Clothing and Embodiment: Men Managing Body Image and Appearance

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Clothing and Embodiment: Men Managing Body Image and Appearance

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Research suggests that cultural shifts in the ways men’s bodies are represented lead men to feel increasingly dissatisfied with their appearance. Clothing is an ideal but underresearched mechanism for appearance management; however, little is known about men’s presentation of their bodies through clothed displays. This article explores the ways in which men’s subjective feelings about their bodies influence their clothing practices. Thematic analysis revealed 4 key themes: practicality of clothing choices, lack of concern about appearance, use of clothing to conceal or reveal the body, and use of clothing to fit cultural ideals. This article demonstrates the pervasive and mundane role of clothing in men’s self-surveillance and self-presentation and the range and complexity of the processes involved in clothing the body.

Although not typically addressed by psychologists, we argue that men’s embodied clothing practices is an interesting and important topic for several reasons. First, research suggests that changing representations of the male body make men increasingly aware of and dissatisfied with bodies that do not meet this cultural ideal. Although psychologists have looked to extreme forms of body modification (e.g., plastic surgery, excessive exercise, bodybuilding) as evidence of men’s attempts to mold their bodies to fit the ideal, more mundane self-presentation strategies have been overlooked. We propose that men’s clothing practices are an important and pervasive form of appearance management that reflects the continued monitoring of their visual selves.

Second, it is often assumed that men are uninterested in fashion and clothing, and most research focuses exclusively on women. However, analyses in sociology and cultural studies suggest that changes in the advertising of men’s clothing lead them to develop new, more narcissistic relationships to their clothed selves. Little empirical research exploring the possible impact of these trends on men’s clothing practices exists. We aim to contribute to the existing literature in these two disparate areas (clothing practices and body image) and to develop an analysis of clothing as an embodied and situated practice (cf. Entwistle, 2001).

Clothing Practices

Clothing and fashion are typically seen as frivolous, trivial, and inconsequential and have been dismissed as unworthy of serious academic analysis. Within psychology, clothing is marginalized within the narrowly focused field of person perception, which addresses how clothing is perceived by others rather than how the wearer uses clothing to construct a particular image (see Damhorst, 1990, for an overview). This approach is limited because it uses artificial clothing stimuli (e.g., uniformed or ritualized dress), ignores people’s everyday clothing practices, and overlooks the context-specific meaning of clothing (Tsélon, 2001). It also treats clothing as the expression of preexisting essentialized identities.

Only a handful of studies have investigated the possible connections between body image and clothing practices, and all focus on women. These suggest that women use clothing to manage their appearance and camouflage their size and shape (Rudd & Lennnon, 2000). Typically, these studies attempt to establish the existence of individual differences in clothing practices and are underpinned by the assumption of a causal relationship between body satisfaction and clothing practices. Women who are less satisfied with their body apparently choose clothing to conceal the body, whereas those who are more satisfied choose clothing to accentuate the body (Harden, Butler, & Scheetz, 1998). When women “feel fat,” they use clothes for comfort and camouflage; when they “feel slim” they use clothes to express their individuality, to gain confidence, and to look fashionable (Kwon & Parham, 1994). However, women with different body builds are equally interested in, and concerned about, clothing (L. L. Davis, 1985), and women’s generally
high interest in clothing makes it difficult to disting-
uish between different groups of women on the ba-
sis of clothing practices (Kwon, 1992). These con-
tradictory findings suggest that our understanding of
the links between body image and clothing practices is
far from complete.

Psychological research on dress and clothing prac-
tices is concerned almost exclusively with women.
One rationale for this is that men are less interested in
clothing (Kwon, 1997; Minshall, Winakor, & Swin-
ney, 1982; Solomon & Schloper, 1982), spend less
money on clothing (Crane, 2000; Nelson, 1989), and
are less involved in shopping for clothes (Peters,
1989). It is often assumed that

Men dress for fit and comfort rather than style; that
women dress and buy clothes for men; that men who
dress up are peculiar (one way or another); that men do
not notice clothes; and that most men have not been
duped into the endless pursuit of seasonal fads. (Craik,
1994, p. 176)

However, the rapid expansion of menswear since the
1980s (Edwards, 1997; Nixon, 1996; Spencer, 1992)
and the development of specialist style magazines
(such as Gentlemen’s Quarterly and Arena) enable
men to relate to their clothed bodies in new ways.
The fusion of consumption and identity apparent in
market segmentation places a greater emphasis on
narcissistic aspects of self previously unavailable to
men and evokes a greater emphasis on appearance
and display. Despite these trends, we could find no
studies that explore the interconnection of body
image and clothing practices for men.

Appearance and Body Image

Most psychological research on body image fo-
cuses on women because it is assumed that they face
greater pressures than men to be a particular size and
shape. Such research adopts a causal model in which
cultural standards of beauty define unrealistic body
shapes as “ideal.” Consequently, women become dis-
satisfied with less than ideal bodies and adopt (more
or less) harmful practices to modify their bodies.
However, over the last 15 years, men have come
under increasing pressure to conform to the cultural
ideal of a lean, well-toned, muscular build, which is
reflected in cultural representations (Mishkind, Ro-
din, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1986; Mort, 1988;
Weinke, 1998). Male action toys (Pope, Olivardia,
Gruber, & Borowiecki, 1999) and male centerfolds
(Leit, Pope, & Grey, 2001) have become more mus-
cular, and the naked male body has featured more
frequently in women’s magazines (Pope, Olivardia,
Borowiecki, & Cohane, 2001). A substantial and
growing proportion of men are dissatisfied with their
bodies (Mishkind et al., 1986), and the gap between
men’s and women’s dissatisfaction is decreasing
(McCaulay, Mintz, & Glenn, 1988). Men express
particular dissatisfaction with their biceps, shoulders,
chest, and muscle tone (Cash, Winstead, & Janda,
1986; Furnham & Greaves, 1994). Men’s ideal chest
size is often significantly larger than their actual
chest size (Thompson & Tantleff, 1992), and many
say they want a larger chest (Tantleff-Dunn &
Thompson, 2000). Men and boys do not necessarily
view thinness as an advantage and are as likely to
want to be bigger or heavier as they are to want to be
thinner (C. Davis & Cowles, 1991).

Many of the recognized psychometric scales may
misrepresent men’s dissatisfaction because they are
oriented toward concerns about being overweight
when men are equally concerned about being under-
weight (Grogan, 1999). In addition, more extreme
forms of body dissatisfaction and distortion are a
growing but underrecognized problem. Pope, Gruber,
Choi, Olivardia, and Phillips (1997) coined the term
muscle dysmorphia to describe a pathological preoc-
cupation with muscularity and the perception of be-
ing small despite having a very muscular physique
(see also Olivardia, 2001). Others have proposed that
machismo nervosa, a psychological disorder mani-
fested by excessive weight training, abnormal eating
habits, and cognitive abnormalities, may be con-
ected to the hypermesomorphic ideal body image
(Connan, 1998).

Men engage in various practices to alter the shape
of their bodies and conform to the muscular ideal.
They exercise to gain weight, develop muscles, and
change their shape (C. Davis & Cowles, 1991); have
plastic surgery to swell their pectoral muscles
(Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn,
1999); and use anabolic steroids to develop muscle
more quickly than is possible by weight training
alone (Rickert, Pawlak-Morello, Sheppard, & Jay,
1992; Wroblewska, 1997). These appearance-
management techniques, ranging from the mundane
(e.g., daily grooming) to the extreme (e.g., cosmetic
surgery, self-starvation), provide further evidence of
men’s dissatisfaction. Although most psychological
research has, understandably, focused on those forms
of appearance management that directly impact on
health, this has been at the expense of theorizing the
links among body image, subjectivity, and everyday
practices. As Weinke (1998) noted,

The implication of existing research is that there are
great social-psychological costs for not fitting the cul-
We focus on mundane methods of appearance management, such as clothing practices, because this form of body management is currently underrepresented in empirical research and may be more pervasive than other, more extreme forms of body modification. Specifically, we explore men’s subjective understanding of the importance of their feelings about their body in guiding their clothing practices and whether men use clothing to alter their appearance by concealing or revealing particular aspects of their body.

Method

Participants

Using an opportunity, snowball-sampling strategy, undergraduate psychology students recruited 2 participants for a study on clothing and the body. A total of 75 men participated. They ranged in age from 17 to 67 (M = 25.79 years, SD = 11.01 years), although the majority (74%) were in the 17- to 26-year age group. Volunteers received no remuneration for their participation. Most participants were White (93.4%); 3.9% described themselves as Pakistani, Black, and mixed race. Participants described the main breadwinner in their household as an employer or manager (28%), a higher professional (20%), an intermediate professional (13%), or a lower professional (13%). Clearly, volunteer bias means that this sample is not representative of the male population in the United Kingdom, and the specificity of the sample is acknowledged.

Procedure

Participants received a pack containing an information sheet, consent form, demographic form, and The Clothing and the Body Questionnaire to complete. The information sheet outlined the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation, how data might be used, how to withdraw data, and, because body image is a sensitive topic, details about relevant counseling services. The Clothing and the Body Questionnaire contained four questions: How much does the way you feel about your body influence the kinds of clothing you buy or wear? Do you dress in a way that hides aspects of your body? Do you dress in a way that emphasizes aspects of your body? Is there anything else you think we should know, or are there any questions we should have asked but didn’t? Respondents were instructed to answer questions fully, giving specific examples and spending some time thinking about their answers before they started to write. Spaces for written responses were provided, and once completed the forms were returned in sealed envelopes.

Analysis

Responses were analyzed using the inductive thematic analysis procedure described by Hayes (2000). First, the data were read carefully to identify meaningful units of text relevant to the research topic. Second, units of text dealing with the same issue were grouped together in analytic categories and given provisional definitions. The same unit of text could be included in more than one category. Third, the data were systematically reviewed to ensure that a name, definition, and exhaustive set of data to support each category were identified. The inductive thematic analysis resulted in 50 categories, which were grouped into 5 key themes (see the Appendix for a full list of themes). The analysis was exhaustive in that 86.6% of the data were allocated to at least one category. The coherence and replicability of the themes were established by a second researcher who recoded the first question (61.5% of the data) with a high level of interrater reliability (κ = 0.9089, SD = 0.1382). Levels of agreement for individual categories are shown on Table 1.

Results

Although some men wrote at length about how their use of clothing relates to their feelings about their body, others wrote very little. The most verbose responses were given to the first question, in which men wrote an average of 68 words (SD = 41.48, range = 3–206). In response to Questions 2 and 3, which asked about whether clothing was used to hide or emphasize the body, men wrote an average of 17.96 (SD = 13.35, range = 1–67) and 18.08 (SD = 18.49, range = 1–78) words, respectively. Analysis of these responses revealed four key themes\(^1\): (a) Men value practicality, (b) men should not care about

\(^{1}\)To aid readability, categories of each theme are presented followed by the number of units relating to each category in brackets.
how they look, (c) clothes are used to conceal or reveal, and (d) clothes fit a cultural ideal.

**Men Value Practicality**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, men emphasized the importance of practical rather than aesthetic aspects of clothing. Clothes should be functional [14]; they should be fit for purpose, practical, and necessary for everyday living: “The clothes I buy tend to have a specific purpose and function.” The prioritization of comfort [34] suggests that, although other factors do affect clothing choice, for many men “comfort and practicability comes first.” To look good and feel comfortable clothes must fit well [13]: “I think I spend most effort on finding the best fitting/most comfortable clothes at a particular occasion.” There are constraints on finding clothing to meet their needs, which relate to the cost of clothes [5] and the fact that physical size imposes limitations on finding suitable clothes [12]. The frustration of trying to fit into average-sized clothing was tangible for unusually tall, broad-shouldered, or short men: “I’m not short but I find trousers are often too long, making me fairly paranoid in the length of my legs.”

This approach might have been predicted by marketing research literature and by gender stereotypes. Although women see shopping as an opportunity to “try on” new identities (and, therefore, try on a number of different outfits), men regard shopping simply as a process of acquiring new clothes; if a garment fits correctly, then they are likely to buy it

### Table 1

*The Level of Agreement Between Two Analysts in Coding the Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>κ</th>
<th>Agreement quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comfort is my priority.</td>
<td>0.913</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like to stand out.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I like to blend in.</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I like to look masculine.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want to look heterosexual.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I want to look muscled.</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Continuity in appearance is valued.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Age affects choice.</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Emphasis on functionality/practicality/purpose</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Clothes are used to communicate about roles.</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I respond to fashion.</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am not a fashion victim.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I don’t want to appear vain.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. We shouldn’t care too much about appearance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I like labels.</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I hate labels.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I like my clothes to fit well.</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I use clothing to motivate weight loss.</td>
<td>0.429</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I want clothes to flatter my body.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I want to make my body attractive to women.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I want to look taller.</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I want to appear slim.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I don’t want to appear too slim.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I want to hide my body.</td>
<td>0.945</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. My physical size limits what I can wear.</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. The shape of my body is irrelevant.</td>
<td>0.956</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Using clothes to look attractive is not an issue for men.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. My style is important.</td>
<td>0.692</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I like to look tidy.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Clothing choices are linked to confidence.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. There is pressure from others about appearance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Look good</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Cost is an issue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Not being smart</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Clothes affect people’s judgments.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I use clothes to communicate.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Acceptance!</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. It matters!</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The look of the garment is apparently irrelevant.

**Men Should Not Care How They Look**

A second theme depicts a lack of concern with, or rejection of, the importance of appearance. Few men argued that body shape does matter [9]; many more argued that the shape of their body is irrelevant [30], that it does not influence their choice of clothing, and that they are not unduly concerned about their appearance. A typical response was: “I don’t tend to be concerned about the way I look when I shop for clothes.” Some men insisted that we should not care too much about appearance [7] (e.g., “you should not be overly concerned with your appearance as it is not the most important thing in life”). Such responses map onto male gender stereotypes, which suggest that men are not supposed to be interested in shopping, adornment, and appearance.

Despite this apparent lack of concern, many participants described in detail how their clothing practices were influenced by their feelings about their body:

I don’t really choose clothing in relation to my body. But I guess when I try them on then I am taking into account how they look on me and my body.

I am not very fussed about my body or the way it looks to extremes. I am aware that clothing is able to make the body look better and sometimes I will use this to improve my appearance.

Men talked about wanting to look good [12] and wanting clothes that flatter the body [16]. They demonstrate expertise in self-presentation and knowledge about which styles complement their particular body shape. They use vertical stripes, the “shirt over the T-shirt” trick, and dark colors to streamline their shape and enhance their appearance. As one said, “I do not have a complex about my body, but I do know what type of clothing makes the most of my build.” Men’s purported lack of interest in the body is undermined by their careful attention to their clothed appearance.

**Clothes Are Used to Conceal or Reveal**

Men’s concerns about their appearance were highlighted when they wrote about using clothing to hide the body [64], often to conceal being overweight.

I tend to wear baggy tops to hide my stomach depending on how I am feeling about myself on the day.

Clothing practices were linked to confidence with the body [9]. As one participant noted, “I am not very confident about my body as I am very thin and don’t have much muscle tone. So, I tend to wear loose fitting clothes to give the impression that I appear to be larger than I actually am.”

Some men felt they had nothing to hide [18] and wrote about wanting to display their bodies [15] and to emphasize particular parts of the body [29]. One wrote, “My bum is my best feature and it is important to me that my trousers, including jeans, fit nicely.”

Some clearly had mixed feelings about displaying the body [17], wanting to both display and conceal different aspects. Men are engaged in an ongoing negotiation body display, which takes into account their changing perceptions of their physical shape.

If I’m thinking I’m a fat git, I’ll have a tendency to wear loose clothes and adhere to various methods employed to make a person look thinner (e.g., a shirt over a T-shirt). However, on a day when I’m feeling good, I’ll be thinking under that fat is a reasonable-sized pair of pecs and I’ll wear something accordingly.

Shifts in attitudes to the body and its display occur on a daily basis, and clothing becomes involved in an ongoing negotiation of the body as men try literally to get it into shape.

My wardrobe is full of a variety of different styles that satisfy how I feel about my body at the time.

I often buy clothing that I don’t intend to wear until I broaden (arms and upper body) like vests and tank tops.

These men are clearly concerned with appearance and the deliberate “performance” of appearance involving revealing, concealing, and displaying the body. Decisions about revealing and concealing the body are not simple, one-time event choices; men monitor a range of factors in making such decisions. Ideas about self-presentation shift depending on whether one is having a “fat day” or a “thin day,” suggesting that body image is not a fixed essence for our participants but rather a matter of negotiation.

**Clothes Are Used to Fit a Cultural Ideal**

The final theme highlights the pressure to conform to an idealized male body that is tall, muscular, and slim. Some men show an awareness of this ideal but do not find it particularly problematic. Instead, they express an acceptance of their body [22]: “Although
I don’t have a particularly good body (i.e., muscles) it has never bothered me.” For others, the cultural ideal presents problems as they aspire to a muscular, tall, and slim body. Men wrote about wanting to appear taller [9] and focused on wearing clothes that increase the appearance of height (e.g., “Buying shoes that increase my height gives me a more confident feeling”). They also wrote about wanting to look muscular [19] and focused on the importance of having muscular arms, a toned upper body, and an athletic-looking body.

I have started to bulk out and put on weight and gain more confidence about my body shape and have started buying more tight-fitting clothing.

When I was doing weights, I felt confident enough to buy a tank top; however, since I’ve stopped I feel more reluctant to show off my arms in public.

A muscular body is clearly one to show off to others, whereas a less developed physique is something to be ashamed of.

I am not one to work out and, therefore, would not consider wearing tight T-shirts that cling to upper arm muscles and chest as they would make my body look inadequate.

Finally, these men wrote about wanting to appear slim [28] but not too thin [20] and used clothing to manage this.

I tend to wear a great deal of black, which gives the impression of slimness along with baggy clothing (i.e., jumpers, jeans).

Very rarely do I wear short-sleeved shirts as I am uncomfortable with my arms, which I believe to be too thin.

These men use clothing to modify and manage the appearance of their bodies depending on how well it currently fits with the ideal. Our data suggest that muscularity and not being over- or underweight play an important role in men’s decisions about clothing. Men’s clothing practices reflect their concerns and anxieties about their appearance and how others will evaluate their body.

**Discussion**

Challenging the idea that men have little invested in their appearance, our participants deliberately and strategically use clothing to manipulate their appearance to meet cultural ideals of masculinity. They vary the color, texture, pattern, fit, and size of garments to appear slimmer, taller, bigger, or more muscular than they believe their actual body shape to be. Clothing is an everyday body-modification practice that may not be as dramatic or permanent as plastic surgery and exercise but requires knowledge, attention, and financial resources. Further research is needed to map these processes in more detail. We know little about the time and energy men spend shopping for, selecting, and maintaining clothes. How do men acquire the knowledge to be able to skillfully alter their appearance using different styles of clothing, and what role do style magazines and significant others play in socializing men into appearance regimes? Although our data suggest that men’s practices are flexible and varied, we know little about how they make decisions about how to present their bodies in different contexts and in relation to different audiences.

In addition, although some men express acceptance and admiration of their bodies, for many there is a battle being fought with a less than acceptable body in which clothing is a necessary armor. Our data raise questions for psychologists interested in body image. Body image is typically conceptualized as an internal and enduring “essence,” but our data suggest that it is fluid, contradictory, and constantly renegotiated. Men’s subjective experience of their body image shifts constantly between, for example, “fat days” and “thin days” and when different aspects of the body may become salient. Men might emphasize parts of the body of which they feel proud and hide aspects of the body of which they feel ashamed. Global measures of body satisfaction may not adequately capture men’s lived experience of their bodies. Our data reveal gaps in current understandings of body image and clothing practices, but it has not allowed us to explore these in detail. We know little about how these processes operate or how they might operate differently for diverse groups of men. For example, do pressures to conform to an ideal masculine body have more impact on some groups than others? Our sample was skewed toward young men and our findings may not apply equally to all ages, although research on age differences in body image is currently inconclusive (e.g., Pliner, Chaiken, & Flett, 1990; Lamb, Jackson, Cassiday, & Priest, 1993). We have also been unable to explore the ways in which these practices might intersect with other aspects of identity such as race, class, or sexual orientation. However, previous work suggests that gay men, for example, value aspects of physical appearance highly (Sergios & Cody, 1985–1986) and spend more money on clothing than do heterosexual men (Rudd, 1996). We also do not know whether those who are diagnosed as having pathological relationships to their bodies (the anorexic, the compulsive exerciser)
share the same knowledge, expertise, and clothing practices as average men. Clearly, there is scope for further research exploring the appearance-management strategies of those with and without pathological relationships to their bodies.

Finally, it is clear from our data that men feel they should express uninterest in their appearance. Relying on a volunteer sample might have meant that we accessed only those men who have a specific interest in clothing; however, when asked directly, the men in our study often denied the importance of the body in their clothing practices. Men’s reluctance to be too interested in appearance and fashion may reflect attempts to distance themselves from stereotypes that position women as fashion dupes who squeeze themselves into ill-fitting or ridiculously uncomfortable clothing and who are interested in fashion as effeminate. If “appearances have an added importance for the gay community” (cf. Edwards, 2000, p. 139), then men may need to signal not only their masculinity but also their heterosexuality in a way that women do not. The men in our study are aware of the appraising audience that observes and evaluates their appearance, but do men dress for a potential sexual partner (only two units of our data referred to dressing to be attractive to women) or the appraising look of other men? In view of the increasing objectification and sexualization of the male body, further research is needed to explore the ways in which men negotiate the competing demands placed on them to be both mindful and unconcerned about their appearance. Furthermore, such research should consider the ways in which these demands might intersect with other aspects of identity (i.e., race, class, sexual orientation) and different audiences (e.g., work colleagues, sexual partners, friends).

Researchers who focus on clothing practices rarely explore embodiment, and those studying body image rarely look at clothing practices. However, our data demonstrate that dressing is an embodied practice; men are aware of and concerned about how their body will appear to others, and they strategically use clothing to alter and manipulate their appearance. Clothing as an appearance-management technique for men has been underresearched, and our study demonstrates that it is an area worthy of more attention. However, men’s ambivalence about their clothing practices suggests that quantitative measures may fail to capture their interest in and concerns about clothing practices, and that qualitative methods may enable the researcher to explore these contradictions more fully. We hope that this article goes some way toward demonstrating the pervasive yet mundane nature of men’s self-surveillance and self-presentation and the range and complexity of the processes involved in clothing the body and displaying the visual self.

References


(Appendix follows)
Appendix

Complete Set of Themes Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men are very practical in choosing their clothes.</th>
<th>Real men shouldn’t care about how they look.</th>
<th>Clothes are used to conceal or reveal.</th>
<th>Clothes are used to fit a cultural ideal.</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comfort is a priority.</td>
<td>Body shape does matter.</td>
<td>Clothing is used to hide the body.</td>
<td>Clothing reflects acceptance of the body.</td>
<td>Overlapping and specificity of the questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes must fit well.</td>
<td>We shouldn’t care too much about appearance.</td>
<td>Men have nothing to hide.</td>
<td>I want to appear taller.</td>
<td>Shoes and accessories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes must be functional.</td>
<td>The shape of my body is irrelevant.</td>
<td>I have mixed feelings about displaying the body.</td>
<td>I want to look muscular.</td>
<td>Style and color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of clothes is important.</td>
<td>I want to look good.</td>
<td>I want to display the body.</td>
<td>I want to appear slim.</td>
<td>Cross-dressing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical size imposes limitations.</td>
<td>I want clothes that flatter the body.</td>
<td>I use clothes to emphasize particular features of the body.</td>
<td>I am concerned with not appearing too thin.</td>
<td>Cultural aspects of clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothes are used to communicate about roles.</td>
<td>I respond to fashion.</td>
<td>Clothing choices are linked to confidence.</td>
<td>I want to look masculine.</td>
<td>Is it the body or the clothes that make the difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am not a fashion victim.</td>
<td>Age affects clothing choice</td>
<td>I want to appear heterosexual.</td>
<td>Male image as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t want to appear vain.</td>
<td>Clothing is used to reflect a desire to blend in.</td>
<td>Continuity in appearance is valued.</td>
<td>holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using clothes to look attractive is not an issue for men.</td>
<td>Clothing can reflect shyness.</td>
<td>I like labels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My personal style is important.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I hate labels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want to look tidy.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I use smaller clothes to motivate weight loss.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clothes affect people’s judgments.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I want to be attractive to women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I want my clothes to reflect my images.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clothing can reflect not being smart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The themes are grouped according to order in which they appear in text. Themes that were associated with a large number of text units are shown in bold. Themes that received few mentions are shown in plain type.

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