**Associations between cosmopolitanism, body appreciation, self-esteem and sought functions of clothing**

**Abstract**

This study investigates the relationships of an individual’s cosmopolitan orientation, body appreciation, self-esteem and sought clothing functions. The sample consisted of 320 university students (184 females, 136 males) with ages ranging from 17 to 59 (M= 26.91, SD= 8.84). Analysis shows that cosmopolitanism is positively associated with body appreciation and self-esteem. Moreover, cosmopolitans choose clothing for fashion purposes and to express their individuality. Results show that gender influences the tested relationships, as the effects were only significant among females. These findings provide the first empirical evidence for significant associations between cosmopolitanism, body appreciation, self-esteem and clothing choices.

**Keywords:** Global citizen, Physical appearance, Self-esteem, Apparel functions

1. **Introduction**

Psychologists seem to share a universal desire to understand individual differences ([Heine & Buchtel, 2009](#_ENREF_10)). The rise of globalisation has led to a growing interest in studying a specific individual difference, namely an individual's cosmopolitan orientation. Individuals scoring high in terms of their cosmopolitan orientation (i.e., cosmopolitans) are open minded, have an affinity for cultural diversity and tend to consume for the purpose of experience ([Cleveland, Laroche, Takahashi, & Erdoğan, 2014](#_ENREF_6)). A cosmopolitan orientation has been shown to be a driver of various lifestyle and consumption behaviors related to sports, food, and clothing ([Cleveland, Papadopoulos, & Laroche, 2011](#_ENREF_7)b), thus offering a potential means to also understand body image related phenomena. Interestingly, Molz ([2006](#_ENREF_11)) suggests that cosmopolitans have an affinity towards physical fitness. Moreover, “Cosmopolitan” is one of the key magazines concerned with fashion and body image. Taken together it can be argued that beyond openness towards cultural diversity there is an inherent relationship between being a cosmopolitan individual and being concerned with physical appearance, including fashionable clothing choices.

Prior research proposes that cosmopolitans seek self-enhancing activities that allow them to express their individuality ([Belk, 1997](#_ENREF_3); [Morris, 1988](#_ENREF_12)), gravitate towards fashion ([Thompson & Tambyah, 1999](#_ENREF_18)), are concerned about their body and physical appearance ([Cleveland, Papadopoulos et al., 2011](#_ENREF_7)a) and that cosmopolitanism is seen as a social ideal ([Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004](#_ENREF_15)). Meanwhile, body image research shows that individuals can seek clothing for various functional purposes such as fashion, expressing individuality, or comfort ([Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012](#_ENREF_19)). Specifically, Tiggemann and Andrew ([2012](#_ENREF_19)) found that among females body weight is positively correlated with seeking clothing for camouflage. Further, their findings showed that the importance individuals placed on their physical self (i.e., self-objectification) correlated positively with choosing clothes for fashion, but negatively with seeking clothing for comfort.

These studies, in conjunction with the notion that cosmopolitans are concerned with physical appearance and fashion, suggest that there may be a relationship between individuals’ level of cosmopolitanism, body appreciation ([i.e., accepting and holding a favorable opinion towards the body; Avalos, Tylka, & Wood-Barcalow, 2005](#_ENREF_1)), self-esteem and the specific clothing functions that cosmopolitans may seek. But as yet, to the best knowledge of the author there is no study that offers empirical evidence on these relationships. In addition, to date the body of research on body appreciation and clothing choices has largely focused on females (e.g., [Swami & Abbasnejad, 2010](#_ENREF_16); [Swami, Cass, Waseem, & Furham, 2015](#_ENREF_17); [Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012](#_ENREF_19)) and left the male domain relatively unexplored.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between cosmopolitanism, self-esteem, body appreciation and five specific clothing choices: namely, fashion, assurance, camouflage, individuality and comfort. Furthermore, to account for the limited body image research on males, this study also explores potential gender differences in the tested relationships. It is predicted that: (1) there is a positive relationship between cosmopolitanism and body appreciation; (2) those higher in cosmopolitanism will also have higher levels of self-esteem; and (3) cosmopolitanism will be positively related to clothing functions that allow individuals to express a sense of fashion and individuality. Moreover, it is expected that there will be gender differences with regard to the tested relationships.

1. **Method**

*2.1. Participants and procedure*

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the relevant ethics committee at the university. Participants were 320 undergraduate and postgraduate students (136 males, 184 females) from a university in the northern United Kingdom and ranged in age from 17 to 59 (M= 26.91, SD= 8.84). Participants were first given a letter of information via email and then directed to the Qualtrics website where they found the survey. In a second round, an additional reminder of the letter was sent to invite further participants to fill out the survey. Following informed consent they completed the study electronically. Participants took part on voluntary basis and were not remunerated for their time.

*2.2. Measures*

* + 1. *Cosmopolitanism*

An individual’s cosmopolitan orientation was assessed with a 5-item scale by Cleveland et al. ([2014](#_ENREF_6)). Participants are asked to state their agreement with statements (“I like to learn about other ways of life”; “I like to observe people of other cultures, to see what I can learn from them”; “I am interested in learning more about people who live in other countries”; “I enjoy exchanging ideas with people from other cultures and countries”; “I enjoy being with people from other countries to learn about their unique views and approaches”) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha above 0.70 have been reported for this scale Cleveland et al. ([2014](#_ENREF_6)).

* + 1. *Body appreciation*

Body appreciation was measured with the revised body appreciation scale-2 (BAS-2)byTylka and Wood-Barcalow ([2015](#_ENREF_21)), which in contrast to the previous version is suitable for both genders. The scale includes 10-items and asks participants their agreement with statements (e.g., “I take a positive attitude towards my body”) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. Tylka and Wood-Barcalow ([2015](#_ENREF_21)) report Cronbach’s alpha above 0.90, indicating high internal consistency.

* + 1. *Self-esteem*

Rosenberg’s 10-item Self-Esteem Scale ([Rosenberg, 1965](#_ENREF_14)) was used to assess self-esteem. The items (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”) evaluate participant’s self-esteem with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Previous studies report Cronbach’s alphas for the RSES of 0.88 ([Barnett & Powell, 2016](#_ENREF_2)).

* + 1. *Functions of clothing*

Functions of clothing were assessed by the 15-item scale by Tiggemann and Andrew ([Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012](#_ENREF_19)). Participants rate potential functions of clothing on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) in response to the stem “I tend to select. . .”. The five categories are: Fashion (e.g., “clothes that are stylish”; 3 items), Camouflage (e.g., “clothes that camouflage my figure problems”; 3 items), Assurance (e.g., “clothes that give me self-confidence”; 5 items), and Individuality (e.g., “clothes that make me distinctive”; 3 items), and Comfort (e.g., “clothes that are comfortable”; 1 item. Tiggemann and Andrew ([2012](#_ENREF_19)) reported Cronbach’s alpha for the subscales ranging from 0.57 to 0.82, reflecting the brevity of some of the subscales.

1. *Results*

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation scores between cosmopolitanism and the variables body appreciation, self-esteem, and five functions of clothing. Cronbach’s alpha indicate acceptable to excellent internal consistency for all but one of the measures, with alphas ranging from 0.57 to 0.93 (Cronbach’s alpha: Cosmopolitanism, 0.90; Body appreciation, 0.93; Self-esteem, 0.88; Fashion, 0.71; Individuality, 0.74; Assurance, 0.84; Camouflage, 0.57). The low reliability score for Camouflage is in line with previous research ([Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012](#_ENREF_19)).

As shown in Table 1, the correlations of the full sample shows statistically significant positive relationships between cosmopolitanism and the variables body appreciation (r = .17), self-esteem (r = .13) as well as the clothing choices fashion (r = .15) and individuality (r = .15). Interestingly, the findings show that gender influences the tested relationships (Table 2). Specifically, among females there are significant positive correlations between cosmopolitanism, body appreciation (r = .27), self-esteem (r = .18), fashion (r = .26), and individuality (r = .28) as sought clothing functions, while none of the tested relationships are significant for males.

**Table 1**

**Descriptive statistics and correlations of Cosmopolitanism with Body appreciation, Self-esteem and Clothing functions – Full sample (n=320)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1.Cosmopolitanism | 4.19 | 0.68 | - | .17\*\* | .13\* | .15\*\* | .15\*\* | .08 | -.03 | .08 |
| 2.Body appreciation | 3.63 | 0.74 |  |  | .62\*\* | .29\*\* | .21\*\* | .05 | -.23\*\* | .14\*\* |
| 3.Self-esteem | 3.58 | 0.70 |  |  |  | .13\* | .04 | -.04 | -.26\*\* | .08 |
| 4.Fashion | 3.43 | 0.73 |  |  |  |  | .51\*\* | .37\*\* | -.03 | -.16\*\* |
| 5.Individuality | 2.93 | 0.76 |  |  |  |  |  | .37\*\* | .09 | -.07 |
| 6.Assurance | 3.83 | 0.66 |  |  |  |  |  |  | .23\*\* | -.00 |
| 7.Camouflage | 2.92 | 0.79 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | .17\*\* |
| 8.Comfort | 4.15 | 0.69 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | - |

\* Indicates signiﬁcance at p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001

**Table 2**

**Descriptive statistics and correlations between Cosmopolitanism, Body appreciation, Self-esteem and Clothing functions – By gender**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Females (n=184)** | | | **Males (n=136)** | | |
| Variables | M | SD | Cosmopolitanism | M | SD | Cosmopolitanism |
| 1.Cosmopolitanism | 4.18 | 0.70 | - | 4.21 | 0.65 | - |
| 2.Body appreciation | 3.57 | 0.76 | .27\*\* | 3.70 | 0.71 | .01 |
| 3.Self-esteem | 3.50 | 0.67 | .18\* | 3.70 | 0.72 | .04 |
| 4.Fashion | 3.50 | 0.68 | .26\*\* | 3.35 | 0.78 | .02 |
| 5.Individuality | 3.01 | 0.74 | .28\*\* | 2.82 | 0.78 | .00 |
| 6.Assurance | 3.99 | 0.60 | .14 | 3.64 | 0.68 | .02 |
| 7.Camouflage | 3.10 | 0.77 | -.07 | 2.70 | 0.78 | .05 |
| 8.Comfort | 4.13 | 0.71 | .06 | 4.19 | 0.66 | .10 |

Note: Indicates signiﬁcance at \*p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001

1. **Discussion**

The present study investigated the relationship between an individual’s level of cosmopolitanism, body appreciation, self-esteem, and sought functions of clothing. Moreover, the study also demonstrated gender differences in these relationships.

Cosmopolitanism correlated most strongly with body appreciation. This study offers the first empirical support for this relationship and suggests that cosmopolitans are not just concerned with taking care of their physical appearance ([Cleveland et al., 2011](#_ENREF_7)b), but also that as individuals become more cosmopolitan they have a more positive perception of their body.

The present study also showed a positive relationship between cosmopolitanism and self-esteem levels. Prior research argues that cosmopolitanism is perceived as a social ideal ([Skrbis et al., 2004](#_ENREF_15)). The findings of this study suggests that a cosmopolitan’s ability to reflect a social ideal may be perceived as a means of personal self-enhancement which consequently leads to higher self-esteem ([Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988](#_ENREF_4)).

In terms of clothing functions, cosmopolitanism was positively correlated with fashion and individuality, but no significant effect for assurance, camouflage, and comfort were found. Prior research shows that cosmopolitanism is associated with the values of individuality and self-achievement ([Cleveland, Erdoğan, Arıkan, & Poyraz, 2011](#_ENREF_5)a). Moreover, previous studies proposed that cosmopolitans have an affinity towards fashion and inclination to express individuality ([Belk, 1997](#_ENREF_3); [Thompson & Tambyah, 1999](#_ENREF_18)). It is notable that the present study is the first to offer quantitative empirical support for these relationships considering clothing choices. Specifically, the findings of this study suggest that cosmopolitans have specific goals when seeking clothing choices; namely, expressing their individuality as well as projecting self-achievement through the use of fashionable clothing.

Finally, the analysis showed that gender influences the tested relationships. The aforementioned effects were present among females. However, among males, none of the tested effects were significant. Prior research suggests that there are gender differences in terms of physical appearance standards and self-esteem, as males tend to be less concerned about their physique than females ([Gentile et al., 2009](#_ENREF_9); [Wolf, 2002](#_ENREF_22)). The findings of the present study indicate that these gender differences are also prevalent among cosmopolitans.

Several limitations need to be considered for future research. A limitation of this study was the low reliability score of the camouflage clothing function measure. As outlined, the low reliability is in line with previous research using this measure ([Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012](#_ENREF_19)) and likely due to the brevity of the scale. Future research should focus on improving this scale by incorporating additional items that capture more adequately the camouflage function of clothing. A second limitation of this study was that the sample was based on students. The present sample of under- and postgraduate students offers a larger variability in terms of age compared to commonly used undergraduate samples. However, the sample is still limited in terms of its generalisability, as cosmopolitan tendencies can be found also among individuals that are older than the majority of the participants sampled in this study. For instance, prior research shows that age affects body appreciation ([Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013](#_ENREF_20)) and self-esteem ([Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012](#_ENREF_13)). Future research should therefore adopt broader cross-sectional research designs in terms of age, or use longitudinal studies to investigate how cosmopolitanism influences body appreciation as well as self-esteem. In addition, it should be noted that, while the results show significant associations between the variables, the correlations are considered weak ([Evans, 1996](#_ENREF_8)). It is possible that the strength of the observed relationships is the result of other variables such as media exposure, in particular with regard to fashion. Future research should control for different types and levels of media exposure as it can potentially influence preference for particular clothing choices. In conclusion, despite its limitations, the results confirm that cosmopolitanism is an individual characteristic to be considered in terms of body appreciation, self-esteem and clothing choices. In particular, the findings highlight the importance of fostering a cosmopolitan orientation among individuals due to its positive association with an individual’s body appreciation and self-esteem.

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