

164 The dress and the self: how dress styles express identities

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Abstract

Clothing one's body denotes a clear intentional behaviour. Literature highlights that females purchase certain products and clothing styles to achieve their desired body shape or to hide or flatter areas of their body. Additionally, it has been found that clothing is a tool that assists consumers in achieving an ideal appearance and has the ability to alter one's mood, enabling them to either camouflage or bolster their self-confidence. This suggests that there is a link between an individual's body perception and their clothing preferences, and that clothing choice reflects the individual. Building on previous studies, this paper investigates how women express their identity through different styles of dresses, exploring what a specific type of dress can say about an individual's perception of self.

A mixed methods study was conducted involving: 1. A quantitative online questionnaire, which established females' preferred style of dress and 2. Qualitative semi-structured interviews which explored how different styles of dresses create different identities. A convenience sample of 263 (phase 1) and 15 (phase 2) UK females aged 18-34 was obtained. The questionnaire data was analysed through descriptive statistics and the qualitative interviews were analysed through a process of coding. Findings indicate that different styles of dresses are used to express different types of identity. This paper contributes to the academic literature regarding fashion choice and the perception of one's self, fashion identity and the clothing selection process. This paper also provides retailers with a better insight into consumers' clothing preferences and their associations with different styles of dresses, which can inform their marketing and sales strategies.

Introduction

Within today's society it is irrefutable that material possessions play a fundamental part in peoples lives. Indeed, the meanings that are bestowed on possessions have the ability to establish identities (Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012). Knowingly or unknowingly, possessions have the aptitude to extend the self and act as a symbol of definition (Belk, 1988). Clothing is considered to be the most demonstrative form of consumer possession (Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012), which goes beyond the necessity to cover the body (Lunceford, 2010). Indeed, clothing is used as a vehicle

of self-presentation whereby an individual can defend, maintain and create identities in an attempt to align oneself with perceived social norms (Baumeister, 1982; McNeil, 2017). Thus, unsurprisingly clothing consumption in a postmodern world is a crucial element in the construction of identity and the self (Niinimaki, 2010; Tiggemann and Andrew, 2012). Prior research that explores the relationship between identity and consumption draws on decision-making models that are concerned with how a consumer searches, chooses, acquires, and disposes of goods (Hogg and Michell, 1996). This is because the choices that are made at the initial stages can be linked to questions of identity of the self (Hogg and Michell, 1996), as consumers are predominantly searching for products that create a sense of self-identity (Riek *et al.*, 2016). This paper will begin by introducing research that has previously investigated the relationship between consumption and the formation of identity (Belk, 1988; Jantzen, 2006; Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012). However, it is evident from the literature review that prior studies explore possessions, such as clothing in general, and so there is a lack of research exploring how particular styles of clothing can be used to establish different identities (Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012). We address this gap by investigating how different styles of dresses can maintain, hide and curate different identities.

Research questions

Indeed, former research has established that clothing can be used to maintain (Guy and Banim, 2000; Buse and Twigs, 2015), create (Kang, Johnson and Kim, 2013; Brownbridge, Sanderson and Gill, 2016) and hide certain identities (Freitas, Davis and Kim, 1997; Peters, 2014), however the role of dress styles in this multiple identity formation has not been established. Consequently, the following questions have been posited:

RQ1. Do females choose certain styles of dresses to express, create or hide certain identities? If so, which styles create particular identities?

RQ2. Which styles of dress do females fear wearing the most and why?

RQ3. Which style of dress gives females the most/ least confidence and why?

Apparel dresses

'Dress' is contextualised within this study as a particular style of garment which is predominantly worn by females. Dress styles have been chosen as they are currently the highest selling product within the womenswear market, with more than two thirds of females having purchased a dress in the last year (Intel, 2018). Dresses are crucial as they have a fit relationship with both primary (bust) and secondary (waist and hip) dimensions of the body (Grogan *et al.*, 2013; Brownbridge *et al.*, 2018;). Thus, when purchasing a dress, a female must consider their whole-body shape. From an academic perspective, Fiore and Kimle (1997, p.144) defined five key dress styles; A-line, Bell, Tubular, Wedge and Hourglass, and emphasised that different dress styles could be used to manage females body shapes. However, within industry the number of dress styles is exhaustive, with

key styles including bodycon, midi, skater, jumper, wrap, smock, slip and maxi. Thus, 'dress' is not just a simple style that is used to portray a particular identity and further exploration of the relationship between dress styles and identity curation is warranted. Furthermore, as identity-based marketing is contended to be more successful than lifestyle-based marketing when selling women's clothing (McNeill, 2017), a comprehensive understanding of how different styles of dresses are used to develop the self is paramount for effective fashion marketing (Gutman and Mills, 1982; Goldsmith, Moore and Beaudoin, 1999).

Identity

Women choose what to wear every single day of their lives (Tiggemann and Lacey, 2009) and in doing so they construct an outward appearance that defines who they are or even who they are not (Freitas, Davis and Kim, 1997). Goffman (1959) found that when a person decides on what clothes to wear they choose to display a particular presentation of the self. Hence, identity is concerned with a self-image that an individual wish to convey to others (Solomon and Schopler, 1982). One's self-identity is neither singular nor static (Peters, 2014), rather an individual embodies multiple selves, which are constructed and re-constructed throughout one's life (Vignoles, 2011). Yet no research has explored whether females choose to wear different styles of dresses in order to achieve or avoid these multiple identities. In order to understand how people curate various identities of themselves, the idea of self-concept must be acknowledged (McNeill, 2017).

The self

Self-concept is defined as the totality of a person's thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards oneself (Goldsmith, Moore and Beaudoin, 1999). An understanding of self-concept is vital because consumers wear products that complement their self-image (Goldsmith, Moore and Beaudoin, 1999). Rosa, Garbarino and Malter (2006) found that consumers seek to affirm their self-concept through the use of apparel. Hence, a consumer's choice of clothing will be influenced by their self-concept, in particular the specific aspect of self that an individual decides to express (McNeill, 2017). However, how individuals do this through different styles of dress remains unknown.

Self-concept is a multifaceted notion that entails various dimensions. Sirgy (1982) acknowledged that self-concept refers to 1). The actual self: how a person perceives themselves, 2). The ideal self: how a person would like to perceive themselves and 3). The social self: how a person would like others to perceive themselves. However, within the literature self-concept is more commonly thought of in two ways, namely, the ideal self-concept and the real-concept (Goldsmith, Moore and Beaudoin, 1999). Additionally, Kaiser (1990) posited that when formulating clothing decisions, a person undergoes a self-dialogue between the 'I' and the 'Me', which together comprise of the self (Niinimaki, 2010). The 'I' refers to the creative self, which interprets the garment subjectively, whereas the 'Me' is

similar to Sirgy's (1982) social self, in that it is concerned with how others will respond to the choice of clothing. Whilst insightful, both Sirgy (1982) and Kaiser (1990) ignore Grubb and Grathwohl's (1967) development of the situational self, which refers to the self that is influenced by a particular situation. As identities are entrenched in social relations (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992), it is contended that the situational self should not be overlooked. Academics have also begun to investigate the self that a person fears (Guy and Banim, 2000). Indeed, Freitas, Davis and Kim (1997) found that who a person does not want to be is an important component in the construction of one's self. Evidently, the concept of self is a meaning-making process (Crane and Boyone, 2006), whereby consumers choose to wear certain styles of clothing in order to express one's self (Niinimaki, 2010). The findings of this study will be framed by Guy and Banim's (2000) findings of: 'The woman I am most of the time (true self)', 'The woman I fear (feared self)' and 'The woman I want to be (aspirational self)', however this paper will also explore, 'The woman I am expected to be (social self)' and investigate these constructs in relation to different dress styles. The following section will synthesis prior findings that have investigated how clothing maintains, curates and supresses certain identities.

The true self

The true self refers to how one really is (Goldsmith, Moore and Beaudoin, 1999). Prior research has established that clothing is used as a vehicle of self-presentation, whereby an individual can uphold their true self (Baumeister, 1982; Vignoles, 2011; Buse and Twigg, 2015). This is exemplified within Buse and Twigg's (2015) study who found that for elderly people with dementia, dress remains a significant way to maintain their identity when their mental perception of the true self deteriorates. Hence, it is evident that clothing enables people to maintain continuity of the self at a material level (Buse and Twigg, 2015). More recently, research has been undertaken to understand how transgender people use clothing to express their true self. For example, Levitt and Ippolito (2014) found that when growing up, participants were forced to hide their true self by wearing clothes that conformed to a traditional gender. Alternatively, Guy and Banim (2000) discovered that when females referred to their true identity they often disassociated themselves with fashionable apparel and tend to select clothing that fulfils their functional needs. Thus, despite the verification that clothing has the ability to sustain one's true identity, there is limited research that explores how particular styles of dresses are used to project one's true self.

The ideal self

Studies that have explored clothing choices and identity have predominantly investigated how people use clothing in order to construct an aspirational identity (Kang, Johnson and Kim, 2013; Brownbridge, Sanderson and Gill, 2016). Grogan *et al.*, (2013) found that clothing was expected to emphasise the most attractive

body features. Thus, given the ability of clothing to modify and flatter the body (Klerk and Tselepis, 2007), it can be argued that an individual uses clothing to gain the temporary achievement of the ideal self (Kang, Johnson and Kim, 2013). The necessity to use clothing to create new identities does not seem to differ amongst age groups either, as Miles, Cliff and Burr (2012, p.91) found that young people use clothing to hide behind in order to attain their ideal self, with one participant acknowledging that caps 'made him look older'. Similarly, Holmlund, Hagman and Polska (2011) found that elderly women preferred clothing styles that made them appear stylish and slimmer. Hence, it is apparent that clothing can be used to manipulate one's true identity to achieve a new one (Peters, 2014). However, the present study explores this even further, by investigating how females use different styles of dresses to construct new identities, as opposed to grouping clothes together in general.

The self I fear

Fashion identity studies have partially investigated the self that a person fears (Guy and Banim, 2000). For example, Buse and Twigg (2015) found that an older male participant who had dementia, avoided wearing certain clothing as he thought that people would associate him with being elderly, an identity he clearly wanted to circumvent. Freitas, Davis and Kim (1997) also found that females avoided clothes that associated them with a past identity, as they felt disassociated with that particular identity. In the same study Freitas, Davis and Kim (1997, p.329) also unveiled that homosexuals avoided certain styles of clothing, which they considered to be 'stereotypically' gay. Additionally, Peters (2014) found that females who identified as being plus-size tried to avoid this identity by negotiating this sense of self through clothing. Hence, it is crucial that this self is accounted for, as it emphatically influences which styles individuals avoid wearing in order to evade a certain identity. Although the feared self is lacking within existing literature, what is often found to be paramount to the construction of identity is the work of establishing who one is not.

The self I am expected to be

Clothing serves a dual purpose within identity construction: it not only permits the expression or suppression of one's self, but also acts as a signal of conformity to a social group (Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012). McNeill (2017) theorises that identity can be seen in the roles that individuals devise for themselves within a specific social setting. This suggests that people select apparel in an attempt to participate in social groups (Niinimaki, 2010). Indeed, Miles, Cliff and Burr (2012, p.85) found that a salient factor that influenced young peoples' clothing choices was their 'friends' opinions', inferring that for young people certain clothing allowed them to be perceived as being socially accepted. However, Niinimaki (2010) found that, although clothing allows for the conformity within social groups, it is also concerned with differentiating the self from others in that social group. Thus, the social self is complex as it is concerned with the balancing of two identities, that is, how one

chooses to conform to their social group, but also how one can create a sense of individuality within this group.

Method

This mixed method study investigates how females express their identity through different styles of dresses, particularly exploring what a specific type of dress articulates about an individual's perception of self. Firstly, a quantitative online survey was distributed, in order to ascertain the most popular styles of dresses purchased, to a convenience sample of 344 females, aged 18-34. A selection of 9 different styles of dresses were obtained from ASOS' website. ASOS was the chosen retailer as the website attracted more than 127 million visits in February 2017 (Intel, 2017), suggesting high user-interaction. The online questionnaire utilised three, 5-point unipolar semantic scales to measure respondents' thoughts towards each style of dress, anchored by the constructs, *likable-not likable/ flattering-not flattering/ similar to what I wear- not similar to what I wear*, developed by Cox and Cox (2002) and further utilised by Kim and Lennon (2008; 2010) and Kim (2018). The online questionnaire allowed the researcher to obtain a quick snapshot (Lazar, Feng and Hochheiser, 2017) of relevant styling preferences about the target sample. Descriptive statistics were used to identify which styles were considered the most flattering, likeable and similar to what the participant would usually wear.

Secondly, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted based on open-ended questions, which allowed for a deeper understanding of how certain dress styles are used to evoke a sense of self. The rich qualitative data set permitted themes to emerge organically (Boardman and McCormick, 2018). As styling preferences are subjective, it was vital that qualitative interviews were utilised in order to explore the 'why' question of the phenomena (Berg, 2009; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). The interview guide (Appendix I) was developed from the main themes in the literature (Miles, Cliff and Burr, 2012). Main questions, supplemented with further probing questions, were utilised to ensure the detail of the answer was sufficient enough to allow the researcher insight to their worldview (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed after the interview had taken place (Rahman, 2015). 15 participants were chosen on the following criteria: they were regular apparel female shoppers, aged 18-34, in an attempt to enhance the reliability of the findings. Saturation point was reached. The researchers undertook a line-by-line coding technique to identify initial themes and subthemes, and then coded interview transcripts in order to highlight the relationship between these themes (Grogan *et al.*, 2013).

Findings and discussion

Study one: online survey

Of the 344 responses that were obtained from the online survey, 262 of those responses were usable and fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The average age group

of the respondents were 18-25-year olds (72.9%). All responses for each of the three constructs, *Flattering*, *Likeability* and *Similar to What I Would Usually Wear*, were averaged to uncover that the style of dress which scored the highest in relation to likeability ($M=4.34$), flattering ($M=4.17$) and most similar to what I would usually wear ($M=3.80$) was the wrap dress. The skater style dress obtained the second highest score for most flattering dress ($M=3.58$), but scored the highest for the least likeable dress style ($M=3.20$). Finally, the bodycon dress scored the highest for the least similar to what the participants would usually wear ($M=2.45$), as well as scoring the second highest for both the least likeable style of dress ($M=3.36$) and the least flattering style of dress ($M=3.14$). A summary of these findings is presented in Table 1.1

Measures	Style of Dress		
Likeable	Wrap dress- most likeable style ($M=4.34$)	Skater dress- least likeable style ($M=3.20$)	The body con- second highest for the least likeable style ($M=3.36$)
Flattering	Wrap dress- the most flattering style ($M=4.17$)	Skater dress- the second most flattering style ($M=3.20$)	The body con- second highest for the least flattering dress ($M=3.14$).
Similar to what I would usually wear	Wrap dress - highest style that is most similar to what I would wear (3.80)	The pencil dress- second highest for the style that is the least similar to what I would wear (2.46)	The body con- the highest for the style that is the least similar to what I would wear (2.45).

Table 1.1. Summary of Findings from the online survey

Study two: semi-structured interviews

As the women sought to articulate how each style of dress expressed different identities, all participants revealed 4 distinct, yet interdependent views of self in relation to the different dress styles. Firstly, females revealed how they would avoid certain styles of dresses as they associated that particular style with a self they feared. Secondly, there were revelations regarding how certain dress styles allowed females to curate aspirational selves. Additionally, females also articulated how certain styles of dress were used in order to reinforce their every-day 'true self'. Finally, there were also statements that revealed how females chose to wear particular styles of dresses in order to uphold social expectations of the self. Thus, this study unveiled that there are four typologies of the female self which can be expressed through dresses:

- (1) The female I fear
- (2) The female I am

- (3) The female I desire to be
- (4) The female I am expected to be

The female I fear

Females revealed how they avoided certain styles of dresses which either reminded them of their younger self, made them look bigger than they actually are or styles that showed areas of their body that they disliked. The first theme that will be explored is the fear of looking like one's younger self. This finding is similar to that of Freitas, Davis and Kim (1997), who discovered that females avoided certain clothing which associated them with their past identities. The main styles of dresses that were associated with this fear were the smock dress, the slip dress, the bodycon dress and the skater dress:

I'd avoid wearing a smock dress because I think it is quite immature and it makes me look a lot younger than I actually am. (P.1-22)

The skater dress is something I would have worn when I was 15 [...] but now I think it's very juvenile and childish. I would just never wear it now. (P.14-23)

The slip dress is very childlike. It reminds me of my school uniform... I would never go for this style of dress as it would make me feel even younger. (P.4-21)

I used to wear the bodycon style in the past when I was younger but now I'm a bit older and my figure isn't as good as it was [...] I used to wear this style clubbing with my friends, but I don't have that lifestyle anymore, so I would definitely avoid this style now. (P.10-30)

These findings imply that females associate certain styles of dresses with past identities. It is clear that, with time, females avoid wearing certain styles of dresses in an attempt to disconnect their contemporary self from their former self. It appears that females of this age group try to portray a more mature identity through their clothing, and thus fear wearing dresses that they used to wear or that are associated with being 'immature' and 'young'. Ten females associated the skater dress style with their younger self, which supports the survey findings that although females considered the skater dress to be the second most flattering style of dress ($M=3.58$), it was the least likeable.

The second theme that emerged is that females avoided wearing styles of dresses that made them look bigger than they actually are. The dress styles that were associated with this fear were the smock dress, slip dress and the jumper dress:

The slip dress is a style I will always avoid wearing. They make me look bigger than I actually am... I associate this style with a particular summer where I had gained a lot of weight [...] I definitely would not wear this style. (P.7-23)

I would never wear the jumper dress. It would just make me look like a sack of potatoes [...] it would make me look like I have an oval body shape. (P.14-23)

The smock dress is definitely a style I would avoid wearing [...] it makes me look bigger than I actually am [...] because it is so baggy! (P.10-30)

These findings illustrate the anxieties that females associate with dresses, in particular how certain styles made them appear larger. There appeared to be a general consensus amongst all participants that dresses should make females look slimmer, a finding supported in the literature (Apeageyi, 2008; Frith and Gleeson, 2008; Grogan et al., 2013). This supports why the jumper dress ($M=3.02$) and the smock dress ($M=3.20$) were found to be the least flattering styles in the survey.

Females avoided wearing styles of dresses that revealed areas of their body that they were insecure about, a finding which is further supported by Klerk and Tselepis (2007). The styles of dresses that were associated with this were the bodycon dress and the maxi dress. The following quotes capture the essence of this fear:

I would never wear the maxi dress because it highlights all the things I dislike about myself. I'm too short, I hate my arms and I don't have any cleavage. (P.15-20)

The thought of wearing the bodycon makes me feel physically sick. I would feel really insecure wearing it, as it would show off all my wobbly bits. (P.2-31).

Furthermore, four participants stated that they loved the wrap dress on other people, but that they would fear wearing this style of dress as it would accentuate areas of their body they feel insecure about:

The wrap dress I love so much. When I see it on models it looks amazing, however for me personally the dress just accentuates everything that is wrong about my figure. It makes me look like I have multiple stomach rolls. (P.7-23).

Hence, it is apparent that a female's perception of their body affects what they wish to show, or in this case, not show about themselves.

The female I am

Females discussed particular styles of dresses that they identified as their true self. Participants often referred to dress styles that they could just 'throw on', or particular styles that would allow them to achieve a satisfactory sense of self 'without too much effort'. These findings are supported by Guy and Banim (2000, p.321) who found that females show their true self through clothing choices that allow them to get on with their day-to-day lives. Indeed, females chose to talk about dress styles that made them feel comfortable, as well as styles that did not require extensive decision-making. The dress styles that were associated with a female's true self were the jumper dress, the smock dress and the slip dress:

The jumper dress is just me. I would feel really comfortable in this style of dress [...] a lot of the time I am dressing to look good in front of other people, but if I could just wear one style of dress and not care about trying to portray something about myself to others, it would be the jumper dress [...] however I could only wear this style in front of people who I'm comfortable around. (P.14-23).

The slip dress is just a safe option for me. It's a very easy style and there is no pressure with this dress. I don't have to worry about what I'm communicating about myself to others. It's just a dress I can just throw on and be satisfied with how I look. (P.5-23)

The smock dress is definitely just my safe go-to. When I go to University, I have to look quite serious and professional, but I wish I could just wear a smock dress and feel comfortable in my own skin. I think the style is me because I am actually young at heart. (P.6-20).

It is apparent that when females referred to their true self they described their chosen dress styles as being 'safe', 'easy' and 'my go-to'. This suggests that when a female chooses a dress style for their true self, they are more concerned with practical factors, such as comfort, rather than attempting to portray something about themselves to others. Indeed, participants acknowledged that they would only ever wear dresses that expressed their true self either in front of people they felt comfortable with or on their own. This implies that females rarely reveal their true self to others and that the styles of dresses that they would choose to wear for themselves are different from the styles of dresses they would choose to wear in public. These findings provide further insight as to why the slip dress, the smock dress and the jumper dress were the highest chosen dress styles for *the most similar style to what I would wear* construct in the online survey, as the interviews demonstrate that these styles of dresses do not require a great deal of cognitive effort.

The female I aspire to be

All participants acknowledged that they often chose to wear certain dress styles in order to curate aspirational identities. A common theme established was that females used dresses to achieve an ideal hourglass figure, a finding similar to that of Grogan et al., (2013). Participants identified the wrap dress, the midi dress and the skater dress as key styles that allowed them to achieve an hourglass figure:

The skater dress really flatters my figure [...] it makes me look like I've got an hourglass figure, which is great! (P.10-30).

I like the fact that I can manage my body shape (with the wrap dress) [...] I can tie it quite tight to define my waist and it looks as though I have an hourglass figure, even though in reality I'm more of a pear. (P.14-23).

The midi dress would 100% enhance my body confidence because it would show off my figure [...] it would make me look like I have an hourglass figure. (P.7-23).

The quotes infer that females choose to wear certain styles of dresses that allow them to obtain their desired body shape. This provides further insight as to why the wrap dress was considered to be the most flattering and likeable style within the survey, as the dress allowed them to define their waist and create an hourglass figure.

A further theme was that females selected certain dress styles to help them feel more powerful. Eight participants stated that the pencil dress in particular best described their aspirational self, using adjectives such as, 'empowering', 'sophisticated' and 'professional'. Females associated this style of dress with an identity that they hoped to achieve in the future:

The pencil dress is a style that I hope I can wear in my 30s [...] when I have my life together. (P.15-20)

Females also associated this style of dress as the one that they would wear in a work environment, as it would 'assert one's authority' (P.15-20) and 'highlight what stage of your career you are at' (P.8-34). One participant associated this style of dress with her friend and highlighted that 'she is a manager now' (P.10-30), inferring that this dress style helped her friend in achieving her aspirational work goals.

The female I am expected to be

Females also revealed that they avoided wearing certain styles of dresses, as that particular style did not conform to the identity that they were expected to be. This

was a particular concern for the participants in their thirties, demonstrated by the following quote:

If I wore the bodycon dress or a wrap dress my friends would think I was having a mid-life crisis [...] they are very revealing and young and are styles in particular that I am not expected to wear. (P.8-34)

This shows that females choose styles of dresses that allow them to maintain a certain ‘expected’ identity to others. This is further reinforced by one participant, who stated that she would only wear ‘modest’ (P.2-32) dress styles as she is a mother and hence is expected to dress in a way that upholds societal expectations. This indicates that females’ dress choices are affected by their perceived social role.

Conclusions and Future Recommendations

Prior studies have found clothing choice to be the salient way in which multiple identities are curated (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Peters, 2014; Buse and Twigg, 2015), yet no research has explored whether females choose to wear different styles of dresses in order to achieve or avoid these multiple identities. Table 1.2. summarises the four female typologies which have been found within this study.

Four Typologies of Self				
	The Female I Fear	The Female I Am	The Female I Desire to be	The Female I Am Expected to be
Dress Styles	Smock Dress Slip Dress Body Con Dress Skater Dress	Jumper Dress Smoock Dress Slip Dress	Wrap Dress Midi Dress Skater Dress	Styles they would avoid: Body Con Dress Wrap Dress
Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Looking larger than normal. ▪ Association with younger self. ▪ Accentuated disliked areas of the body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Styles to throw on. ▪ Did not require extensive cognitive effort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Styles that allow one to achieve their desired body shape. ▪ Styles that made one feel more powerful and professional. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social projection of ones-self. ▪ Modest styles. ▪ Dressing for one’s age.

Table 1.2. Summary of Four Female Typologies Curated Through Different Styles of Dress.

Hence, by answering RQ1 this study fills this gap within the literature by providing valuable insights into how certain dress styles are used in order to curate, maintain, hide or express different identities. These findings support Guy and Banim (2000) who explored how clothing choices related to, ‘the woman I want to be’, ‘the woman I fear I could be’ and the ‘the woman I am most of the time’. However, this research

extends these findings by not only investigating how specific styles of dress are used to achieve different identities, but also by discovering a new identity typology, 'the female I am expected to be', which is the novel contribution of this paper. Indeed, this study found that females who were in their 30s felt pressure to wear certain styles of dresses in order to fulfil a societal expectation. This implies that age also plays a key role in the construction of identity through different dress styles, an area that future research could investigate further. The interviews also answered RQ2 and RQ3 by illustrating that females fear wearing certain dress styles that evoke certain anxieties and felt more confident in dresses which allowed them to achieve their desired body shape, a finding which has also been supported within prior literature (Apeageyi, 2008; Frith and Gleeson, 2008; Zhang et al., 2017). The findings of this paper make managerial contributions by demonstrating that the different identities that females associate with certain dress styles are extremely influential over their purchasing decisions. The outcomes of this paper can provide retailers with a better insight into consumers' clothing preferences and their associations with different styles of dresses, which can better inform their marketing and sales strategies. Finally, this paper contributes to the academic literature regarding fashion choice and fashion identity with a particular focus on the selection process of certain dress styles.

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Appendix I

Main Questions	The Self Explored	Probing Questions	Follow-up questions
Can you please comment on what you think each style of dress says about you if you	True self Aspirational self Social self Feared self	Why do you think that? Have you ever worn this style before?	That is really interesting; please can you tell me a bit more about that?

were to wear the dress?		Would you wear this style in the future?	
Which is the dress style that would give you the most/ least confidence?	Aspirational self Social self Feared self	Why do you think that? Would you feel insecure in this particular style of dress?	That is really interesting; please can you tell me a bit more about that?
What do you think your friends would think about you if you to wear one of these styles of dresses?	Social self Feared self	Why do you think that? Do you choose dresses that are similar to what your friends would wear?	Can you tell me a bit more about why you think that?
Which style do you think expresses your individuality?	True self	Why do you think that? How come you have not chosen another style of dress?	That is interesting; can you explain in a bit more detail as to why a certain dress style does/ does not express your individuality?
Which style of dress do you fear wearing the most?	Feared self	Why do you fear that particular style of dress?	Can you tell me a bit more about why you fear that particular dress?

Table 1.0. Interview guide

Source: based on Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Boardman and McCormick (2018).