CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to determine the relationship among concept of self, self-esteem, body image, body cathexis and clothing behavior for a group of middle aged working women. The review of literature focuses on self concept, measures of body image, body cathexis, women and body image, clothing and body image, and clothing interest.

2.1.1 Self concept

Appearance is one of the most prominent ways to display and reinforce self-concept. Interest in appearance is multifaceted and may reflect characteristics central to self-definition through extensive time, energy and resources expended on appearance (Kaiser, 1997). In consumer research, it is argued that the social self is achieved through the purchase and use of products that portray an image consistent with (or a compromise between) the consumer’s actual and/or ideal self-concept (Sproles & Burns, 1993). Women who are dissatisfied with their body may buy and wear clothing that camouflage certain body parts or emphasize other body parts, both of which may help to bring the perceived body image more in line with the ideal body image. Dieting may also be used as a tool to help bring the perceived body image closer to the ideal.

Body image is an aspect of self-concept. Self-concept is the global perception of who one is (Kaiser, 1997, p. 147). Kalish (1975) defined self-concept as the total image one has about oneself; it contains one’s actual experiences and the interpretations about those experiences. Within that total image, self-concept is multidimensional and encompasses several facets of the self. Body image and self-esteem are considered the most important aspects of self-concept (Kalish, 1975).

By spending time and money on dieting and exercising, women believe that they can improve their appearance and, as a result, feel better about themselves, thereby improving their self-concept. As evidenced by the increase in time and money spent on dieting and exercising behavior, appearance is an extremely
important part of one’s self-concept. It is believed that through personal appearance (in this case specifically through appearance management and clothing behavior), an individual presents personal identity, attitudes, moods, and value or selfworth.

A number of studies attempted to grapple with the issue of how clothing choices convey meaning to others. Interestingly, several studies which attempted to find straightforward correlations came up with mixed results or were inconclusive. Out of this emerged a consensus that, although clothing conveys meaning, the meanings it conveys are not easy to untangle – they are determined to a great extent by context, but also by so-called subculture. That is, if the wearer and the observer belong to the same sub-culture, the message is clearly understand, but if they belong to different sub-cultures, sometimes the messages are lost or become confused. In a recent study, it was pointed out that clothing interest serves at least four different purposes, and that the meaning conveyed by clothing may be different depending on the purpose sought (Venkatesh, Joy, Sherry Jr and Deschenes, 2010). The four purposes include fashion as wearable art, as a way of self concept or maintaining identity, as a commentary on the body, or as a reflection of body image.

The relationship between emotion and clothing is also found in other research studies. For the past decade, the study of emotion has become mainstream in psychological research and the results of this concentrated effort are increasingly present in the research literature. In the exploratory study by Wendy Moody, Peter Kinderman and Pammi Sinha cited at the beginning of this post (Moody, Kinderman and Sinha, 2010), emotion and mood were found to be managed and reflected through clothing. Although self concept of personality played into clothing choices, mood was a much stronger predictor. The authors caution that the small size of their first study group limit the generalizability of their findings, however, and promise more as the study moves forward. These modern studies complement earlier findings that found
clothing selection to be influenced by mood, but more so in women than among men (Kwon, 1991). Other modern studies show, for example, how Arab women managers use clothing choice as a way of dealing with conflicting identities in the work environment (Omair, 2009).

**How Clothing Affects Our Self-concept**

Clothing choices may influence our self-concept in other ways. A 1994 study showed that clothing enhances people’s self perception of a range of “occupational attributes”, including responsibility, competency, knowledge-ability, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthyness, willingness to work hard and efficiency (Kwon, 1994). That is, by wearing appropriate clothes, a person’s sense of these traits was augmented. This result was further reinforced in a more recent study that showed that people who are dressed more formally use more formal language to describe themselves, compared to the casually dressed who use more casual language (Hanover and Kühlmann, 2006). An overview paper (Tombs, 2010) notes that clothing choices affects both our self-concept and our internal feelings, but also affects our forms of symbolic and emotional expression. He sees the first two as “inward oriented” and the second pair as “outward oriented” within a communications model. This understanding parallels the communication model discussed in the previous post. Tombs notes that “people consume fashion to fulfill emotional needs”.

**2.1.2 Self Esteem**

Self-esteem is a sociopsychological construct that assesses an individual’s attitudes and perceptions of self-worth. Thus, self-esteem is “an understanding of one’s quality as an object—that is, how good or bad, valuable or worthless, positive or negative, or superior or inferior one is” (Thoits, 1999, p. 342). Individual assessments of self-esteem are formed through two interrelated processes. First, individuals compare their social identities, opinions, and abilities with others. To the extent that individuals feel that they are inferior to
those with whom they interact, their self-esteem will be negatively affected. Second, individuals assess themselves through their interaction with others. People learn to see themselves as others believe them to be. If significant others do not think highly of an individual, that individual will come to think poorly of himself or herself. This is referred to as the ‘‘reflected appraisal’’ of one’s selfworth (Rosenberg & Perlin, 1978).

Self-esteem is strongly and negatively correlated with distress and depression (Rosenberg, 1985; Rosenberg, Schooler & Schoenbach, 1989) and individuals who have high perceptions of self-worth and self-esteem are thought to cope better with stress (Perlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981). Hence, to understand distress and depression, one needs to understand the factors and processes that contribute to low self-esteem. The strong and consistent finding regarding gender and self-esteem is that compared with men, women have lower levels of self-esteem in adulthood (Josephs, Markus & Tafarodi, 1992). Although boys and girls start with very similar levels of self-esteem in early adolescence (between ages 11 and 13), they gradually diverge throughout the teenage years and adulthood with boys gaining a sense of positive self-worth and girls losing that sense (Rosenfield, 1999).

Lower levels of self-esteem help to explain the fact that girls and women are more likely to experience higher levels of distress and depression than boys and men (Avison & McAlpine, 1992; Rosenberg, 1985; Rosenfield, 1989). Although there are several explanations for this relationship in the mental health literature, Rosenfield’s (1999) is compelling. She argues that men and women have different social structural experiences that begin in early childhood and are reflected in the relative power that men and women have in society. Relative power, in turn, influences self-appraisals. As a result, Rosenfield suggests that ‘‘Given the power, the responsibility in the public domain, receipt of support, and value placed on masculine pursuits, males
Generally tend toward high self-esteem” (Rosenfield, 1999, p. 220). Although Rosenfield uses this argument to explain gender differences, it can also be extended to explain differences in self-esteem among women. Working class women, for instance, have considerably less power than do middle and upper class women, and with increasing age, the likelihood of women engaging in valued feminine pursuits declines considerably. Others may think poorly of them, and through reflected appraisals, their self-esteem may suffer. Furthermore, girls and women take part in processes of comparison whereby they compare their beauty with that of others. If a woman feels less beautiful than the women with whom she interacts, her self-esteem will be negatively affected (Abell & Richards, 1996; Furman, 1997). There is little doubt that men also engage in comparative beauty exercises and value their corporeal appearances (Oberg & Tornstam, 1999). However, the fact that women rate their appearance with higher importance than men do suggests that physical appearance may be more salient to identities and self-esteem among women than among men.

In the literature on the relationship between self-esteem and social class, social class is typically measured using self-esteem is defined as “a realistic respect for or favorable impression of oneself,” (Dickerson, 2004). The factors that contribute to this lack of self-confidence are varied and powerful, considering they are strong enough to generate feelings of negative self-worth during a time that could be exciting and uplifting. Dickerson (2004, p. 338) found that middle aged women today face extraordinary pressure to accomplish many things, including finding a partner, choosing a career, achieving financial independence, creating a social life, and needing to stay thin and attractive. In trying to sort out all of these priorities, Dickerson (2004, p. 338) argues that women cannot possibly balance everything and end up feeling like failures for not being good enough. This sense of not measuring up contributes to a pervasive lack of self-esteem in young women which negatively impacts their
life choices and satisfaction. The goal in this thesis is to discover the reasons why this disconnect exists between women’s accomplishments and their low self esteem levels and how to take steps to address this social phenomenon.

One major aspect of this self-esteem crisis seems to be linked to poor body image in females. This study will explore why middle-aged women feel this discontent with themselves physically and emotionally, especially because physical self-esteem or satisfaction with one’s body may actually defend women from feeling dissatisfied with themselves (Cook-Cottone & Phelps, 2003, p. 81). Self-esteem, as related to body image, has a vast impact on women’s total well-being, due in part to the fact that “self concept is an inclusive and holistic gauge of satisfaction with the body, which includes feelings about physical presence and health” (Bracken, 1992, as cited in Cook-Cottone & Phelps, 2003, p. 82).

In perusing the research, a question came to mind. Was this self-esteem and body image problem a product of the contemporary culture’s competing values and pressures on women today or has this been an issue that has existed throughout time for females? McQuaide (1998, p. 22) notes the importance of a positive self image in women at midlife because a woman who is satisfied at midlife can be a positive role model to women who feel trapped by stereotypes within her culture. Contemporary women grew up in a very different culture and historical time than their mothers, aunts, or godmothers, and it would be interesting to see how women of past generations feel about themselves as compared to young women of today. This lack of self-esteem in young adult females is important to social work practice. Further, self-esteem not only contributes to better mental health, it also affects women’s decisions and actions. Prior research discovered that a loss of self esteem in young adult females can lead to either a loss of voice in one’s own opinions.

Gergen (1965) study on self-esteem showed how it is affected by the reactions of others. Asked subjects to talk about themselves as openly and honestly as
possible. Half subjects treated in a positive way, half in a negative way by a clinical psychologist. Other subjects in a control condition treated neutrally. Found that self-esteem increased as talk progressed if in positive condition, decreased in negative condition and stayed the same in the control condition.

Bergin (1962) showed that we do not believe people who widely disagree with our self evaluations (e.g. if you think you are a really hard worker but your parents suggest that you are incredibly lazy then you’ll ignore them and think they are stupid!)

Morse and Gergen (1970) showed that in uncertain or anxiety arousing situations our self-esteem may change rapidly. Subjects were waiting for a job interview in a waiting room. They were sat with another candidate (a confederate of the experimenter) in one of two conditions:

A)  **Mr Clean** - dressed in smart suit, carrying a briefcase opened to reveal a slide rule and books.

B)  **Mr Dirty** - dressed in an old T-shirt and jeans, slouched over a cheap sex novel. Self-esteem of subjects with Mr Dirty increased whilst those with Mr Clean decreased!

No mention made of how this affected subjects’ performance in interview. Level of self-esteem affects performance at numerous tasks though (Coopersmith 1967) so could expect Mr Dirty subjects to perform better than Mr Clean. Even though self-esteem might fluctuate, there are times when we continue to believe good things about ourselves even when evidence to the contrary exists. This is known as the *perseverance effect*.

Ross et al (1975) showed that people who believed they had socially desirable characteristics continued in this belief even when the experimenters tried to get them to believe the opposite. Does the same thing happen with bad things if we have low self-esteem? Maybe not, perhaps with very low self-esteem all we believe about ourselves might be bad.
Contemporary American culture promotes the under development of positive self regard for women. Society’s focus on physical attractiveness and body image is widely reviewed in previous literature. Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008, p. 460) reported that 50% of women stated being dissatisfied with their bodies. This unhappiness has serious consequences because it is linked to physical and mental health issues, and poor self-esteem.

Clark and Tiggemann (2008) also found that a negative body image is associated with a low self-concept for women, can be harmful to social functioning, and can lead to eating disorders (p. 1124). It is agreed that body dissatisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of subsequent eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and obesity (Grabe et al., 2008; Clark & Tiggeman, 2008). Eating disorders, in particular, are both a consequence and contributor to poor self-esteem in. These behaviors are aimed at eliminating body dissatisfaction when in reality, they ravage the body physically and mentally (Grabe et al., 2008). Eating disorders are a severe way to feel better about one’s body and evidence shows that “body image disturbance prospectively predicts eating pathology” (Grabe, 2008).

An even more drastic response to dealing with low self-esteem as a result of body dissatisfaction is the development of Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). Grant and Phillips (2004) define a person with BDD as being “preoccupied with their appearance, thinking they look abnormal, ugly or deformed, when in fact they look normal.” Like Anorexia Nervosa, women who suffer from BDD are terrified of gaining weight, even if they are normal weight or underweight. This disorder encourages restricting food intake and excessive exercise, yet no remedy ever proves satisfactory to the sufferer who continues to feel overweight (Grant & Phillips, 2004). This disorder represents a severe illness for women who are intensely unhappy with their body size and experiencing an extremely low level of self-esteem.
The current literature on self-esteem points to numerous contributing factors to the low self-esteem of middle aged women. To start, contemporary American culture promotes the under development of positive self regard for women. Society’s focus on physical attractiveness and body image is widely reviewed in previous literature. Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008, p. 460) reported that 50% of women stated being dissatisfied with their bodies. This unhappiness has serious consequences because it is linked to physical and mental health issues, such as Bulimia and poor self-esteem. Clark and Tiggemann (2008) also found that a negative body image is associated with a low self-concept for women, can be harmful to social functioning, and can lead to eating disorders (p. 1124). It is agreed that body dissatisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of subsequent eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression, and obesity (Grabe et al., 2008; Clark & Tiggeman, 2008).

Eating disorders, in particular, are both a consequence and contributor to poor self-esteem in women. Common eating disorders include Anorexia Nervosa, starvation of self, and Bulimia, bingeing and purging. These behaviors are aimed at eliminating body dissatisfaction when in reality, they ravage the body physically and mentally (Grabe et al., 2008). Eating disorders are a severe way to feel better about one’s body and evidence shows that “body image disturbance prospectively predicts eating pathology” (Grabe et al., 2008). Women who negatively evaluate their bodies are more at risk to engage in patterns of restrictive dieting and other eating disorders (Trampe, Stapel & Siero, 2007, p. 106).

One of the main forces in American culture that encourages women to view their physical selves as inadequate is the media. Images of unrealistically thin and attractive women are portrayed ubiquitously in Western culture. Cook-Cottone and Phelps (2003) argue that as women have gained more social status in politics and professions, the female ideal has become thinner and more impossible to achieve, thus creating feelings of discontent in females. Through
television, advertisements, and magazines, women are bombarded with a physical standard that is largely unattainable (Trampe et al., 2007). For example, women on television are thinner today than they were in the past and these representations are aimed at women as a standard of beauty. This thin ideal is overemphasized in the media and is consistently rewarded and encouraged through female characters. Other mediums, such as Playboy and the Miss America Pageant, also reinforce a young, lean, and attractive model as the perfect woman (Grabe et al., 2008). It was found that exposure to these images “instigates social comparison processes that typically have negative effects on self-evaluation” (Trampe et al., 2007, p. 106). Monder (2007) notes that books like *Our Bodies Ourselves* were landmarks in the active 1970’s that inspired women to be proud of themselves and their bodies, regardless of size and shape. Today’s women lack this type of motivation and are deluged with one thin body ideal.

Mental health in women is also found to be negatively affected by low self esteem. Dickerson (2004) found that contemporary women face enormous pressure to adhere to certain life opportunities. More than ever, women have more options available to them, yet many experience these choices as expectations that place conflicting demands on their lives. Women are now taught that they can “have it all:” a great career, a satisfying personal life, and financial stability. However, women who are not able to achieve this ideal are left feeling unsuccessful and worthless. The consequences of these feelings are self-doubts and a sense of failure when a woman is not able to juggle everything (Dickerson, 2004, p. 338).

It is further discussed that women who were college-aged in the 1970’s grew up in the context of the changes and advances occurring for women and, therefore, developed basic expectations for gender that were rooted in equality in the workplace and at home (Zucker & Stewart, 2007, 138). McQuaide (1998) acknowledges the powerful effect of this idea on women who are
presently at midlife and who came of age in the women’s rights era. These women tend to have a fairly positive self-image at midlife as a result of their actions and behaviors as young adults.

Another difference between women at the end of the twentieth century and contemporary women pertains to body image. Monder (2007) discusses the rise of cosmetic surgeries in recent years as a way for women to stay young and adhere to the western standard of beauty. This trend was practically nonexistent for the mainstream in the 1970’s, yet there has been an enormous increase in elective surgeries over the past three decades. The quest for perceived bodily perfection has taken on an increased importance for current young women which creates a superficial pressure on females and leads to a poor self-image when one does not measure up (Monder, 2007).

However, Dickerson (2004, p. 339) argues that “though many women are told that they now have equal rights and opportunities, it is still difficult for women to translate their ways of knowing in all of those areas that have more traditionally belonged to men.” This sense of not measuring up can greatly contribute to a shortage of self-esteem in today’s young women. In addition, contemporary college-aged women lack the passion and drive to advocate for women’s rights that typified young women in the 1960’s and 1970’s. This apathy can make women feel “stuck” and isolated with their own plight, rather than part of a larger cause (Monder, 2007). Feelings of low self-esteem can result and plague a young woman’s life experience.

Although there are many external reasons that may contribute to low self-esteem in middle aged women, these factors are not directly related to the development of poor self-regard in all young females. In western society, the estimates for children who are unhappy with their body shape or size are as low as 28% (Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001, as cited in Clark & Tiggemann, 2008, p. 1124). This percentage is indicative of how most body image issues do not arise in childhood. In addition, about 50% of middle aged women reported
feeling dissatisfied with their bodies and while this is not a small percentage, it does mean that half of all females are satisfied with their physical selves (Grabe, Hyde, & Ward, 2008, p. 460).

Eating disorders can develop as a result of low self-esteem, but they are not a common coping strategy for most women. Eating disorders can be caused by a number of factors, and it is noted that the sociocultural influences that produce eating issues in one individual and not in another are still not understood (Trampe, Siero & Stapel, 2007, p. 106). The numbers for women struggling with eating disorders are not very high, either. In the United States, about one in 100 women suffer from Anorexia Nervosa while two to three women out of 100 are diagnosed with Bulimia Nervosa (“Eating Disorder Statistics,” 2006). These statistics do not suggest that the majority of women are forced to turn to eating disorders as a result of low self-esteem. In reality, many women feel positively about their academic achievements, social experiences, and competence and are less likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and, consequently, resort to eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa (Cook-Cottone & Phelps, 2003, p. 82).

Self-esteem has not been adequately researched and, therefore, does not have a strong connection. It is often assumed that the media portrays an impossible-to-attain thin-ideal for a woman that negatively impacts the self-esteem development in young, adult women. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the media, including television, advertisements, and magazines, simply represents an ideal and not a standard of beauty. Trampe, Siero, and Stapel (2007) confirm the ideas of previous researchers who found that images of physically attractive women have a greater effect on some women than others which means that a number of women have no adverse reaction to the thin-ideal in the media (p. 106). In fact, “not every woman feels bad about herself after confrontation with an attractive target” but rather, it is a smaller, specific group of women who
have an increased propensity to negatively self-evaluate (Trampe et al., 2007, p. 115).

In addition, past researchers who studied the effects of the media on women’s self-esteem, through correlational and longitudinal studies, have not been able to provide “unequivocal findings regarding the role of the media in women’s body image concerns” (Grabe et al., 2008, p. 461). Even though some women may be negatively affected by the ideals depicted in publications such as *Playboy* or the Miss America Pageant, a large number of young women continue to aspire to these images and exhibit no self-esteem crisis (Grabe et al., 2008).

Further, self-esteem not only contributes to better mental health, it also affects young women’s decisions and actions. Prior research discovered that a loss of self esteem in young adult females can lead to either a loss of voice in one’s own opinions or an increased tendency to act out. This rebellion can take many forms, including alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuousness, or criminal behavior (Gilligan & Brown, 1992, p. 5).

The fact that scores of women want to be viewed as sexually attractive and attempt to achieve the western standard of physical beauty proves that many females do not have low self perceptions.

The consequences that can be associated with low self-esteem in women cannot be solely attributed to one cause. For example, mental health issues are not exclusively due to a self-esteem problem. Many middle aged women grow up into healthy, self-assured young adults. Hancock (1989) notes that “a confident young woman is sometimes called a young woman’s authentic self” which means that a number of females do not struggle with self-esteem. Even in this world of conflicting expectations and pressures for women, healthy development, both physically and mentally, is possible. Dickerson (2004) admits that “women do appear to have many more opportunities available to
them as an effect of the feminist movement” and numerous women are able to balance all of these new experiences (p. 338).

Self-doubt is not present for all middle aged women. Contemporary women are now able to do much more than just get married and have children. Women can become financially stable, have a fulfilling career, create a vibrant social life, and choose where they want to live (Dickerson, 2004, p. 338). Women have many more choices than were previously available, and a positive self-image can develop from successfully juggling multiple tasks and increased opportunities.

It can be argued that women who grew up in the active times of the 1960’s and 1970’s cultivated higher self-esteem as compared to contemporary young women who grew up in apathetic times. However, women of today certainly have more opportunities and equality than past generations. All of these rights could actually increase the self esteem of women because it is now believed that women can do almost as much as men in politics, occupations, and social arenas. It is true that women who came of age in the 1960’s and 1970’s have a different life perspective than contemporary young women. This is partly due to the fact that “events experienced in late adolescence and early adulthood are reflected in conscious identity, opportunities, and life choices” (Zucker & Stewart, 2007, p. 137)

Through clothing, feelings about the self may be expressed. clothing can be used to maintain or bolster the self esteem of an individual. It can enhance good figure features and camouflage poorer ones. Clothing can help a women feel that she belongs to a group. Several researchers have found that clothing is important to middle aged women (Bader, 1963 Ebeling and Rosencranz, 1961). However, the relationship between clothing interest and self esteem for middle aged women has received little attention.
2.1.3 Body Cathexis

Body cathexis is a concept that is closely related to body image, but more specifically addresses the degree of satisfaction one has with his/her body (Kaiser, 1997). This construct is described as multidimensional and complex (Kaiser, 1997). As satisfaction with one’s body can be influenced by many different factors, such as cultural ideals and gender, body cathexis can vary from body area to body area (Kaiser, 1997).

Jourard and Secord (1955) found body part size to be a predictor of body cathexis in men, as males desired to possess larger body parts. They proposed that females evaluate their present body by comparing it with the concept of an ideal body that is shared by most women. The results of Jourard and Secord’s (1955) study regarding female body cathexis suggested that a positive body cathexis is associated with possessing a relatively small body frame, with exception to the bust area. Within their study, Jourard and Secord (1955) also explored whether or not a shared ideal for body shape or size exists. The researchers uncovered a small variability in ideal sizes, indicating the existence of a standard ideal body frame (Jourard & Secord, 1955).

Hwang (1996) defined body cathexis as a factor that aids in the formation of clothing behavior and attitude towards clothing. Many consumers perceive an innate problem with their body when their clothing fails to accentuate the body in a desired way. However, quite often, these consumers neglect to realize that clothing needs to be designed for the body and not vice versa. These consumers also frequently rely on outside influences when shaping their ideal body. Bodies of female fashion models are considered to represent the perfect figure, and women that fall short of those standards are left with negative thoughts about their own bodies (Labat & DeLong, 1990).

Individuals often have a perceived divergence in their ideal physical self and the actual self (Kaiser, 1997). This divergence between the actual body shape/size and ideal body shape/size means that the consumer has a desire to
have a shape other than the one she possesses. Notions of an ideal physical self are formed from elements of society and standards of beauty to which the person has been exposed, and these often dictate the way they view themselves. The socially accepted standard of an ideal body has been found to create body image disturbances and contribute to negative body cathexis among women (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997).

Actual weight, although important, may not play a major role in women’s feeling about their bodies (Kwon & Parham, 1994). The results of Kwon and Parham’s (1994) study regarding body perception and clothing practices indicated that women’s perception of their weight rather than numerical weight had a heavier bearing on their clothing practices. Their perception of personal physicality dictated whether garments were to be used as camouflaging tools or to individualize oneself (Kwon & Parham, 1994).

A study conducted by Singh (1994) to determine the role of waist to hip (WTH) 12 ratio in perceived female attractiveness concluded both male and female respondents ranked attractiveness on the basis of WTH ratio measurements as opposed to apparent body weight. This eludes to the fact that actual proportion is a higher standard of attractiveness than weight. Therefore, the results of study suggest that a woman may workout to achieve an ideal weight but may still be dissatisfied with her body. However, the results of Singh’s study have been contradicted by studies conducted by Tovee, Reinhardt, Emery and Cornelissen (1998), Tovee, Hancock, Mahmoodi, Singleton and Cernalissen (2002) and Tovee, Mason and Cohen-Tovee (2003), who argue that Body Mass Index (BMI) serves as a better predictor of body attractiveness than WTH. Another study conducted by Harrison (2003) regarding mass media ideals and ideal body proportions, concluded that women’s desire for a smaller figure, specifically smaller waist and hips, increased on exposure to television images of the ideal body. These results elude to the suggestion that mass media’s ideal body proportions are the source
of lower body cathexis amongst women; while also supporting both Singh’s and Tovee’s suggestions that BMI and WTH ratio are integral to women’s satisfaction with their body.

Jourard and Secord (1955) found that none of the women in their study’s sample possessed the measurements they (women) viewed to be ideal. Most women hold themselves to a standard that may be unobtainable when body shape and size are taken into account.

In order to determine whether clothing can make a difference in body cathexis, Markee et al. (1990) investigated the difference between the perception of the nude body and the perception of the clothed body in relation to body cathexis using a modified version of the Body Cathexis Scale. Results indicated the women were significantly more satisfied with their clothed bodies than with their nude bodies. The results also revealed that clothing was not only a body covering, but that it functioned to improve body image perception. Women used clothing to camouflage areas of the body that deviated from cultural ideals, thereby improving their body image.

**Satisfaction with clothing and body cathexis.** The satisfaction with the fit of clothing is strongly related to an individual’s body cathexis. Higher body cathexis scores have been related to greater satisfaction with the fit of clothing (Hwang, 1996; Shim et al., 1991). Individuals who were more satisfied with their bodies and had a favorable attitude toward clothing were more likely to be satisfied with ready-to-wear clothing, enjoy shopping, be confident in choosing proper clothes for themselves, and be heavy purchasers of clothing (Shim et al., 1991). Lower body cathexis scores for weight have been related to dissatisfaction with the fit of clothing at the thighs, hips, and waist (Hwang, 1996). Overweight women tend to have a lower body image and lower body cathexis scores than normal-weight women (Cash et al., 1990; Cash et al., 1986), and tend to express greater dissatisfaction with the fit of clothing. Normal weight women, when compared to overweight women and those in a
weight loss group, were more satisfied with their bodies and expressed greater satisfaction with the fit of clothing (Frederick, 1977). Women who were overweight or in a weight loss group had lower degrees of body cathexis, and women in the weight loss group expressed significantly lower clothing satisfaction than the normal-weight group. The author suggested that overweight women were in need of clothing that would enhance their self-image because of the negative feedback they receive as a result of being overweight.

Dissatisfaction with the lower body has also been related to decreased satisfaction with the fit of garments in the lower body (LaBat & DeLong, 1990). The authors contended that, when clothing does not fit, the consumer may perceive the cause as related to the body and not the clothing. Further, they believed that fit problems could result in negative feelings about the body particularly when fashion dictates a close fit in the lower body with the use of blue jeans and slim skirts. LaBat and DeLong suggested that the apparel industry’s sizing systems and the sized garments themselves provide symbols of expectations for women. The ideal female body type, with slimmer hips than the average American woman, is reflected in sizing systems used by manufacturers. This in turn may influence the more stringent evaluation of fit at the lower body. The correlation between lower body satisfaction and lower body cathexis supports a relationship between the subjects’ satisfaction with fit and feelings toward personal body. LaBat and DeLong (1990) suggest that dissatisfaction is a result of trying to fit real bodies into garments that the garment industry sized according to an ideal body shape with slim hips in proportion to upper body measurements. They also suggest that a departure from stereotypical definitions of female body types could result in new sizing systems that would fit more consumers.
2.1.4 Clothing interest

An influential factor in determining body image and clothing preferences of women is the culturally prescribed idea of aesthetics (Kaiser, 1997; Ussher, 1989). In order to achieve the fashionable body, women alter their bodies through diet, exercise and make-up choices (Jung, Sharon & Rudd, 2001). For the sake of ‘self-enhancement’ women of all ages are willing to undergo painful and intrusive medical procedures or use anti-aging treatments. The cultural message regarding how women should look and act is propagated by Media eliciting heightened clothing dissatisfaction among women (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). Although for many women the media generated beauty standards are unattainable, it does not prevent them from using a variety of methods to alter their appearance in the pursuit of these beauty standards (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004; Sarwer, Grossbart & Didie, 2002).

The illusionary ‘perfect figure’ and ‘ideal beauty’ has been sought by women through the ages. Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) explain that the more different one’s self evaluation is from the clothing, the greater the dissatisfaction with one’s own appearance. According to Ussher (1989) the concept of the perfect female body has a pervasive influence on women’s consciousness. The cultural expectations of the ideal female body appear to be inconsistent with aging. Aging is a continual but inevitable process that results in clothing changes that are often incompatible with cultural conceptions of beauty (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001).

Thus, an aging population is faced with a dilemma; they live in a culture that is obsessed with youth, beauty and thinness but also face a diminishing ability to achieve or maintain appearance ideals. As a result, there is a growing discrepancy between how people see themselves and how they would like to look (Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999). Although these changes (like, the skin wrinkles, the backbone hunches and the hair becomes thinner and grey)
are a product of one’s genetic and environmental background. Such changes influence the social aspects of their lives and choices including clothing preferences. The physical changes which occur with aging (e.g. sagging bust lines, thickened waists and loss of muscle tone) tend to affect clothing preferences because of fitting problems. For example, older women prefer A-line shirts, front closures, set in sleeves, dresses with jackets, three-quarter-length sleeves in order to conceal upper arms and designs that do not emphasise the waist (Kaiser, 1997, p.133). Thus indicating that women’s body image is likely to influence their clothing preferences.

Many studies have indicated a relationship between clothing and body cathexis. Women with a decreased body cathexis have reported a higher dissatisfaction with the fit of clothing, especially for the lower body. Studies have also indicated that weight conscious women tend to camouflage certain body parts with clothing, thereby compensating for body dissatisfaction and improving their body image perception and appearance. Clothing is therefore an important component of one’s body image and self-concept. The level of interest in clothing can determine the extent to which an individual will use clothing to change body image.

Interest in clothing can be defined as one’s attitude toward clothing and its behavioral dimension. In other words, clothing interest is determined by how one spends time and money on clothing and the attention paid to clothing (Kaiser, 1997).

Studies have indicated that women have a higher interest in clothing than men (Kwon, 1997; Minshall, Winakor, & Swinney, 1982). According to Kaiser, the major reason for women’s higher clothing interest is that women are socialized to pay more attention to appearance than are men.

Women tend to be interested in clothing and fashion regardless of their body size or weight. Davis (1985) determined that women who classified themselves as mesomorphic (muscular) or endomorphic (fat) tended to have lower body
cathexis scores than women who classified themselves as ectomorphic (thin). However, the women who classified themselves as mesomorphic or endomorphic were just as interested in fashion and clothing as women who classified themselves as ectomorphic. Therefore, even though the mesomorphic or endomorphic women had a lowered body cathexis, they still expressed an interest in clothing and fashion. Large-size women have also expressed an interest in purchasing the latest clothing styles and have indicated they are willing to spend money to purchase quality garments (Chowdhary & Beale, 1988). Height is also not a factor affecting clothing interest. Taller women are just as interested in clothing as petite or average-height women (Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1990). Even though average-height women had the highest scores on body cathexis and petite women expressed the most dissatisfaction with their bodies, there were no differences in fashion interest or clothing importance for the three groups. Just as body size or height does not affect the level of clothing interest, the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the body also does not appear to be an indicator of clothing interest.

University Women in Baggs' (1988) study who were underweight or average-weight indicated higher satisfaction with their bodies than overweight women. However, all women, regardless of weight or level of body satisfaction, exhibited clothing interest and fashion leadership qualities. This finding is consistent with Davis (1985) and Shim & Kotsiopulos (1990) who found that women were interested in clothing and fashion, regardless of body type or size. These studies indicate that women have a higher interest in clothing than men, and that interest in clothing does not seem to be related to a woman's body size or her satisfaction with her body. Larger women are just as interested in clothing and fashion as other women. These studies demonstrate that women who are overweight can still have a high interest in clothing.

Clothing has been shown to be an integral part of body image (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Kaiser, 1997), and one’s level of interest in clothing can determine the
extent to which an individual will use clothing to change body image. Women have a higher interest in clothing than men (Minshall et al., 1982) and overweight women appear to have as much interest in fashion and clothing as other women (Baggs, 1988; Chowdhary & Beale, 1988; Davis, 1985; Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1990). In an attempt to lose weight and increase their body image, overweight women often engage in appearance management behaviors, such as dieting and exercising, but may differ in their clothing behavior.

Research has shown that women can use clothing as a means of improving their appearance and consequently their self-esteem (Joyner, 1993; Kwon, 1997). Therefore, women who are dissatisfied with their bodies and are dieting to lose weight may use clothing to compensate for their dissatisfaction by enhancing their appearance and temporarily improving their body image.

Research on clothing satisfaction and body image has demonstrated that dissatisfaction with the fit of clothing is related to dissatisfaction with weight and a lowered body cathexis (Frederick, 1977; Hwang, 1996). Kwon and Parham (1994) demonstrated that women tend to choose certain types of clothing to increase body satisfaction based on how “fat” or “slender” they “feel.” However, their focus was not on the actual physical size of the subject. While these studies have examined clothing and body cathexis as they relate to weight, none of these studies examined the changes that take place in clothing behavior as a result of weight loss. For example, women in a weight loss program can change several clothing sizes prior to reaching their weight loss goal; as a result, choices related to clothing styles may also change during the weight loss process.

The desire to change one’s body image is often the motivating factor for women who engage in dieting behavior (Cash & Hicks, 1990). Women wanting to lose weight often seek help from a commercial weight loss program, and women constitute the majority of members in such programs. There have been studies that examined body image among women in a weight loss
program as well as studies that examined body image and its relationship to clothing. However, there have been no studies that have examined changes in clothing behavior, body image, and appearance management of women in weight loss programs. Because clothing is such an integral part of the self (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Kaiser, 1997), it is important to examine the influences and contributions of this variable to weight loss.

2.1.5 Body Image
An influential factor in determining body image and clothing preferences of women is the culturally prescribed idea of aesthetics (Kaiser, 1997; Ussher, 1989). In order to achieve the fashionable body, women alter their bodies through diet, exercise and make-up choices (Jung, Sharon & Rudd, 2001). For the sake of ‘self-enhancement’ women of all ages are willing to undergo painful and intrusive medical procedures or use anti-aging treatments. The cultural message regarding how women should look and act is propagated by media eliciting heightened body dissatisfaction among women (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). Although for many women the media generated beauty standards are unattainable, it does not prevent them from using a variety of methods to alter their appearance in the pursuit of these beauty standards (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004; Sarwer, Grossbart & Didie, 2002).

Women also tend to be more dissatisfied with areas of the middle or lower torso (Cash & Henry, 1985; Charles & Kerr, 1986; McAllister & Caltabiano, 1994; Monteath & McCabe, 1997). The areas that generated the most dissatisfaction are areas commonly associated with weight gain in women: stomach, buttocks, hips, thighs, and waist. In a study of women enrolled in weight loss programs, 80 percent reported dissatisfaction with their body shape, particularly with the stomach, hips, and thighs (McAllister & Caltabiano, 1994). A study of college women revealed that none of the women in the
sample gave a positive rating to all of her body parts. Except for one body area, the bust, all of the women wished to be smaller in their body parts. The illusionary ‘perfect figure’ and ‘ideal beauty’ has been sought by women through the ages. Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) explain that the more different one’s self evaluation is from the cultural ideal, the greater the dissatisfaction with one’s own appearance. According to Ussher (1989) the concept of the perfect female body has a pervasive influence on women’s consciousness. The cultural expectations of the ideal female body appear to be inconsistent with aging. Aging is a continual but inevitable process that results in physical changes that are often incompatible with cultural conceptions of beauty. (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001).

Thus, an aging population is faced with a dilemma; they live in a culture that is obsessed with youth, beauty and thinness but also face a diminishing ability to achieve or maintain appearance ideals. As a result, there is a growing discrepancy between how people see themselves and how they would like to look (Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999). Although these changes (like, the skin wrinkles, the backbone hunches and the hair becomes thinner and grey) are a product of one’s genetic and environmental background. Such changes influence the social aspects of their lives and choice including clothing preferences. The physical changes which occur with aging (e.g. sagging bust lines, thickened waists and loss of muscle tone) tend to affect clothing preferences because of fitting problems. For example, older women prefer A-line shirts, front closures, set in sleeves, dresses with jackets, three-quarter-length sleeves in order to conceal upper arms and designs that do not emphasise the waist (Kaiser, 1997; p.133). Thus indicating that women’s body image is likely to influence their clothing preferences.

Research findings regarding the relationships among self esteem, self concept, body image, body cathexis, and clothing interest of women in weight loss programs will contribute to the base knowledge concerning women and their
body image and clothing behavior. Weight loss programs could use this information as a tool to assist their members during the weight loss process. Most weight loss programs do not address aspects of appearance or body image.

Because diet alone is not the complete answer to permanent weight loss, perhaps more success would result from using appearance as a means to a goal of weight loss, rather than as part of the goal itself. More successful and permanent weight loss may be achieved through the use of a program that assists dieters in improving other aspects of themselves besides their weight. The solution to successful and permanent weight loss may lie in how an individual feels about herself. Research has shown that most women join weight loss programs because they have a negative body image (Cash & Hicks, 1990), especially of areas of the body they consider to be too large. Because research has demonstrated that negative feelings about the self, as a result of being overweight, can affect the overall body image and feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the body, this knowledge can be employed by weight loss programs. Instead of waiting until that day in the future when an ideal size may or may not be reached, attention to aspects of appearance needs to become a part of the weight loss program. Prior research utilise clothes to make their bodies social and gain an identity (Entwistle, 2000; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002) and because the female gender has largely been associated with its desire for ‘fashionable’ body and clothes, this paper examines women’s body image concerns and its influence on clothing preferences.

Self-esteem is the way we feel toward the self we perceive, an appraisal resulting from self-concept and refers to the way one evaluates one’s self (Laurer & Handel, 1977). Body image refers to “the mental picture one has of his or her body at any given moment in time” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 98). Schilder (1950) defined body image as “the picture of our own body which we form in
our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves” (p. 11).

Research has shown that body image concerns are a strong motivator of dieting (Cash & Hicks, 1990). Weight loss or gain is intimately tied to a woman’s self-esteem. The thin ideal is considered to be attractive for women, and an attractive appearance is essential for success in ways that it isn’t for men. If women do not conform to the cultural stereotype they are not accepted and are ostracized by society (Charles & Kerr, 1986).

Research has shown that women possess more negative body image attitudes than men (Cash, 1998; Cash & Brown, 1989; Muth & Cash, 1997). The greatest gender differences pertain to women’s affect-laden concerns about their shape and weight, particularly fears about being or becoming fat, which foster widespread dieting (Cash & Hicks, 1990; Cash et al., 1986; Rodin et al., 1985; Silverstein et al., 1986). Women have been shown to possess higher body image dissatisfactions than men, especially pertaining to weight (Miller et al., 1980).

One’s body image includes his/her perceptions of the cultural standards, his/her perceptions of the extent to which he/she matches the standard, and the perception of the relative importance that members of society place on that match (Fallon, 1990). A person’s perceived body image may or may not accurately reflect a person’s actual body size. In other words, a person may see herself as smaller or larger than she actually is. In addition, a person’s body image may or may not be consistent with others’ perceptions of her body. A negative body image can undermine a person’s general self-concept, especially of women, just as a positive body image can enhance self-concept (Jourard & Secord, 1955).

Distorted body images occur in people with a variety of shapes and sizes (Kaiser, 1997; Rodin, 1992). Individuals can overestimate the size of their body as a whole, as well as specific body parts; however, the most common
distortion is to overestimate the size of one’s body. According to Rodin (1992), these estimation errors are specific to one’s own body; an individual who overestimates the size of her own body will accurately judge the body size of other people.

This tendency to distort one’s actual body size occurs more often among obese people, pregnant women, and individuals with an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia (Kaiser, 1997). Kaiser notes that body image tends to become distorted when the body changes in size or when a person focuses more on the size or shape of the body.

There are two basic ways body image disturbance may be manifested (Brodie & Slade, 1988; Garner & Garfinkel, 1981). The first form is body-size distortion and involves a perceptual disturbance in which a person seems unable to assess her size accurately. Usually an individual will overestimate her body size. The second form, often referred to as body dissatisfaction, represents an attitudinal or affective dimension in which an individual expresses concern about the body shape. An individual rates her feelings about her body or body parts, indicating the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

An individual's body image and how one feels about herself plays an important role in clothing preferences and attitudes (Kaiser, 1997). Clothing is an extended dimension of one’s bodily self (Shim et al., 1991) and can be used to change the appearance of the body (Schilder, 1950). Therefore, a change in dress could result in a change in the attitude toward the body and self (Jourard, 1958). Clothing can reduce the discrepancy between an individual's ideal and actual body image, and can be used as a means to attain the aesthetic ideal (Jourard, 1958). Clothing can also be used to improve body image by making some characteristics of the body salient, while masking other less desirable characteristics.

Hwang (1996) found that individuals with greater dissatisfaction for the lower body, torso, and weight would be more likely to seek clothing that disguised
perceived figure flaws. Therefore, clothing can compensate for one’s dissatisfaction with body image and can enhance self-esteem (Doss, 1990; Jourard, 1958; Sontag & Schlater, 1982). However, since a person’s body image may not always be accurate, clothing that exaggerates certain body parts may be selected instead of clothing that camouflages. (Kefgen & Touchie-Specht, 1986). A person that is overweight may see himself as thin, and someone who is thin may view himself as being heavy. As a result, an overweight person may choose to wear tight, revealing clothing, and an underweight person may choose loose-fitting, baggy clothing.

Women who were dissatisfied with their body or with certain parts of their body have used clothing to conceal, minimize, or de-emphasize those body parts (Ogle, 1999). In Ogle’s study, clothing was used most often to alter the appearance of the bust, waist, or hips. Participants often used loose or oversized clothing to conceal those body parts perceived to be too large (i.e., long shirts to hide stomach, hips, and/or buttocks), but participants also reported using clothing to make one body part look larger so that another would look smaller (i.e., wearing shoulder pads to make the waist look smaller). Ogle also reported behaviors associated with focusing attention on one body part to draw attention away from another (i.e., wearing scarves to draw attention to the face and away from the lower torso). Participants used colors, fabrics, and styles to minimize certain areas of the body, such as wearing black to appear thinner and choosing dresses and skirts that didn’t emphasize the hips. Results showed that they also used clothing to enhance certain body parts with which they were more satisfied.

While dieting and exercise are popular methods of changing one’s body shape and body image, clothing is often the medium used to visibly project the change. Clothing can also be used to manage one’s appearance while experiencing weight loss. However, weight loss programs and fitness centers usually do not focus on clothing. Clothing is an extension of the bodily self and
the body scheme (Schilder, 1950) and represents the nearest aspect of one’s environment. As such, it is an integral part of body image (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Kaiser, 1997) and can be used to not only change body image but to transfigure bodily appearances (Schilder, 1950).

According to Markee, Carey & Pedersen (1990), individuals might use clothing as a way to camouflage perceived figure faults or flaws and bring their bodies closer to their perceptions of the norm, thus temporarily improving body cathexis or satisfaction with the body. They contend that clothing may create a new and better perception of the body. Cash (1990) also contends that body image may be enhanced through aesthetic self-management – by wearing favorite clothes, jewelry, cosmetics, or fragrances.

How an individual perceives her body can also affect clothing choices. The results of How an individual perceives her body can also affect clothing choices. The results of (Kwon and Parham’s 1994) study indicate that when individuals perceived themselves as fat or as gaining weight, they were most interested in the camouflage function of clothing, followed by comfort, individuality, and assurance. For weight conscious women, clothing’s camouflaging function played the most important role in differentiating the two states. Consistent with Ogle’s (1999) findings, women in Kwon and Parham’s study tended to use clothing to camouflage areas of the body with which they were dissatisfied, thereby increasing body satisfaction.

Research has shown that women possess more negative body image attitudes than men (Cash, 1998; Cash & Brown, 1989; Muth & Cash, 1997). The greatest gender differences pertain to women’s affect-laden concerns about their shape and weight, particularly fears about being or becoming fat, which foster widespread dieting (Cash & Hicks, 1990; Cash et al., 1986; Rodin et al., 1985; Silverstein et al., 1986). Women have been shown to possess higher body image dissatisfactions than men, especially pertaining to weight (Miller et al., 1980). There have been studies that examined body image and its
relationship to clothing as well as studies that examined body image among women in a weight loss program. However, there have been no studies that have examined clothing behavior, body image and appearance management behaviors of women in weight loss programs. Women have been shown to have a more negative body image than men (Cash, 1990; Cash & Green, 1986; Cash et al., 1986).

Clothing has been shown to be an integral part of body image (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Kaiser, 1997), and clothing can also be used to change one’s body image, (Schilder, 1950). Weight conscious women seek to camouflage certain body parts, and clothing may be used to compensate for body dissatisfaction and improve body image perception (Kwon & Parham, 1994). Women who engage in dieting behaviors are often motivated by the desire to change their body image (Cash & Hicks, 1990). Women wanting to lose weight often seek help from a commercial weight loss program, and women constitute the majority of members in such programs. time” or “frequently.” But the women weren’t alone; the study also found that 46% of the normal-weight men surveyed responded the same way. Encouragement to focus on appearance is at an all-time high in this culture, and with it comes the potential for a significant increase in negative body image. According to the authors of The Adonis Complex, “There’s often a vicious circle here: the more a person focuses on his body, the worse he tends to feel about how he looks – obsession breeds discontent.”

Poor body image increases the risk for extreme weight/body control behaviors. Researchers have found that increased preoccupation with appearance and body dissatisfaction put people at greater risk for engaging in dangerous practices to control weight and size. Extreme dieting, exercise compulsion, laxative abuse, vomiting, smoking and use of anabolic steroids so that they can use the clothing according to fashion.
Studies at Stanford University and the University of Massachusetts found that 70% of college women say they feel worse about their own looks after reading women’s magazines. And a 2006 study published in the journal of Psychology of women showed that not only did watching prime-time television and music videos appear to make women more uncomfortable with themselves, but that the discomfort led to sexual problems and risky behaviors. “People see the same images over and over and start to believe it’s a version of reality,” says Deborah Schooler, one of the researchers. “If those bodies are real and that’s possible, but you can’t attain it, how can you not feel bad about your own body?”

Body image is a multifaceted psychological experience relating to physical appearance and self perceptions and attitudes encompassing perceptual, affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects (Cash, 2004; Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). It is the picture we have in our minds of the size, shape and form of our bodies and our feelings concerning these (Slade, 1988). Body image constitutes both ‘perceptual’ and ‘attitudinal’ components that are influenced by historical, cultural, social, individual and biological factors. Clothes or dress and body image have similar consequences on what one looks like and how one feels about themselves.

An influential factor in determining body image and clothing preferences of women is the culturally prescribed idea of aesthetics (Kaiser, 1997; Ussher, 1989). In order to achieve the fashionable body, women alter their bodies through diet, exercise and make-up choices (Jung, Sharon & Rudd, 2001). For the sake of ‘self-enhancement’ women of all ages are willing to undergo painful and intrusive medical procedures or use anti-aging treatments. The cultural message regarding how women should look and act is propagated by International Journal of Arts and Commerce Vol. 2 No. 5 May 2013 media eliciting heightened body dissatisfaction among women (Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002). Although for many women the media generated beauty
standards are unattainable, it does not prevent them from using a variety of methods to alter their appearance in the pursuit of these beauty standards (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004; Sarwer, Grossbart & Didie, 2002). The illusionary ‘perfect figure’ and ‘ideal beauty’ has been sought by women through the ages. Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) explain that the more different one’s self evaluation is from the cultural ideal, the greater the dissatisfaction with one’s own appearance. According to Ussher (1989) the concept of the perfect female body has a pervasive influence on women’s consciousness. The cultural expectations of the ideal female body appear to be inconsistent with aging. Aging is a continual but inevitable process that results in physical changes that are often incompatible with cultural conceptions of beauty (Tantleff-Dunn & Agliata, 2001). Thus, an aging population is faced with a dilemma; they live in a culture that is obsessed with youth, beauty and thinness but also face a diminishing ability to achieve or maintain appearance ideals. As a result, there is a growing discrepancy between how people see themselves and how they would like to look (Spitzer, Henderson & Zivian, 1999). Although these changes (like, the skin wrinkles, the backbone hunches and the hair becomes thinner and grey) are a product of one’s genetic and environmental background. Such changes influence the social aspects of their lives and choices including clothing preferences. The physical changes which occur with aging (e.g. sagging bust lines, thickened waists and loss of muscle tone) tend to affect clothing preferences because of fitting problems. For example, older women prefer A-line shirts, front closures, set in sleeves, dresses with jackets, three-quarter-length sleeves in order to conceal upper arms and designs that do not emphasise the waist (Kaiser, 1997, p.133). Thus indicating that women’s body image is likely to influence their clothing preferences.

Rudd and Lennon (2001) posit that body image includes how one perceives the physical body and thereby influences how the body is present to others through the medium of dress. Because body image is a mental picture we have of
perceptual and affective components of our bodies, it affects how we interact with clothes, and how the ‘clothed appearance’ is presented publicly (Rudd & Lennon, 2001). Individuals utilise clothes to make their bodies social and gain an identity (Entwistle, 2000; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002) and because the female gender has largely been associated with its desire for ‘fashionable’ body and clothes, this paper examines women’s body image concerns and its influence on clothing preferences.

The relationship between emotion and clothing is also found in other research studies. For the past decade, the study of emotion has become mainstream in psychological research and the results of this concentrated effort are increasingly present in the research literature. In the exploratory study by Wendy Moody, Peter Kinderman and Pammi Sinha cited at the beginning of this post (Moody, Kinderman and Sinha, 2010), emotion and mood were found to be managed and reflected through clothing. Although personality played into clothing choices, mood was a much stronger predictor. The authors caution that the small size of their first study group limit the generalizability of their findings, however, and promise more as the study moves forward. These modern studies complement earlier findings that found clothing selection to be influenced by mood, but more so in women than among men (Kwon, 1991). Other modern studies show, for example, how Arab women managers use clothing choice as a way of dealing with conflicting identities in the work environment (Omair, 2009).

Apparel as the product of standard sizing is reflected in female evaluation of self and body, i.e., body cathexis. Responses were measured on three scales: (1) satisfaction with fit of apparel at upper, lower, and total body; (2) satisfaction with fit at specific body sites; and (3) a body cathexis scale developed by Rosen and Ross. Analysis of data indicated satisfaction with overall fit at lower body was less satisfying than at upper body and total body. Satisfaction with fit at specific sites below the waist (hip and thigh) was also
generally less satisfying than at sites above the waist (neck and arm). Fashion at the time, close fit at lower body, reflected in blue jeans and slim skirts, no doubt influenced more stringent evaluation of fit at lower body. The body cathexis scores were slightly lower for lower body and lower body sites. Correlation for lower body fit satisfaction and lower body cathexis was statistically significant, confirming a relationship between the respondents’ satisfaction with fit and feelings towards personal body.

How an individual perceives her body can also affect clothing choices. The results of Kwon and Parham’s 1994 study indicate that when individuals perceived themselves as fat or as gaining weight, they were most interested in the camouflage function of clothing, followed by comfort, individuality, and assurance. For weight conscious women, clothing’s camouflaging function played the most important role in differentiating the two states. Consistent with Ogle’s (1999) findings, women in Kwon and Parham’s study tended to use clothing to camouflage areas of the body with which they were dissatisfied, thereby increasing body satisfaction. Satisfaction with clothing and body cathexis.

Clothing has been shown to be an integral part of body image (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Kaiser, 1997), and clothing can also be used to change one’s body image, (Schilder, 1950). Weight conscious women seek to camouflage certain body parts, and clothing may be used to compensate for body dissatisfaction and improve body image perception (Kwon & Parham, 1994). Women who engage in dieting behaviors are often motivated by the desire to change their body image (Cash & Hicks, 1990). Women wanting to lose weight often seek help from a commercial weight loss program, and women constitute the majority of members in such programs. Therefore, research regarding the relationship between the clothing behavior, body image and appearance management of women in a weight loss program is warranted.
Height is also not a factor affecting clothing interest. Taller women are just as interested in clothing as petite or average-height women (Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1990). Even though average-height women had the highest scores on body cathexis and petite women expressed the most dissatisfaction with their bodies, there were no differences in fashion interest or clothing importance for the three groups. Just as body size or height does not affect the level of clothing interest, the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the body also does not appear to be an indicator of clothing interest.