship between gender identity and proximity of clothing to self. Theories of impression management, such as Higgins (27) self-discrepancy theory, posit that in social contexts people select and organize identity information that will help them to control their personal image, and they seek confirmation about their identity through social feedback. Consequently, people are motivated to behave in a manner that contributes to social acceptance and simultaneously allows them to approach congruency with their ideal self. That is, such self-discrepancies drive consumers to behave in ways, to make consumption preferences to cope with or reduce such incongruities (38). Social comparisons and perceived discrepancies between self-states (e.g., ideal self and actual self) commonly result in various forms of psychological distress (e.g., low self-esteem; 47, 58), including dissatisfaction with body and self (e.g., 22, 49).

Behaviors that create congruence between the self-states are associated with general psychological well-being (e.g., elevated self-esteem; 26, 27). Self-concept theory (e.g., congruity theory) suggests that people may create their identity and resolve discrepancies between self-states through the manipulation and modification of their appearance (25, 71). People choose to purchase and consume certain products, such as clothing and cosmetics, that help them create or maintain an identity, and they are more likely to value and use products that

they believe establish or maintain a positive self-image that may subsequently enhance their self-esteem (25, 26, 35, 58, 71).

Gender Identity and Clothing

Gender, which is central to one's self-concept and social identity, is commonly defined as a person's basic sense of self as male (e.g., being a boy or a man) or female (e.g., being a girl or woman; 5). Gender is determined for us and learned in early childhood (16, 72), and gender identity is then created through our performance of prescribed gender roles and stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (9, 18). Although the process of gender identification is complex, by middle childhood children have developed a rather stable concept of their gender and the degree to which they wish to conform to social expectations of maleness or femaleness (3).

Some individuals lie outside the polarized dichotomy of masculinity and femininity and others may experience subjective distress when their gender identity is incongruent with their sex assigned at birth (i.e., gender dysphoria; 4). Transgender is the term used to describe an individual whose gender identity differs from their assigned gender at birth and experiences periods of gender dysphoria (66). Transgender is commonly used to label anyone who does not classify themselves as cisgender (i.e., individuals who identify with their assigned at birth sex), including those individuals who belong to a third gender or who lie outside the binary gender spectrum.

Extant literature has demonstrated that one's identity, including gender identity, and feelings about the self are significantly related to one's dress behaviors (e.g., 20, 64). Gender, as a major component of consumers' self-identity, and the desire to express expected gender role attitudes and gendered body expectations may guide certain consumer behaviors (18), such as product and brand choice (7). Brands and products (e.g., clothing) are culturally coded and communicate information that consumers use to conceal, establish, enhance, or confirm their identity (e.g., gender identity; 28, 46, 54).

For transgender individuals, appearance and dress are central to the process of self-discovery, construction, and presentation of gender (29; 63). Compared to cisgender individuals, transgender individuals may rely more on apparel and appearance modifications to camouflage or change their appearance to better approximate societal expectations of what it means to look feminine or masculine and to negotiate the disparity between their perceived and ideal gendered selves. Clothing has been shown to be a major, yet relatively innocuous and easy, first step in the transition process that socially affirms one's gender identity and the degree to which they feel "genuine, authentic, and comfortable with their gender identity and external appearance" (e.g., 33, 50).

Clothing, the Self, and the Body

Appearance and body satisfaction are central to one's identity. Appearance ideals are established by cultural factors and reinforced through socialization (e.g., social media; 62) and determined by one's gender identity (e.g., women are to be thin, and men are to be muscular; 10, 44). Sociocultural models (e.g., 62) suggest that men and women internalize cultural appearance-related messages related to gender and traditional ideals concerning body and appearance. Essentially, people incorporate or set the ideal of attractiveness as their personal standard in the creation of their self-schema. Sociocultural pressures, internalization, and comparison to appearance ideals may result in heightened levels of body dissatisfaction, which is managed daily as appearance management and self-evaluation (e.g., 43). For many men and women,

attractiveness and social value are dependent upon their how closely their appearance and body approximate their respective culturally determined ideals (10, 45, 67). Therefore, expectations of femininity and masculinity are defined and linked to specific physical attributes through consistent exposure to socio-cultural messages (10, 42). Exposure to such imagery and the resulting negative self-sentiments may drive men and women to participate in body changing behaviors, such as diet and exercise (8; 52). The use of apparel and grooming products may provide a more accessible option for camouflaging perceived flaws or accentuation of those aspects that approach cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity (19, 54, 68).

Population-based studies on body dissatisfaction have largely been limited to cisgender individuals. However, scholars are beginning to examine body and appearance related issues within the transgender population (e.g., 1, 29, 63). Many studies show that transgender individuals experience high degrees of body dissatisfaction because of the dissonance between their gender and assigned at birth gender, which is often coupled with social pressures to conform to the appearance expectations for their gender (e.g., 1, 29). Some transgender individuals experience heteronormative gender role pressure to conform to cisgender, heterosexual expressions both as their assigned at birth gender and even as their gender identity. They often pursue conventional standards of attractiveness or cisnormative gender expressions to avoid stigma (41). Other studies have argued that body image concerns in transgender individuals are primarily dependent on where a person finds themselves in the transition and self-acceptance process (e.g., 34, 39), especially as their appearance approximates sociocultural expectations of maleness and femaleness.

Although there is a clear connection between body image and gender identity (44), only a handful of studies explore the relationship between body cathexis, clothing, and gender identity (e.g., 19, 20, 55). More specifically, they have demonstrated that clothing is not only used to construct a particular image and express individuality, but it can be strategically used to modify, conceal or reveal body size and shape to conform to cultural ideals of femininity or masculinity (19, 55).

Purpose of the Present Study

Despite the growing body of research related to dress and identity, the role of gender identity in relation to clothing practices and identity management is relatively understudied. Few studies have attempted to examine clothing in relation to self-concept, and gender identity (e.g., 19, 63), and research examining how internalization moderates the relationship between identity and proximity of clothing to self (i.e., the psychological relationship of clothing to one's expression of the self) to self is next to nil. Traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity have shifted over the past few decades indicating a need to challenge the prevailing discourse on gender and consumer behavior. Gender is no longer viewed through the dualistic lens of masculinity and femininity. Rather society is more accepting of a more fluid approach to gender that acknowledges temporal changes in gender identity and expression. Millennials and Gen Z are eroding the gender binaries by identifying as something other than traditional cisgender identities (61). Therefore, research is needed to investigate dress behaviors and attitudes while considering a more fluid gender spectrum. Furthermore, because gender is a common market segmentation criterion, it is important for merchandisers, marketers, and consumer behaviorists to understand the variance in information processing and reactions to marketing stimuli amongst genders so that they may create consumer experiences that match each market's needs and preferences.

Using discrepancy theory and self-image congruity as conceptual frameworks, the authors examined the relationship between gender identity and proximity of clothing to self (i.e., relationship with clothing), and the moderating role of their internalization societal standards in a sample of cisgender and transgender people. Because clothing, as a visible means of identity expression, can potentially reduce social stigma and improve body satisfaction during gender transition, the authors propose that the importance of clothing will be more important for transgender individuals compared to cisgender individuals. Specifically, the authors propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Transgender participants (i.e., transwomen and transmen) will have higher scores on all subscales of the proximity of the clothing to self, compared to their cisgender counterparts.

Hypothesis 2a: One's internalization of Thin/Low Body Fat ideals will moderate the relationship between gender identity and proximity of the clothing to self.

Hypothesis 2b: One's internalization of Muscular/Athletic ideals will moderate the relationship between gender identity and proximity of the clothing to self.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Following approval from the university's IRB, the first author posted the survey questionnaire on a secure website (i.e., Qualtrics). A research panel was recruited directly from a pool of respondents in the U.S. who registered to be part a market research service (i.e., Qualtrics). Qualtrics participants received \$5.00 financial compensation. Participants were also solicited from universities located in the Northeast, the Midwest, and Southwest U.S. to participate in a study on gender identity, body image and psychological health. The participants accessed a secure website where they provided consent and then anonymously completed the survey. When students entered the website, they provided consent and then anonymously completed the survey, which took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Other than course extra credit, no compensation was offered. Students were oversampled to ensure sufficiently large groups of younger cisgender men and cisgender women (i.e., 18-25) to balance the sample of transgender individuals recruited by Qualtrics. Participants answered two validity check questions to indicate their attention to the study, such that specific answers had to be chosen to answer those questions correctly.

Initially, 484 people entered the website and completed the consent form. Due to low sample size, 29 participants were excluded because they selected nonbinary/gender fluid/genderqueer or other as their gender identity. Another 49 responses were deleted because they left five or more questions completely blank. Of the total participants, 299 were recruited from Qualtrics (50 cisgender women, 49 cisgender men, 101 transmen, and 99 transwomen) and 107 were recruited from the universities and social media (100 cisgender women, 6 cisgender men, 0 transmen, and 1 trans woman).

The final sample for the current study was comprised of 406 individuals; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.70$ years ($SD = 15.57$). The gender identity breakdown of respondents is as follows: 150 cisgender women, 55 cisgender men, 101 transmen, and 100 transwomen. In terms of ethnicity, 79 (19.5%) reported being Hispanic/Latinx. In terms of race, the majority were White (63.8%, $n = 259$), followed by 21 (5.2%) who were African American/Black, 18 (4.4%) Asian or Pacific Islander, 13 (3.2%) Native American, 4 (1.0%) bi-racial, 2 (0.5%) Middle Eastern, 2 (0.5%) African, and 6 (1.5%) selected "other". Most were single and not currently in any type of

romantic relationship (31.8%, $n = 129$), followed by 124 (30.5 %) who indicated being married or in a domestic partnership. In terms of education, the majority (37.2%, $n = 151$) had 1-5 of college, but no degree; 67 (16.5%) were high school graduates; and 49 (12.1%) held bachelor's degrees. Reported household incomes were: less than \$25,000 (19.5%, $n = 79$), \$25,000 to \$49,999 (22.4%, $n = 91$), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (21.2%, $n = 86$), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (12.3%, $n = 50$), and \$100,000 or more (24.4%, $n = 99$).

Instruments

Demographics and Gender Identity

At the survey's end, the participants provided their current age, current weight and height, ethnicity, race, educational level, relationship status, and annual household income. Gender identity (independent variable for all analyses) is categorized as (1) cisgender woman, (2) cisgender man, (3) transman, and (4) transwoman.

Internalization

To measure internalization (moderator in this study), five items from the Internalization-Thin/Low Body Fat subscale and five items from the Muscular/Athletic subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Attractiveness Questionnaire-4 (SATAQ-4; 56) assessed identification with socially prescribed ideals of athleticism and thinness. On questions such as, "I want my body to look very thin", participants rated each item from 1 (*definitely disagree*) to 5 (*definitely agree*). Total score is the mean of the five items; higher scores indicate stronger internalization. A high score Schaefer et al. (56) reported Cronbach's alphas of .87 (Thin/Low Body Fat) and .91 (Muscular/Athletic). Cronbach's alpha from the current study was .81 (Thin/Low Body Fat) and .89 (Muscular/Athletic).

Proximity of Self to Clothing

To measure the psychological closeness of clothing to a person's perception of self the authors utilized the Proximity of Clothing to Self Scale (PCS; 60). Participants responded to 78 questions on a scale of 1 (*never or almost never true of me*) to 6 (*always or almost always true of me*) and a high score indicated higher proximity to clothing. The PCS Scale consists of six subscales (dependent variables of this study): Clothing in Relation to Self as Structure, Clothing in Relation to Self as Process I-Communication of Self to Others, Clothing in Relation to Self as Process II- Response to Judgement of Others, Clothing in Relation to Self-Esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant, Clothing in Relation to Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant, and Clothing in Relation to Body Image and Body Cathexis. Sontag and Lee (60) reported a Cronbach's alphas ranging from .78 to .88. The Cronbach's alphas from the current study ranged from .90 to .98.

Data Analysis

To test the study hypotheses, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was deemed appropriate over multiple ANOVAs to control for the inflated error rates. Preliminary analyses included testing of normality, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and presence of outliers. Data were distributed normally as evidenced by low skewness and kurtosis values (<1) and absence of outliers was confirmed by normally distributed histograms plots. Box's M tested homoscedasticity, with a significant p-value ($p < .001$) indicating violation of the assumption of equality of the variances across groups. A further Levene's test based on means

revealed that all the six sub-scales of the dependent variable were statistically significant. When assumptions of homogeneity of variance cannot be assumed for dependent variables, a more stringent level of alpha, than .05, such as .01, is recommended (2) and thus used in further analyses to evaluate the MANOVA results. Likewise, Pillai's Trace statistic was used for the multivariate tests, as it is more robust to violation of assumptions compared to other statistics (48).

Results

To test for the direct impacts of gender identity as well as the moderation effect of the participants' degree of internalization on PCS, MANOVA was conducted using four groups: cisgender women ($n = 150$), cisgender men ($n = 55$), transmen ($n = 101$), and transwomen ($n = 100$). Although the cell sizes were unequal, such were sufficient for minimum statistical power (at least $n=20$; 24). Hypothesis 1 posited that transgender participants, compared to their cisgender counterparts, would express higher proximity to clothing in relation to (a) Self as Structure, (b) Self as Process I-Communication of Self to Others, (c) Self as Process II-Response to Judgement of Others, (d) Self-Esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant, (e) Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant, and (f) Body Image and Cathexis. Pillai's Trace (.38) indicated that the six subscales of PCS significantly differed across individuals with different gender identities, multivariate $F(18,329)=2.82, p<.001$, and had a high level of association at partial $\eta^2 = .13$.

ANOVA results indicated that gender identity had a statistically significant effect on three out of six subscales of the proximity to clothing self, which are Self as Structure, $F(3, 121) = 6.19, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$; Self-Esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant, $F(3, 121) = 5.414, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$; and Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant, $F(3, 121) = 4.578, p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Self as Process I-Communication of Self to Others, Self as Process II- Response to Judgement of Others, and Body Image and Body Cathexis were not statistically significant and hence not further analyzed.

A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was conducted to analyze the comparative differences between the gender identities based on the three subscales of PCS. Results revealed that for Clothing in Relation to Self as Structure, cisgender women had significantly higher scores than cisgender men ($t = .83, p < .001$), transmen ($t = .61, p < .001$), and transwomen ($t = .79, p < .001$). That is, for cisgender women, clothing is an important reflection or expression of their self-perception. For Clothing in Relation to Self-Esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant, cisgender women, again, had significantly higher scores than transmen ($t = .64, p < .001$), transwomen ($t = .57, p = .001$), and cisgender men ($t = 1.04, p < .001$). Thus, for cisgender women, clothing appears to affect how they cognitively evaluate themselves in comparison to social standards others. Similarly, for Clothing in Relation to Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant, cisgender women had higher scores than cisgender men ($t = 1.09, p < 0.001$), transmen ($t = .75, p < .001$) and transwomen ($t = .89, p < .001$). Cisgender women's clothing evoked stronger generalized emotional response towards themselves compared to participants of other gender identities. Additionally, while the omnibus multivariate results indicated of no significant difference among the gender-identities for Self as Process II- Response to Judgement of Others, a pairwise comparison in post-hoc analysis indicated that transmen had significantly higher scores than cisgender women ($t = .62, p = .001$) and cisgender men ($t = .79, p = .001$). That is, for transmen, clothing serves as an important medium to respond to others' judgments about themselves for

self-validation. Thus, H_1 is partially supported. Table 1 presents a comparative summary for all genders based on their scores on the six sub-scales of proximity to clothing self.

Insert table 1 approximately here

Hypothesis 2 a and b concerned inferences comparing gender identities across the six dimensions of Proximity of Self to Clothing under the moderating impacts of Internalization-Thin/Low Body Fat ideals and Internalization of Muscular/Athletic ideals. Pillai's Trace (1.21) indicated that the six subscales of proximity to clothing self were affected by participant's gender identity under the moderating influence of Internalization-Thin/Low Body Fat ideals, multivariate $F(180,692) = 1.21$ with a high level of association at partial $\eta^2 = .20$, but such impact was observed to be non-significant at $p = .41$. Similarly, a non-significant moderating influence ($p = .68$) of Internalization of Muscular/Athletic ideals was observed at Pillai's Trace (1.2) multivariate $F(192,694) = .95$ with a high level of association at partial $\eta^2 = .20$. Thus, H_2 is rejected. Figure 1 shows the findings of the study.

Insert figure 1 approximately here

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to determine if there exists a relationship between gender identity and proximity of clothing to self and if internalization processes would moderate the relationship. More specifically, the authors proposed that the importance of clothing would be greater for the transgender participants compared to their cisgender counterparts because past research (e.g., 33, 53) has demonstrated the importance of clothing in the transition process. Because clothing symbolizes arbitrary and culturally constructed ideas of femininity and masculinity it is an accessible mechanism to socially, and individually, affirm of one's gender.

Clothing in Relation to Self as Structure and Self-Evaluation

The present study's results largely confirmed previous research indicating that gender is a central component of self-concept and affects one's relationship with their clothing, specifically when they are used to create a common understanding of the body (e.g., 40). However, the results showed that clothing as an expression of self-perception was more important for cisgender women, not the transgender participants as hypothesized. Further analysis indicated that cisgender women also engage in more evaluations of, and emotional responses to, the self in comparison with a personal or social standard, which may directly affect their self-esteem. Consumers buy products for their symbolic benefits (e.g., bolstering self-esteem), yet research suggests that genders differ in the importance they assign to such belief and values (e.g., 54). Lower self-esteem individuals will place less emphasis on body-involving products because they do not feel these products affirm their self-concept (54, 65, 68). Clothing as an expression of personality and of the self can also satisfy the need for self-consistency (e.g., with a gender identity) and consequently the need for self-esteem because clothing allows the individual to approach one's ideal self-image (17).

The majority of social-psychological research on dress behavior has focused on cisgender women's relationship with clothing and has demonstrated that women are expected to be more concerned with appearance than men, specifically that they are expected to have greater involvement with fashion, beauty culture, and products (28, 46, 64). This discrepancy has been attributed to society's adherence to traditional gender roles, including a socially engrained power dichotomy that values women for their appearance (i.e., *being*), while men are appreciated for

their physical abilities and achievement (i.e., *doing*; 31). Therefore, it is not at all surprising that the current study confirmed other studies that claim women express a greater proximity of clothing to self, compared to men (59, 60), and clothing represents a significant part of a person's appearance management which can be used for the the positive function of self-assurance (69, 70).

The relationship between clothing, self-perception, and self-esteem in transgender individuals may not be as strong as hypothesized because transgender individuals may use other means to establish and affirm their sense of self, such as using a name that represents their gender identity, hormone replacement therapy, cosmetics, or even reassignment surgery (e.g., 33). In fact, for some individuals, self-positivity towards outer appearance comes only with the transition from one sex to the other, which permits the expression of a sense of self-authenticity in terms of gender identity, and therefore positivity is associated with where one finds themselves in the transition and self-acceptance process (39, 53), especially as their appearance approximates sociocultural expectations of masculinity and femininity.

Likewise, the findings of the current study can be attributed to the fact that there are fewer clothing options available for transgender individuals. The apparel marketplace has historically marginalized the trans community with respect to products (e.g., 51), services, retail space, and advertising, leaving transgender consumers feeling powerless and alienated (e.g., 13).

Clothing in Relation to Self as Process and Body Image

While people do use social feedback to derive a sense of self, it is a process that is true of all genders (33, 59, 71). Clothing often affects the way others perceive an individual and as a result can motivate a person to construct an image that evokes a positive response by others (40). However, the results of the current study did not demonstrate any influence of participants' gender identities on how important clothing is to their public self-consciousness. That is, even though participants used clothing to communicate aspects of oneself to others and respond to others' judgments, no significant differences were observed among transgender and cisgender individuals and their reliance on the nonverbal medium of clothing to convey messages about the self to the society.

Such a non-significant impact can be attributed to the changing times when society is shifting to less restrictive gender expectations. The clothing industry has evolved and attempts to obfuscate the distinctions between otherwise rigid gender identities. Crossing sartorial gender boundaries has been a recurring theme in popular culture, and the fashion world has recognized and commodified androgyny since at least the 1980s when popular music performers turned androgyny and cross-dressing into a trend (21). Today the fashion and apparel industries continue to dissolve gender boundaries associated with clothing by removing gender labels and even gendered departments (e.g., 6). Furthermore, brands are attempting to be more inclusive by openly featuring nonbinary and transgender individuals in advertisements and offering products tailored to their needs (15). Thus, as gender roles and expectations are blurred in the broader society, it might be that transgender participants did not feel any additional need to use clothing to communicate their identities, values, attitudes, moods, and self-regard to others, or to respond to actual or imagined judgments. Transgender participants do not use other's responses to their clothing to establish and validate the self any more than cisgender individuals because they may find more significant affirmation of their identity through other means such as, use of pronouns, personality, and feedback on body shape and appearance (e.g., hairstyle).

Clothing and Body Satisfaction

Because the process of dressing oneself involves modifications to the body, the act of wearing clothing suggests a close relationship between the body and clothing (31). For transgender individuals in the process of reconciling their identity, clothing is an accessible means to masculinize or feminize the body and even manage dissatisfaction by using it to suppress sexual characteristics (i.e., camouflage parts of the body). Contrary to the study's expectations that transgender individuals use clothing to reflect body satisfaction or compensate for body dissatisfaction, no significant differences were observed between cisgender and transgender participants in their use of clothing. In fact, all genders used clothing for body enhancement or management, which supports past studies that have demonstrated the equally important relationship between clothing and body satisfaction in cisgender men and women (e.g., 19, 59, 70). And although past studies have shown significantly high levels of body dissatisfaction in transgender individuals due to gender dissociation (e.g., 39; 63), others argue that body image preoccupations are dependent on where a transgender person finds themselves in the process of gender identity consolidation and self-acceptance (e.g., 34, 39). Therefore, it is possible that the transgender participants in the current study were in various stages of acceptance, or they affirmed their internal gender identity and increased body congruence via other body modifying behaviors (e.g., hormone therapy, cosmetics, diet, surgery).

Internalization as Moderator

Finally, in the current study, internalization processes (i.e., the active endorsement of gendered body ideals) and the use of clothing to communicate information about a person's identity to others is stable across cisgender and transgender individuals. The internalization of neither the thin ideal nor the muscular ideal moderated the relationship between gender identity and proximity of clothing to self.

The current outcome may also result from the fact that transgender individuals have internalized and pursued both types of body ideals at some point in their gender development, depending on whether they were trying to conform to expected gender roles and assignments and/or other social pressures. For example, transwomen may have pursued muscularity as their assigned sex at birth and later suppressed muscularity during their transition in order to feminize the body. In fact, three of the four groups have experienced being treated as a woman by society – including constant messages regarding the importance of appearance and objectification by others (i.e., men).

Conclusions

The results of the current study suggest several implications. Because gender is a common market segmentation standard, manufacturers and retailers should consider the product and service needs of each cohort. More specifically, they should consider how gender identification is linked to elements of choice and decision making so that they may create products and experiences that satisfy the needs and preferences of each consumer segment.

Increasingly, research (e.g., 69) reveals that consumer products, such as clothing can resolve people's concerns over their self-concept, such as body image and gender identity. Although overt gender-neutral fashion has become more popular over the past few years, the fashion and apparel marketplace still reflect a dichotomized assessment of gender (i.e., maleness and femaleness), which does not necessarily accommodate the transgender population. Despite the need, there is an underrepresentation of transgender individuals, products, and services in the

fashion and apparel world. Although only about 0.6% of the population self-identify as transgender (30), the importance of the symbolic and functional values of dress and fashion to this population cannot be ignored. This is especially true when research demonstrates that the LGBTQ community constitutes a \$1 trillion market that is largely overlooked (57). While some businesses are catching on, most mainstream clothing marketers exhibit a significant lack of understanding and inclusivity of transgender consumers. Inaccessibility to the products and services needed for impression management can lead to severe body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. This is especially noticeable for transgender individuals during the transition process (e.g., 34, 41). Thus, this empirical study calls for the attention of clothing industry marketing teams, as it is an essential opportunity for brands to consider consumers' preferences defined by their gender identities and eventually tap on the lucrative but overlooked market segment.

As with any study, the current study is not without limitations, which emphasizes the need for further investigation. First, although the participants represent the diversity of the general population, this study was limited by the smaller cisgender male sample compared to the cisgender female and transgender groups. Our four-category gender classification also does not capture the true variety of gender expressions and identities that exist in contemporary society including non-binary individuals. Thus, further research considering the comprehensive gender identities, their decision making applied to clothing consumption will be helpful.

We also did not ask for information on stage of transition or sexual orientation, which may have impacted the interpretation of the data. Transitioning (social and/or medical) may take years to complete, if ever. With each step of the gender affirmation process, individuals may experience shifts in sexual identity and gender expression, which may influence their personal understandings of themselves (41, 66), and likewise, call for additional scholarly exploration.

Finally, this current study considered the need for awareness among the marketing teams about consumers' gender identities and clothing consumption orientation. However, with the growing representation of transgender individuals in marketing messages, communicated through advertisements, future studies exploring the influence of such advertisements on the process of self-discrepancy and self-image congruity can offer interesting insights.

The current study contributes to the growing body of literature on gender and dress behaviors, specifically how transgender identities impact one's relationship with their clothing. As compared with previous investigations on clothing and gender, this study has several unique features. It is perhaps the only study that examines proximity of clothing to self with a sizeable transgender sample. Despite assumptions that transgender individuals will place greater emphasis on clothing behaviors, the current study demonstrates that cisgender women have closer relationships with their clothing. Furthermore, across all genders a person's personal relationship with clothing, self-perception, and self-evaluation is more important than viewer feedback.

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Table 1

Bonferroni Post Hoc Test for Pairwise Comparisons of Gender and Proximity of Self to Clothing

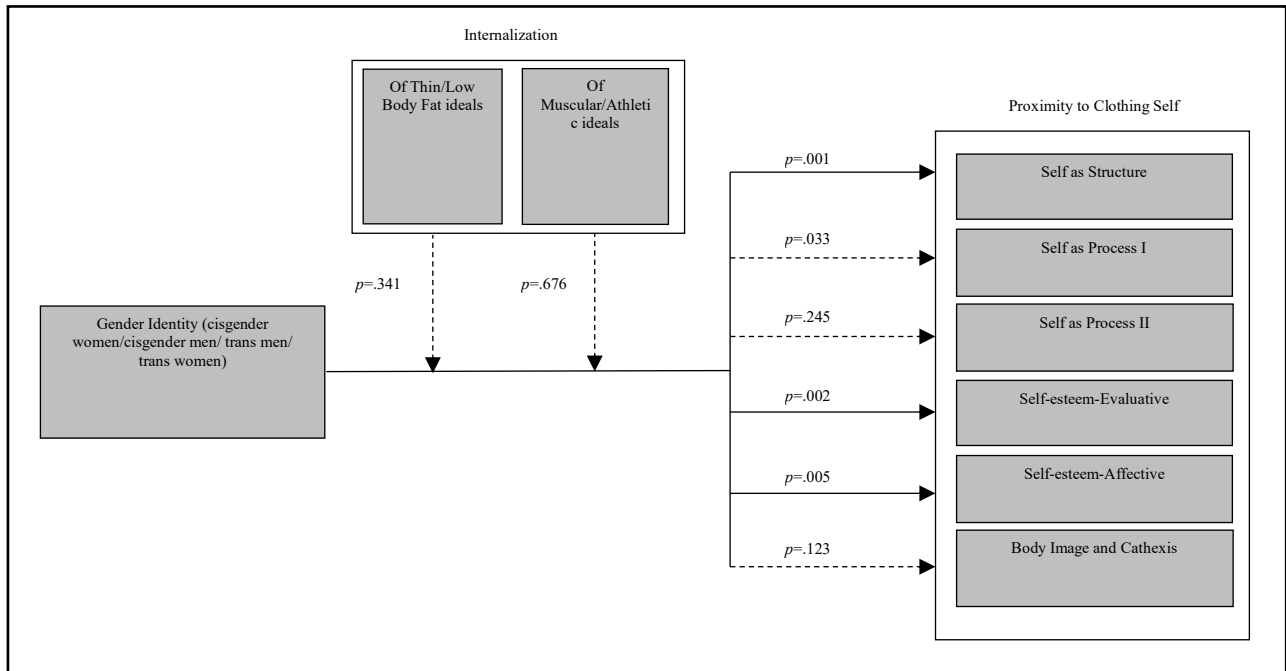
Gender Identity (I)	Gender Identity (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		<i>p</i>
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
Factor 1: Self as Structure						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	.83*	.164	.192	1.47	<.001
	Trans men	.61*	.134	.092	1.136	<.001
	Trans women	.79*	.135	.271	1.318	<.001
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-.83*	.164	-1.47	-.192	<.001
	Trans men	-.21	.175	-.896	.462	1.000
	Trans women	-.03	.175	-.717	.644	1.000
Trans men	Cisgender women	-.61*	.134	-1.136	-.092	<.001
	Cisgender men	.21	.175	-.462	.896	1.000
	Trans women	.18	.147	-.391	.752	1.000
Trans women	Cisgender women	-.79*	.135	-1.318	-.271	<.001
	Cisgender men	.03	.175	-.644	.717	1.000
	Trans men	-.18	.147	-.752	.391	1.000
Factor 2: Self as Process I-Communication of Self to Others						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	.52	.163	-.116	1.147	.012
	Trans men	.06	.133	-.460	.571	1.000
	Trans women	.20	.133	-.315	.719	.791
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-.52	.162	-1.147	-.116	.012
	Trans men	-.46	.173	-1.131	.211	.053
	Trans women	-.31	.173	-.986	.359	.435
Trans men	Cisgender women	-.06	.133	-.571	.460	1.000
	Cisgender men	.46	.173	-.211	1.131	.053
	Trans women	.15	.145	-.419	.711	1.000
Trans women	Cisgender women	-.20	.133	-.719	.315	.791

	Cisgender men	.31	.173	-.359	.986	.435
	Trans men	-.15	.145	-.712	.419	1.000
Factor 3: Self as Process II- Response to Judgement of Others						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	.18	.195	-.584	.934	1.000
	Trans men	-.62*	.160	-1.238	.001	.001
	Trans women	-.39	.160	-1.008	.235	.103
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-.18	.195	-.934	.584	1.000
	Trans men	-.79*	.208	-1.600	.013	.001
	Trans women	-.56	.208	-1.370	.247	.047
Trans men	Cisgender women	.62*	.160	-.001	1.238	.001
	Cisgender men	.79*	.208	-.013	1.600	.001
	Trans women	.23	.175	-.448	.911	1.000
Trans women	Cisgender women	.39	.160	-.235	1.008	.103
	Cisgender men	.56	.208	-.247	1.370	.047
	Trans men	-.23	.175	-.911	.448	1.000
Factor 4: Self-esteem-Evaluative Process Dominant						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	1.04*	.166	.400	1.688	<.001
	Trans men	.64*	.135	.113	1.164	<.001
	Trans women	.57*	.136	.047	1.102	<.001
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-1.04*	.166	-1.688	-.400	<.001
	Trans men	-.41	.176	-1.090	.280	.139
	Trans women	-.47	.177	-1.155	.217	.054
Trans men	Cisgender women	-.64*	.135	-1.164	-.113	<.001
	Cisgender men	.41	.176	-.280	1.090	.139
	Trans women	-.06	.148	-.640	.512	1.00
Trans women	Cisgender women	-.57*	.136	-1.102	-.047	<.001
	Cisgender men	.47	.177	-.217	1.155	.054
	Trans men	.06	.148	-.512	.640	1.00
Factor 5: Self-esteem- Affective Process Dominant						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	1.09*	.166	.447	1.733	<.001
	Trans men	.75*	.135	.220	1.271	<.001

	Trans women	.89*	.126	.360	1.414	<.001
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-1.09*	.166	·1.733	-.447	<.001
	Trans men	-.34	.176	·1.029	.339	.315
	Trans women	-.20	.176	-.889	.482	1.000
Trans men	Cisgender women	-.75*	.135	·1.271	-.220	<.001
	Cisgender men	.34	.176	-.339	1.029	.315
	Trans women	.14	.148	-.434	.717	1.000
Trans women	Cisgender women	-.89*	.126	·1.414	-.360	<.001
	Cisgender men	.20	.176	-.482	.889	1.000
	Trans men	-.14	.148	-.717	.434	1.000
Factor 6: Body Image and Cathexis						
Cisgender women	Cisgender men	.63*	.160	.008	1.254	.001
	Trans men	.12	.131	-.384	.633	1.000
	Trans women	.18	.131	-.329	.692	1.000
Cisgender men	Cisgender women	-.63*	.160	-1.254	-.008	.001
	Trans men	-.51	.170	-.169	.156	.021
	Trans women	-.45	.171	-1.113	.214	.057
Trans men	Cisgender women	-.12	.131	-.633	.384	1.000
	Cisgender men	.51	.170	-.156	.169	.021
	Trans women	.06	.143	-.501	.614	1.000
Trans women	Cisgender women	-.18	.131	-.692	.329	1.000
	Cisgender men	.45	.171	-.214	1.113	.057
	Trans men	-.06	.143	-.614	.501	1.000

Figure 1

Conceptual Model Showing Study Findings



Note. For Self as Process I-Communication of Self to Others and Body Image and Body Cathexis, Gender Identity comparisons were non-significant ($p>.01$). Although Self as Process II- Response to Judgement of Others had non-significant omnibus results ($p>.01$), post-hoc analyses reported of two significant pairwise Gender Identity comparisons.

For all six dimensions of Proximity to Clothing Self, Gender Identity X Internalization- Thin/Low Body Fat ideals was non-significant ($p>.01$).

For all six dimensions of Proximity to Clothing Self, Gender Identity X Internalization of Muscular/Athletic ideals was non-significant ($p>.01$).