

Men's Attraction According to Women's Dress

Lauren Kaminskas and Lindsay Satryan

West Virginia University

Lauren Kaminskas and Lindsay Satryan are students at West Virginia University. Kaminskas is a senior Communication Studies major while Satryan is a junior majoring in Communication Studies.

Because of women's poor body image and social pressures, women tend to dress more provocatively when trying to attract men. According to Grammer, Renninger, and Fischer (2004) women that have more skin showing will be rated by men as being sexier therefore bare skin on women is given favored attention than clothed areas. Young women of American society are exposed to a highly sexual world earlier than ever before. The media constantly pressures women on how to dress and how to look. Young women especially in the college age are extremely susceptible to these pressures. When women are in a social environment like a club or a bar, the pressures of what is considered attractive cause young women to dress more provocatively. If they do not dress accordingly they will not be perceived as attractive. While dressing more sexually can attract more attention from men, it can also cause lower body image and self-esteem. Yamamiya, Cash, and Thompson (2006) found that women with lower body image of themselves were less able to refuse sex and had lower confidence while having sex. Although some women with low self-esteem have less confidence while having sex, the majority of women in the United States reported being sexually satisfied, especially compared to reports from other countries (Pujols, Meston, & Seal, 2010).

Previous work in this area has uncovered many things about the way women dress. However, very few articles were found that focused on the motivation behind a women's dress. Most studies looked at the impact of clothes and first impressions. Many findings would suggest, such as research done by Elliot and Niesta, that the color red alters a man's first impression of women (2008). While important to this study, the researchers are more interested in *why* women dress the way they do.

In order to understand the research found in this study, the variables must be specifically defined. "Consistency regarding how a label of 'provocative' or 'sexual' dress is assigned

within the academic literature is problematic” (Lynch, 2007, p. 185). The researchers choose to define seductive dress simply as clothing worn by an individual to appear more sexually desirable. Clothing seductiveness can be measured by its skin display, sheerness, and tightness (Grammer, Renninger, & Fischer, 2004). Many researchers have used clothing correlated with attraction. Attraction defined by the researchers is the initial attention given to another person when drawn to another.

Body Image

Body image was found to be a prominent reason for a women's choice in dress. A women's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with her body was described and operationalized as “body part satisfaction (i.e., satisfaction with stomach, arms, thighs), concern with body size or weight, and comfort with one's body in front of a partner or others” (Pujols et al., 2010, p 910). Women that have a lower body image can try to compensate for this by their clothes. When trying to attract a man, women with poor body image may dress more provocatively because they feel it is the only way to get the man's attention. This body dissatisfaction may also lead to lower sexual sufficiency. However, women that are satisfied with their body were shown to have better sexual activity, adventure, and sexual functioning (Pujols et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Wentland, Herold, Demarais, and Mihausen (2009), they also found that women that were more at ease with their body image engage in more sexual activity and achieve orgasm. Another way women body images can be affected by the constant thought they are being watched and sometimes viewed as objects by men. When women see a positive response by the male population when wearing provocative outfits, this leads to women being pulled into what Lynch (2007) referred to as “the media beauty culture” (p. 187). By being pulled into this consistent image of what it takes to attract men, women learn that they would rather be desired

than to feel desire. According to Locher, Unger, Sociedade, and Wahl (1993) the impact on whether a person is perceived as being attractive is more prevalent in women than in men.

Reasons for Seductive Dress

Research suggests that women are motivated to dress seductively for a variety of reasons. Moor (2010) suggested the literature shows an overwhelming 82% of women in one particular study self-reported their motivation for dressing seductively was simply because they liked the look. However, a wish to look attractive was the motivation for almost just as many women. Only 3.2% of the women reported intent to arouse men with their seductive dress and of those less than 6% meant to seduce. Very few reported a desire to be touched or stared at as their motivation for dressing seductively. It can be concluded from these statistics that women in fact use seductive dress to attract men. Other study proposes women feel empowered by the attention they receive as a result of their seductive dress (Notwatzki & Morry, 2009). Problems arise, however, when the intent is misinterpreted by men.

Negative Outcomes

Negative outcomes may result from men's misinterpretation of women's seductive dress. An unfortunate outcome is the potential for sexual violence, specifically pertaining to date rape. In these instances women will dress to attract, and men will perceive seduction. According to Johnson and Lee (2000) date rape is characterized as a unique act because "there are no witnesses, 'appropriate' victim behavior is unclear, and the victim-offender relationship is perceived as close" (p. 332). The intent of women's seductive dress would pertain to unclear appropriate victim behavior. Research has found not only do most people believe women who dress seductively invite sexual advances, but that the greatest probability of rape is linked directly with seductive dress (Johnson & Lee, 2000). Furthermore, it has been documented,

“women wearing provocative clothing should be held at least partially responsible for their rapes” (Johnson & Lee, 2000, p. 335).

Mate Selection

Time and time again, research has reported differences in sexuality and partner selection between men and women. Townsend and Levy (2001) noted that, “when choosing partners for sex or marriage, men place more emphasis than women on physical attractiveness and women place more emphasis than men on socioeconomic status” (p. 372). Because women know men value physical attractiveness in a partner, they use clothing to attract them in this way. Past studies have reported women vary type of dress based on the type of relationship they are seeking. Women wanting to meet new people and have a desire to flirt rated their clothing as more sexy and bold. Grammer, Renninger, and Fischer (2004) likewise propose, women reporting a high motivation for sex reported their clothing as very bold, very sexy, and less natural.

It has been determined that men and women have developed different strategies for finding partners in both short-term and long-term contexts. Literature suggests that women's dress is predictable based on marriages and careers and women will dress in certain ways in order to compete with other women for a partner. Women's dress through the past centuries was looked at to see if there was a correlation with the changing trends and exogenous events (Barber, 1999). It was found, through three separate studies, that there was strong evidence supporting the underlying hypothesis that women's fashion are predictable depending if women are looking for marriage or a professional career. Also, Smith (1999) looked at the reason behind women's persist use of high heels. It was found that heels are merely used for cosmetic and mating purposes. These two articles are among the few that looked into the motivation

behind women's dress. It was found that a smaller waist and a more curvaceous silhouette, while wearing a longer dress is more associated with marriage. This conclusion is further supported by men reporting differences in values of certain characteristics as it pertains to short-term mating and long-term mating (Barber, 1999). Buss and Schmitt (1993) presented statistics that represent men seek good looking, physically attractive, promiscuous women with sex appeal and who are sexually experienced for short-term mates. While men are still interested in these characteristics in a long-term mate, they identified lower levels of desirability of all these, especially in levels of promiscuity. This concept suggests that women still need to use dress to attract men but portray a less seductive look if seeking a long-term mate.

A variety of research supported that people tend to make first impressions of others based on outward appearance within a quick glance (Grammer, Renninger, & Fischer, 2004). Lennon (1986) was able to conclude from her research that clothing and physical appearance effect a person's initial judgment of another individual. Women use certain colors to grasp the attention of men. Red specifically enhances men's attraction to women. Historically the color red has been linking with sex. Because the color red holds a specific meaning of romance and lust, it evokes a feeling of sexual desire in men when they see women wearing it (Elliot & Niesta, 2008). Research conducted by Elliot and Niesta (2008) identifies men being more attracted to women wearing red over various colors including white, gray, green, and blue.

Women's motivation to form a variety of different relationships affects their type of dress. Overall, the researchers believe this review identifies major factors in research regarding the frequency of women dressing seductively compared to men. This review also identifies negative aspects of seductive dress involving sexual violence as well as addresses the problems it creates in our society pertaining to younger generations. In light of the research on sex

differences in sexuality and partner selection, it seems safe to conclude based on the wide range of evidence reviewed in this paper that women dress seductively to attract men.

Method

The research method used was quantitative gathered through the use of surveys. The surveys were used to assess the relationship between attraction and dress. Two surveys were used with the only difference being the picture. In the survey conveying casual dress the model wore light colored lounge clothes. In the survey conveying fancy dress the model wore a tight fitting black dress. The first section asked ten questions using the Likert scale with numbers one through five, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions provided the amount of attraction to the given picture. The survey also included a demographic section containing five different questions.

Participants

Participants were mostly West Virginia University undergraduate students recruited in 100 level Communication Studies courses. Surveys were distributed on a Friday afternoon during a regular class session and were completed in approximately twenty minutes. The survey was completely anonymous. No identifying information such as participants' names were taken down. The students participating in the study volunteered their time freely. Of the participants, 63% (32) were male and 31% (16) were female. Freshman accounted for 35% (18) of the participants, sophomores 29% (15), juniors 14% (7), and seniors 16% (8). Of the surveys collected 6% (3) were not valid. The ages of the participants ranged from 18-27, with the mean age being 20.13. Of the participants, 75% (38) were White or Caucasian, 2% (1) were American Indian, 6% (3) were Asian, 2% (1) were Black or African American, 2% (1) were Biracial, and 6% (3) were other. Of the participants, 67% (34) practiced Christianity, 2% (1) practiced

Hinduism, 8% (4) practiced Islam, 2% (1) practiced Judaism, 4% (2) were Atheist, and 10% (5) were other.

Measurement

Dress. Dress was measured by two different pictures. In the survey conveying casual dress the model wore light colored lounge clothes. In the survey conveying fancy dress the model wore a tight fitting black dress.

Attraction. Attraction was measured by asking ten questions using a Likert scale. An example is "I think she is pretty." Participants' responses ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree on a five point Likert scale.

Results

Hypothesis one stated, women dress seductively to attract men. To test the hypothesis an independent sample t-test was conducted ($t = -2.556, p = .01$). Hypothesis one was supported. The mean for casual dress was 4.12 and the mean for fancy dress was 4.49.

Discussion

The purpose of the research was to study the correlation between dress and attraction. The goal of the research was to support the hypothesis that women dress seductively to attract men. It was found that the hypothesis was supported. Women do in fact dress seductively to attract men. This research was important to be further studied because society and media tell women to dress a certain way. If women do not follow the standards set by society, they are not considered attractive by the majority. Research supports that society has a strong influence on peoples' perception of attractiveness. Women strive to meet these expectations but are motivated by various factors. The type of relationship women are seeking is the factor that most highly influences their type of dress. Women seeking short term relationships or strictly sexual

relationships dress differently than women seeking mates. This was especially true of the participants used in this research study. Because the population consisted of young college students, there was a trend of sexual relationships being sought after rather than long term commitments.

The research found in this study was consistent with past research regarding men's attraction based on women's dress. This is important and beneficial because it makes past research more credible. The findings focused on a specific age group and did not vary from research that did not specify age.

This research can be especially beneficial to women to educate them on how men interpret their dress. Although women might not be intended to seduce or attract men for sexual relations, this is often how men interpret women's dress.

Limitations

One limitation in the study is the sample size. The research would have been more accurate if the sample size were larger than 50 participants. Performing an actual experiment rather than using a survey would have provided more accurate results. An appropriate experiment would have been to create a controlled environment in which models dressed in both casual dress and fancy dress to represent the variable. Although the hypothesis was supported, a major limitation was the participants included both males as well as females. To get the most accurate results, the researchers would have benefited from selecting only male participants to complete the survey.

Future Research

A variable to look at in future research would be physical characteristics such as hair color, hair length, skin tone, body shape, height, and weight. The relationship examined would be between attraction and physical characteristics.

The research was conducted to find the correlation between women's dress and men's attraction. The study proved the hypothesis that women dress seductively to attract men was supported. The hypothesis was also supported by past research which verified the validity of the study conducted. This proves the findings are consistent over time.

References

- Barber, N. (1999). Women's dress fashions as a function of reproductive strategy. *Sex Roles, 40*, 459-471.
- Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review, 100*, 204-232.
- Elliot, A. J., & Niesta, D. (2008). Romantic red: Red enhances men's attraction to women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95*, 1150-1164.
- Grammer, K., Renninger, L. A., & Fischer, B. (2004). Disco clothing, female sexual motivation, and relationship status: Is she dressed to impress? *Journal of Sex Research, 41*, 66-74.
- Johnson, K. P., & Lee, M. (2000). Effects of clothing and behavior on perceptions concerning an alleged date rape. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 28*, 332-356.
- Lennon, S. J. (1986). Additivity of clothing cues in first impressions. *Social Behavior and Personality, 14*, 15-21.
- Locher, P., Unger, R. K., Sociedade, P., & Wahl, J. (1993). At first glance: Accessibility of the physical attractiveness stereotype. *Sex Roles, 28*, 729-743.
- Lynch, A. (2007). Expanding the definition of provocative dress: An examination of female flashing behavior on a college campus. *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal, 25*, 184-201.
- Moor, A. (2010). She dresses to attract, he perceives seduction: A gender gap in attribution of intent to women's revealing style of dress and its relation to blaming the victims of sexual violence. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 11*, 115-127.
- Nowatzki, J., & Morry, M. M. (2009). Women's intentions regarding, and acceptance of, self sexualizing behavior. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 95-107.

Pujols, Y., Meston, C. M., & Seal, B. N. (2010). The association between sexual satisfaction and body image in women. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 905-916.

Smith, E. O. (1999). High heels and evolution. *Psychology, Evolution & Gender*, 1.3, 245-277.

Townsend, J. M., & Levy, G. D. (2001). Effects of potential partners' costume and physical attractiveness on sexuality and partner selection. *The Journal of Psychology*, 4, 371-389.

Wentland, J. J., Herold, E. S., Demarais, S., & Mihausen, R. R. (2009). Differentiating highly sexual women from less sexual women. *Canadian Journal of Human Society*, 18, 169-182.

Yamamiya, Y., Cash, T. F., & Thompson, J. K. (2006). Sexual experiences among college women: The differential effects of general versus contextual body images on sexuality. *Sex Roles*, 55, 421-427.