Understanding the psychology of fashion: Demographic, personality, and fashion factors underlying everyday clothing choices in the UK and USA

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Abstract

Fashion is one of the most common (aesthetic) activities, yet aside from a select number of works, systematic studies of clothing preference remain relatively rare. This study aims to extend this line of research by offering a more generalizable understanding of the predictors and descriptions of everyday clothing preferences. Samples were drawn from two English-speaking cultures (i.e., the UK and the USA; *N*s = 402 and 400 respectively) and a range of demographic, personality, and fashion-related variables (e.g., general fashion interest, formal training/education in fashion, & perceived function of clothing) were examined. The results revealed a six-factor structure of clothing preference, which was invariant across UK and USA samples (i.e., the Updated Everyday Clothing Preference Factors; ECPF-2). Path analysis indicated that general fashion interest and demographic variables (e.g., gender) are key predictors of one's clothing choices. Moreover, while a general positive relationship between liking and owning clothing was found across the entire sample, further analysis revealed individual differences. Additionally, the work includes analyses of culture-invariant factor structures for perceived clothing functions and clothing descriptors. The present study opens up exciting avenues for exploring the dynamic relationship between clothing preference and its underlying motivations.

Keywords: Fashion, clothing preference, individual differences, cultural differences, liking vs. wanting

> "… *a man's Me is the sum total of all that he CAN call his*, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house… The old saying that the human person is composed of three parts—soul, body and clothes—is more than a joke." (pg. 279-280, *The Principles of Psychology*, William James, 1890/1983)

> "What are these mysterious influences which mould in this fashion the clothes we wear and the very *décor* of our lives?… Fashion is not an inanimate object, and it is never at rest, a distinction it shares with life itself, of which it seems to be some special and significant manifestation." (pg. 211, *Taste and Fashion*, James Laver, 1937)

> "The first stage of applied science must consist in an honest review of our present position and a reconnoitring of the path of future progress." (pg. 238, *The Psychology of Clothes*, John Flügel, 1930)

Introduction

Clothing is ubiquitous and is one of the most common everyday aesthetic objects. According to the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) report, households in the UK, on average, spent 16.80 pounds per week on clothing and footwear, whereas spending on books amounted to 1.00 pounds per week, and spending on cinema, theater, and museums (including theme parks and zoological gardens) combined summed to 2.90 pounds per week (ONS, 2024). Such prevalence of clothing, not to mention the sheer volume of variations that exist in clothing designs makes clothing both a scientifically fascinating and ecologically sensitive object for psychological study.

Clothing's validity as an object for psychological study notwithstanding, the track record of fashion as an object of empirical study is relatively sparse, especially when compared to the existing psychological investigations in various aesthetic fields such as visual art, design, literature, music, and architecture (e.g., Winner, 2019; Chatterjee & Cardilo, 2022). To date, fashion is a relatively sporadically studied subject within social psychology ("…there has been a general lack of interest in investigating fashion from psychologists (other than a few exceptional social psychologists)", Mair, 2018, p. 14), with studies on the psychophysics (e.g., DeLong, 1998) and evolutionary psychology of clothing (e.g., Etcoff, 1999) more an exception than the norm.

Of the existing works in fashion psychology, a number of investigations explored the psychological impact of clothing styles. Researchers have, for example, studied the behavioral and cognitive consequences (e.g., language use, cognitive task proficiency, & prosocial behavior) of wearing certain styles of clothing, most notably between (what is in effect) formal and casual clothing (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Hannover & Kühnen, 2002; Slepian, Ferber, Gold, & Rutchick, 2015), but also across various types of formal clothing, e.g., uniforms (Pech & Caspar, 2023). The impact of wearing or viewing certain clothing styles has also been explored in the context of self-perception (Hannover & Kühnen, 2002; Peluchette & Karl, 2007) and interpersonal perception (Albright, Kenny, & Malloy, 1988; Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Fasoli, Maass, Volpato, & Pacilli, 2018; Gurney, Howlett, Pine, Tracey, & Moggridge, 2017; Hesslinger, Goldbach, & Carbon, 2015; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008).

Still, a broad question remains underexplored, namely "In everyday contexts, why do people choose certain styles of clothing in the first place?" This question can be formulated as a question of preference structures, for the inquiry presupposes the question of whether certain designs of clothing can be grouped together in terms of preference styles and whether these groupings can be traced to certain psychological and individual factors. Such inquiry also received some attention in other everyday aesthetic activities, for instance, in music (e.g., Cattell & Anderson, 1953; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003; Rentfrow, Goldberg,… Levitin, 2012), everyday entertainment (Rentfrow, Goldberg, & Zilca, 2011), and everyday aesthetic activities (McManus & Furnham, 2006). These findings imply that preference for everyday aesthetics, on the one hand, can be seen as an unconscious reflection of personality (Cattell & Anderson, 1953), but on the other hand, as a behavioral reinforcement aligned with one's personality traits (Rentfrow et al., 2012).

Existing psychological research that explored fashion preference has examined the various predictors of preference, examining the roles of design elements often specific to certain environments, e.g., workplace and sports (Eckman, 1997; Feather, Ford, & Herr, 1996; Ko, Lee, Kim, Oh, & Yin, 2024; Peluchette & Karl, 2007) and gender/sex (Eckman, 1997; Stolovy, 2021). In the broader academic fields of marketing and retail, studies have explored shopping behaviors specific to

certain target populations and garment types (e.g., Jegenthesan, Sneddon, & Soutar, 2012; Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). As such, while these snapshots provide emerging and local patterns in clothing preference behaviors, a systematic and global study of the preference structure of clothing, involving a wider range of everyday clothing items and an extended inquiry into its psychological antecedents, remains presently limited.

Taking this limitation, Hur, Etcoff, and Silva (2023) explored the preference structure of everyday clothing by asking a sample of UK residents about their preferences for 34 everyday clothing items. The analysis revealed the presence of four preference dimensions (i.e., Everyday Clothing Preference Factors; ECPF), namely feminine (e.g., dresses & skirts), essential (e.g., suits & jackets), comfortable (e.g., hoodies & sweatpants), and trendy (e.g., boiler suits & dungarees) styles. The study also noted several individual differences (e.g., personality & demographics) that corresponded with the preference for each style. In doing so, this study provided a preliminary yet more general picture of the mechanisms of clothing preference, despite – and as will be discussed below – some limitations of generalizability.

Consequentially, the present work sought to present an update of Hur et al.'s (2023) ECPF as a more generalizable tool for capturing everyday clothing preferences as well as providing a more valid explanation as to why people choose certain styles of everyday clothing. Most notably, a study claiming strong generalizability should consider sampling from different cultures. For example, research has shown that preferences for abstract shapes (Eysenck & Iwawaki, 1975) and clothing purchase motivations (Millan, De Pelsmacker, & Wright, 2013) can be shared across cultures (see Che, Sun, Gallardo, & Nadal [2018] for an overview of cross-cultural studies in the context of aesthetic evaluations). Logically, if the preference structure for everyday clothing can be shown to be invariant across multiple cultures, this would present a stronger case of generalizability (and potential universality) of the ECPF. Therefore, the present study considered samples from the UK and the USA, two major English-speaking fashion cultures.

In the attempt to better explain the preference factor structure of everyday clothing, the present work also broadened its range of relevant measurements, most notably introducing relevant

fashion-related variables. For example, fashion education, work experience in the fashion industry, and the perceived function of clothing were considered predictors of fashion preference. Past research on expertise, for instance, noted the impacts of education, profession, and interest on the preference for specific styles of artworks (Chamorro-Premuzic, Reimers, Hsu, & Ahmetoglu, 2009; Leder, Gerger, Dressler, & Schabmann, 2012). Clothing function has a tradition within fashion psychology, with John Flügel notably arguing for the triptych of decoration, modesty, and protection as being the three fundamental functions of clothing (Flügel, 1930).[1] More recent empirical works also examined more specific functions such as fashion, individuality, assurance, camouflage, and comfort (Gonzalez-Jimenez, 2016; Stolovy, 2021; Tiggemann & Lacey, 2009), status signaling (Arrow & Dasgupta, 2009), interpersonal attraction (Pazda, Thorstenson, & Elliot, 2021), and mood regulation (Masuch & Heffron, 2014), yet no recent work empirically explored the latent factors underlying these variegated functions.

It should be noted that the relationship between perceived clothing function and clothing preference warrants particular attention, which was also addressed in the present study. While it is conceivable that one's preference for certain styles of clothing may result from beliefs about clothing's functions (e.g., one can prefer functional clothing due to a belief in the importance of functionality in clothing), there are reasons to believe that these two factors may also operate independently. For instance, even if people wear the same type of clothing (e.g., sportswear), their behavior may be founded on different grounds or beliefs (e.g., to follow social trends, for individual aesthetic grounds, or for functionality). Therefore, the perceived function of clothing was examined both as a predictor of clothing preference as well as in terms of its underlying factor structure.

In addition to these fashion measures, personality (Big 5) was also included in the study due to the key roles these dimensions play in general preference research (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009; Hur et al., 2023; McManus & Furnham, 2006). Age and gender/sex, which are prevalent themes

[1] This is comparable to popular depictions regarding clothing's functions, notably the motives of utility, status, and sex (in Alison Lurie's [1992] *The Language of Clothes*, which in turn is a take on James Laver's principles of utility, hierarchy, and seduction), and display, comfort, and modesty (in Desmond Morris' [1978] *Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behaviour*).

in discussions of fashion attitudes and related measures (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019; Hur et al., 2023; O'Cass, 2000, 2004; Pentecost & Andrews, 2010), and preference research (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2009; Rentfrow et al., 2011), were also included in the present work.

Apart from the main purpose of the study, which was to explore the factor structure of clothing preference and its predictors across two cultures, two additional analyses were conducted. First, an analysis was performed on the adjectives people use to describe their own clothing. While the primary aim of this data was to further elaborate on the ECPF (i.e., to understand which adjectives people use to describe the clothing they own), it also served as a stand-alone analysis of the language people use to describe everyday clothing. As with the analysis on preference and perceived function, the analysis involved exploring the underlying factor structure of clothing descriptors. Second, the study explored the relationship between liking and owning. Although previous work by Hur et al. (2023) addressed this topic, there were certain limitations since that study did not separately measure liking and owning. This examination, however, holds important theoretical significance, as it provides an ecological approach to understanding the general relationship between liking and wanting in everyday settings (Aharon et al., 2001; Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2016) given clothing's everyday accessibility. The inquiry, thus, offers insight into the nature of preference in everyday life.

To sum up, the present study had four primary objectives. Firstly, the study attempted to understand the factor structure of clothing preference across two national cultures. Secondly, the study sought to explore the predictors of these clothing preference factors via psychological, demographic, and fashion variables. Thirdly, the study examined the factor structure of language people use to describe their own clothing. Lastly, the study attempted to understand the relationship between liking and owning in the context of everyday clothing. Taken together, by expanding the ECPF (Hur et al., 2023), the present work disseminates a more generalizable yet nuanced picture regarding the description and prediction of the everyday aesthetics of clothing.

Methodology

Participants

Sampling was done through Prolific, an online participant recruitment platform. All participants were financially compensated with the amount recommended by Prolific as representing fair pay. Given that the study examined the role of fashion variables, it was considered analytically beneficial to obtain a sample with a wide range of fashion experiences. Therefore, for each of the UK and USA samples, two types of advertisements were used: one calling for participants with backgrounds or experiences in fashion (i.e., "looking for participants with fashion education/background") and one without such specifications. For each of the UK and USA samples, half of the participants responded to the former advertisement, and the other half to the latter advertisement.

The UK sample consisted of 402 unique participants (M = 38.06; SD = 13.93), 184 of whom selected "male", 213 selected "female", and five participants selected "other." Two participants did not disclose their ages and one participant's age data was deleted due to a typing error (i.e., "3500"). The USA sample consisted of 400 unique participants (M = 37.16; SD = 14.01), of whom 193 participants selected "male" as their gender, 197 selected "female", and nine selected "other." One participant did not disclose gender.

The sample size was determined by the rule of thumb set forth by Comrey and Lee (1992), who viewed the sample size of 300 as "good" and 500 as "very good" in the context of factor analysis. By adopting a sample size of at least 400 for each participant group, it was ensured that the sample size was adequately obtained either in the context of each participant group being analyzed separately or in the context of both groups being analyzed together as a single group.

The gender distributions did not differ between the two samples, χ^2 (2) = 1.97, p = .373, φ = .05. Within each sample, the ratio of male and female participants also did not differ significantly, meaning that among both the UK (χ^2 [1] = 2.12, p = .146, φ = .07) and USA (χ^2 [1] = 0.04, p = .839, φ = .01) samples, the numbers of male and female participants were comparable. The UK and USA samples did not differ in age, t (795) = 0.91, p = .362, d = 0.07.

The study received ethical approval from the London College of Fashion's ethics committee prior to data collection. Prior to the start of each data collection session, informed consent was obtained from each participant.

Design and Procedure

The survey was distributed through Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The main elements of the survey, excluding the study information page and consent form at the start and the debriefing page at the end, were presented in the order given below (questions not deriving from already-published papers are described afterwards, under Clothing Measures). In all questions involving multiple statements, the order in which the statements were presented was randomized for each participant.

The first section of the survey consisted of clothing preference questions. Participants were shown a list of 43 garments, and for each garment asked to indicate the degree to which they owned the garment, using a scale of "None at all" (1), "1 item" (2), "2-3 items" (3), "4-5 items" (4), "6-7 items" (5), "8-9 items" (6), and "10 or more items" (7). Participants were then shown the identical list of garments, but this time they were asked to indicate the degree to which they liked each garment, regardless of possession, using a scale of "Extremely dislike" (1) to "Extremely like" (7). For the liking questions, participants were also given the option of "I don't know what this item is" for each garment; if this option was selected, no response was collected for that particular garment.

After the clothing preference questions, participants received a set of questions on clothing descriptors. Here, participants were given a list of 42 adjectives commonly used to describe clothing and were asked to indicate the degree to which each of these adjectives described their own everyday clothing on a scale of "Does not describe my clothing at all" (1) to "Describes my clothing extremely well" (7).

Afterward, participants were given a standardized questionnaire on fashion orientation (Gutman & Mills, 1982). This is a 17-item measure that represents fashion attitudes consisting of four subfactors, i.e., fashion leadership, fashion interest, the importance of being well-dressed, and antifashion attitudes. While the study was primarily interested in using the fashion interest factor, the

entire questionnaire structure was retained.[2] This was followed by three questions on one's experience with fashion, i.e., whether one currently works in the fashion industry (yes/no), the total number of years of work in the fashion industry, and the total number of years of formal education and/or training in fashion.

The Big 5 personality dimensions were measured via the 30-item BFI-2-S (Soto & John, 2017). Participants then rated a set of 35 questions on clothing functions; participants were given statements representing a wide range of clothing functions, to which they rated how much they believe each statement represents the function of clothing in their own daily life, using a scale of "Not an important function for me at all" (1) to "A very important function for me" (7). Before the debriefing, participants answered a number of demographic questions, e.g., gender and age, as well as a question on one's political orientation (Kanai, Feilden, Firth, & Rees, 2011).

Clothing Measures

Clothing Preference

The list of garments (item $N = 43$) for the clothing preference task was updated from the garment list used in the everyday clothing preference task administered by Hur et al. (2023). The update was mainly derived from feedback from six students enrolled at an arts university, all of whom had academic-level English skills, represented both British and non-British English, who had substantial knowledge of the fashion industry, and were blind to the purpose of the present study. Details regarding the updating of the list as well as the final clothing list can be found in Supplementary Material.

Clothing Description

As a separate study, the derivation of a representative set of clothing descriptions (item $N = 42$) was achieved in four steps: the generation of an adjective pool, the reduction of the adjective pool, the selection of representative adjectives, and the validation of the adjective list based on previous

[2] Previous studies indicated significant correlations across all four fashion orientation variables; therefore, it was also considered analytically sensible to choose only the fashion interest variable to minimize potential multicollinearity issues.

studies (e.g., Augustin et al., 2012a, 2012b). Details of this four-step process can be found in Supplementary Material. The final adjective list can be found in Supplementary Material.

Clothing Function

A measure of perceived clothing function (item $N = 35$) was derived, which involved a thematic analysis of texts from fashion history and criticism. Details of this process can be found in Supplementary Material. The final statement list can be found in Supplementary Material.

Reliability of Scales

The study contained standardized measures of fashion orientation (Gutman & Mills, 1982) and the Big 5 personality dimensions (Soto & John, 2017). In these measures, Cronbach's α (internal reliability) scores were largely similar across the UK and USA samples. For fashion orientation, the α scores were .87/.87 (UK/USA), .81/.83, .82/.81, and .43/.38 for fashion leadership, fashion interest, the importance of being well-dressed, and antifashion attitudes, respectively. For the Big 5 personality dimensions, α scores were .75/.79, .77/.78, .82/.85, .87/.86, and .81/.79 for extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, negative emotionality, and open-mindedness, respectively. The α scores for each of the three facets within a domain were not calculated, given that only two measures represent each facet and that Cronbach's α may be misleading when there is a small number of items per construct (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

Statistical Analysis

The analysis was structured in a way that for each clothing measure – clothing preference, clothing description, and clothing function – a preliminary factor structure was first determined using the whole dataset (k-fold cross-validation) before each structure was tested for measurement invariance across the UK and USA samples (multigroup confirmatory factor analysis). Afterwards, a path analysis was run to explore the relationship between the various demographic, personality, and fashion variables, using the summary score of the generated clothing measure factors. Finally, as an exploratory analysis, the nature of clothing preference was examined by looking at the relationship between liking and owning clothing.

The k-fold cross-validation was used to increase the accuracy and generalizability of the exploratory factor analysis as well as to reduce overfitting (compared to the traditional method of exploratory factor analysis). In k-fold cross-validation, the data is randomly split into k subsets ("folds"), with a process of training (using data from all but one of the folds) and validation (using data from the remaining fold) occurring a total of k times, before the k numbers of outputs are aggregated. In the present context, this meant that exploratory factor analysis was run for the training phase, with confirmatory factor analysis being followed up as validation. The present work used R's *kfa* package (Nickodem & Halpin, 2023) to carry out this analysis. Given the sample size of 802 and the suggested minimum sample size of 200 for sound evaluation of model fit (Curran, et al., 2003), the total number of folds was set as four as opposed to the typical five.

To test for measurement invariance across the UK and USA samples, the validated factor structure was then fit into a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (using R's *lavaan* and *semTools* packages) in line with recent recommendations, e.g., the reporting of CFI and RMSEA as fit indices (Fischer & Karl, 2019; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). This extra step was taken to ensure that the factor structure does not vary across both samples, in which case direct comparisons can be subsequently made (as done in the path analysis) between UK and USA participants.

Unless noted otherwise, all analyses were run via SPSS v29 and R 4.4.1. To minimize the possibility of Type 1 error deriving from a large number of inferential statistics tests and given the relatively large sample size, only results with p-values of $\leq .001$ were considered statistically significant in subsequent analyses.

Transparency and Openness

The report includes details concerning how the authors determined the sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in the study. The data of the study is attached as a separate file (Study Dataset.xlsx). The study's design and its analyses were not pre-registered.

Results

The Factor Structure of the Three Clothing Measures

The Factor Structure of the Clothing Preference

Despite some of the conceptual and methodological alignments the present work has with the past work by Hur et al. (2023), there were several differences in the way the two studies were carried out. Most notably, the present work directly asked participants how much they owned of each clothing item, as opposed to how much they "owned because they liked" as was done in the past work. As previously discussed, the present work also enlarged the pool of rated clothing items, from 34 to 43. Given these differences, an exploratory factor analysis was first conducted on the clothing preference measure (based on owning ratings[3]) instead of a confirmatory factor analysis. A similar exploratory procedure was adopted for the other two clothing measures (i.e., description and function).

For clothing preference, a four-fold cross-validation resulted in a six-factor structure (details of the factor structure can be found in Table 1). The average model fit indices across the folds (mean CFI = 0.87 [range: 0.87-0.88] & mean RMSEA = 0.08 [range: 0.08-0.08]) indicated a reasonable and replicable fit. When the resulting factor structure was fit to the whole dataset, the factor structure also suggested a reasonable fit to the data (CFI = 0.88 & RMSEA = 0.08). The factors indicated measurement invariance (configural invariance: CFI = 0.87 & RMSEA = 0.09; metric invariance: ΔCFI = 0.01 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; scalar invariance: ΔCFI = 0.01 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; residual invariance: ΔCFI = 0.01 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00).[4]

The Factor Structure of Clothing Description

The same general procedure as above was carried out in fleshing out the factor structure of clothing description. A four-fold cross-validation resulted in a seven-factor structure (details of the factor structure can be found in Table 1). The average model fit indices across the folds (mean CFI = 0.89 [range: 0.87-0.90] & mean RMSEA = 0.07 [range: 0.07-0.08]) indicated a reasonable and

[3] There were two reasons behind this decision, one being theoretical and one being methodological. Theoretically, the present study was interested in people's behavioral outcomes as a consequence of various psychological antecedents. Therefore, people's tendency to owning a piece of clothing was prioritized over people's response towards liking a piece of clothing. This also had the theoretical advantage of producing comparable results to Hur et al. (2023), which used people's tendency to own certain garments in its main analysis. Methodologically, since the liking measurement produced missing data (see Methods section above) while the owning measurement did not, the use of the latter measurement produced considerably fewer computational issues. The relationship between liking and owning was separately examined later on.

[4] It should be noted that two items (i.e., Lingerie from Clothing Preference Factor 2 & Loose from Clothing Description Factor 5) that were loaded onto a factor during the initial four-fold cross-validation were removed in the final CFA models to improve overall fit. It should also be noted that for the final model, models were chosen with acceptable fit that makes theoretical and interpretational sense.

replicable fit. When the resulting factor structure was fit to the whole dataset, the factor structure also suggested a reasonable fit to the data (CFI = 0.91 & RMSEA = 0.07). This factor structure also indicated measurement invariance across the two samples (configural invariance: CFI = 0.90 & RMSEA = 0.07; metric invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; scalar invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; residual invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00).

The Factor Structure of Clothing Function

The same procedure as above was carried out in fleshing out the factor structure of clothing function. A four-fold cross-validation resulted in a six-factor structure (details of the factor structure can be found in Table 1). The average model fit indices across the folds (mean CFI = 0.89 [range: 0.86-0.90] & mean RMSEA = 0.07 [range: 0.07-0.08]) indicated a reasonable and replicable fit. When the resulting factor structure was fit to the whole dataset, the factor structure also suggested a reasonable fit to the data (CFI = 0.90 & RMSEA = 0.07). This factor structure also indicated measurement invariance across the two samples (configural invariance: CFI = 0.89 & RMSEA = 0.07; metric invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; scalar invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00; residual invariance: ΔCFI = 0.00 & ΔRMSEA = 0.00).

Naming the Factors

In naming the factors of the three clothing measures (i.e., clothing preference, clothing description, & clothing function), the following steps were taken. For clothing description, each factor was named after the most representative item(s) that loaded onto it. Afterwards, these clothing description factors were correlated with each of the clothing preference factors in deriving the names of the latter. Ideally, one's clothing preference would be named based on one's description of their own clothing. Lastly, for clothing function, each factor was named by identifying the unifying theme of each factor's statements.

However, no consistently interpretable pattern emerged in the naming of the clothing preference factors using the outlined methodology (clothing description factors did not uniquely and strongly correlate with each clothing preference factor), and a similar lack of pattern was also evident

when all 42 clothing description items were utilized.[5] In the end, the naming of the clothing preference factors was done in the same way as the naming of the clothing description factors. Details of the factor structure including factor names of all three clothing measures can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor Structure of Clothing Preference, Clothing Description, and Clothing Function across both UK and USA data

	Factor Number	Factor Name	Internal Reliability (α)	Items (Loadings)
Clothing Preference (22 items), aka. ECPF-2	1	Activewear & Sportswear	.82	Activewear (.84) & Sportswear (.82)
	2	Dresses & Skirts	.90	Dresses (.90), Skirts (.84), Leggings (.78), Blouses (.78), Tights (.72), Cardigans (.69), Jumpsuits/Playsuits/Rompers (.58), Nightwear/Pajamas (.58), & Vests/Tank Tops (.55)
	3	Polo Shirts & Suits	.74	Polo Shirts (.74), Suits (.72), & Chinos/Khakis (.68)
	4	Knitwear	.73	Knitwear (.79) & Sweaters/Jumpers (.74)
	5	Hoodies & Sweatpants	.77	Sweatshirts (.73), Sweatpants/Joggers (.72), Hoodies (.71), Loungewear (.57), & T-Shirts (.47)
	6	Denim	.78	Denim (.85) & Jeans (.75)
Clothing Description (27 items)	1	Basic & Simple	.72	Basic (.80), Simple (.76), & Neutral (.51)
	2	Pretty & Beautiful	.87	Pretty (.85), Beautiful (.84), Cute (.79), Chic (.73), & Feminine (.61)
	3	Dark & Black	.82	Dark (.84) & Black (.83)
	4	Bright & Colorful	.86	Bright (.88) & Colourful/Colorful (.86)
	5	Easy, Casual, & Practical	.81	Easy (.79), Casual (.74), Practical (.69), & Comfortable (.67)
	6	Fashionable & Stylish	.91	Fashionable (.88), Stylish (.87), Trendy (.83), Cool (.76), Hip (.69), Sexy (.66), & Modern (.65)
	7	Elegant & Smart	.81	Elegant (.85), Smart (.73), Formal (.70), & Classic (.54)
Clothing Function (24 items)	1	Concealment	.68	"To camouflage and make myself less noticeable from other people" (.96) & "To hide my body" (.54)
	2	Attraction	.82	"To look beautiful" (.80), "To look attractive" (.80), "To emphasise my body" (.71), & "To sexually attract other people" (.60)

[5] There were some notably large effects when looking at individual adjectives. For example, the Activewear and Sportswear was correlated with "Sporty" ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), the Dresses and Skirts category with "Feminine" ($r = .71$, $p < .001$), and the Polo Shirts and Suit category with "Formal" ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). However, such large effects did not emerge – especially in a clear-cut interpretable way – for the other clothing categories.

	3	Individuality & Self-Expression	.88	"To stand out among others" (.82), "To emphasise my individuality" (.78), "To signify my personality" (.77), "To boost my self-esteem and morale" (.76), "To signal my aesthetic predilection and taste" (.71), & "To reflect my current mood" (.65)
	4	Social Signaling	.86	"To signal my social status" (.74), "To help me look prosperous" (.74), "To follow fashion trends" (.73), "To generally impress other people (not aimed at sexual attraction)" (.71), "To create a sense of belonging with others" (.71), "To signify my cultural origin" (.62), & "To signal my occupation" (.56)
	5	Protection & Functionality	.68	"To promote physical protection" (.75), "To promote physical warmth" (.61), & "To support physical activities" (.57)
	6	Political Expression	.72	"To represent my political standpoints and ideologies" (.81) & "To protest and rebel" (.69)

Exploring the Predictors of Clothing Preference via Path Analysis

A path analysis was undertaken to examine the roles of demography, personality, fashion experience, and perceived clothing function on clothing preference. It should be noted that while correlations provide useful insights, their failure to account for confounding variables may lead to an increased risk of Type 1 errors. Therefore, as previous works have also investigated the predictors of everyday aesthetic activities using path analysis (e.g., McManus & Furnham, 2006), the present work adopted a similar approach to investigate the predictors of the six-factored clothing preference measure.

Causal Ordering and Model Fitting

Clothing preference (six variables), or the likelihood of owning certain types of garments, was considered a consequence of fashion variables, consisting of perceived clothing function (six variables), the experience of working in the fashion industry, formal training/education in fashion, and general interest in fashion (each represented by a single variable). Among the fashion variables, it was assumed that general interest in fashion leads to formal training/education in fashion, which in turn affects the likelihood of working in the fashion industry. These three fashion variables were then assumed to have an impact on how clothing is (seen to be) used in daily life (i.e., perceived function of everyday clothing). It was also assumed that one's education in fashion was impacted by one's personality (i.e., Big 5) and demographics (i.e., age, gender, and country of residence [UK vs. USA]).

Following McManus and Furnham (2006), causality was set in the order of demographics, personality, and education.

It should be noted that the fashion work and fashion education/training variables were dichotomized as those with experience vs. those without. Given the small number of participants who identified themselves as "other" in the gender question, these participants were omitted for the gender variable. As a consequence, the gender variable was also dichotomized, i.e., "male" and "female."

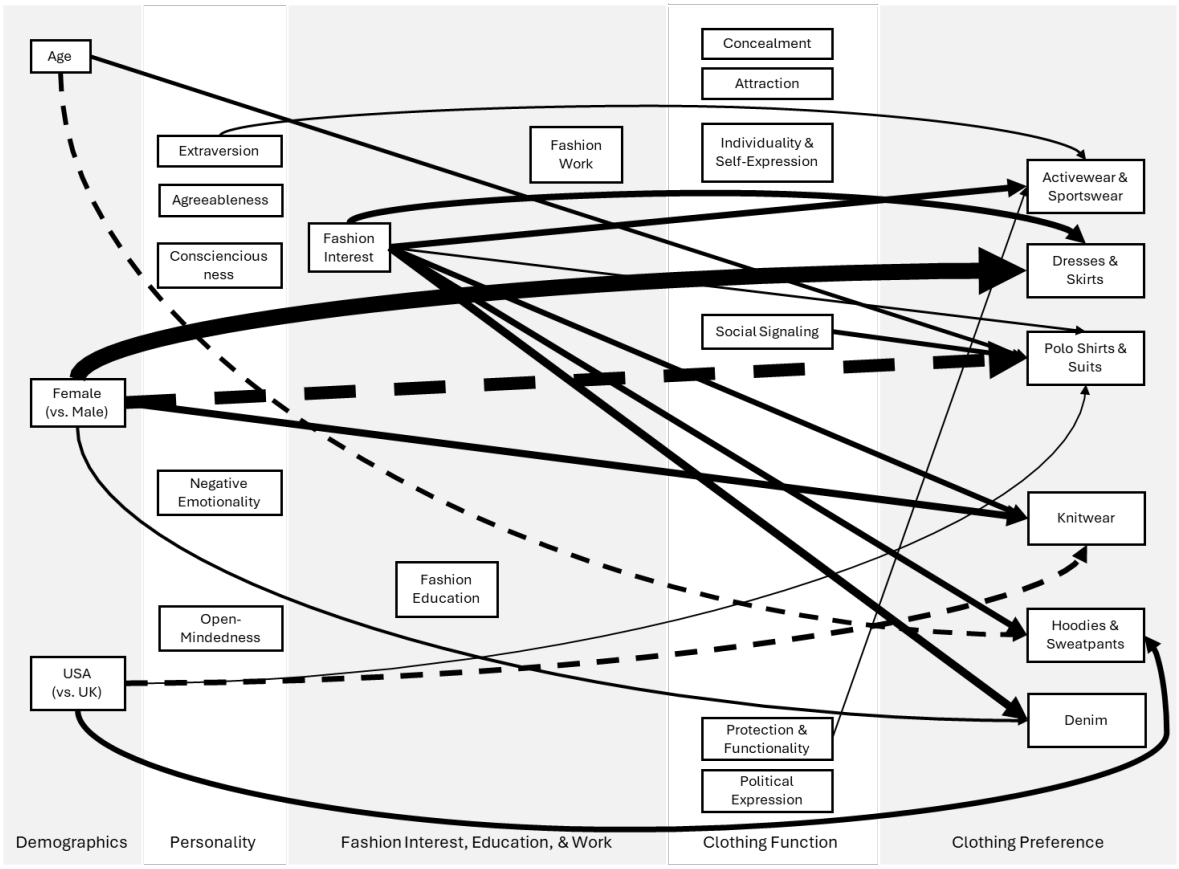
All analyses concerning the path analysis were done using R's *lavaan* package (Rousseel, 2012). The method of path analysis was modeled after McManus and Furnham (2006). The fitted model proved an excellent fit (CFI = 0.97 & RMSEA = 0.05). For those who wish to re-examine the data based on differing assumptions and interests, a raw correlation table consisting of variables used in the path analysis is available in the Supplementary Dataset (as mentioned earlier, the study's raw data is also available).

Interpreting Path Analysis

The path analysis was presented in two diagrams to accommodate the large number of variables. To that end, Figure 1 represents paths predicting clothing preference. Figure 2 represents paths predicting the rest of the variables. In other words, both diagrams should be viewed together as a single path analysis.

Figure 1

Path Diagram Predicting Clothing Preference



Note. To simplify the diagram, the path coefficients are omitted from the visualization (they are discussed in the main text). However, the thickness of the visualized significant ($p \leq .001$) paths is approximately proportional to the beta coefficient. The dashed lines represent negative beta coefficients, while the solid lines represent positive beta coefficients.

In predicting clothing preference, the majority of significant paths (18 paths in total) derived from demographics and general interest in fashion. Being female (vs. male) positively predicted the owning of Dresses and Skirts ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < .001$), Knitwear ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$), Denim ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .001$), while it negatively predicted the owning of Polo Shirts and Suits ($\beta = -0.58$, $p < .001$). Residing in the USA (vs. the UK) positively predicted the owning of Hoodies and Sweatpants ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < .001$) and Polo Shirts and Suits ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < .001$), but negatively Knitwear ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .001$). Age

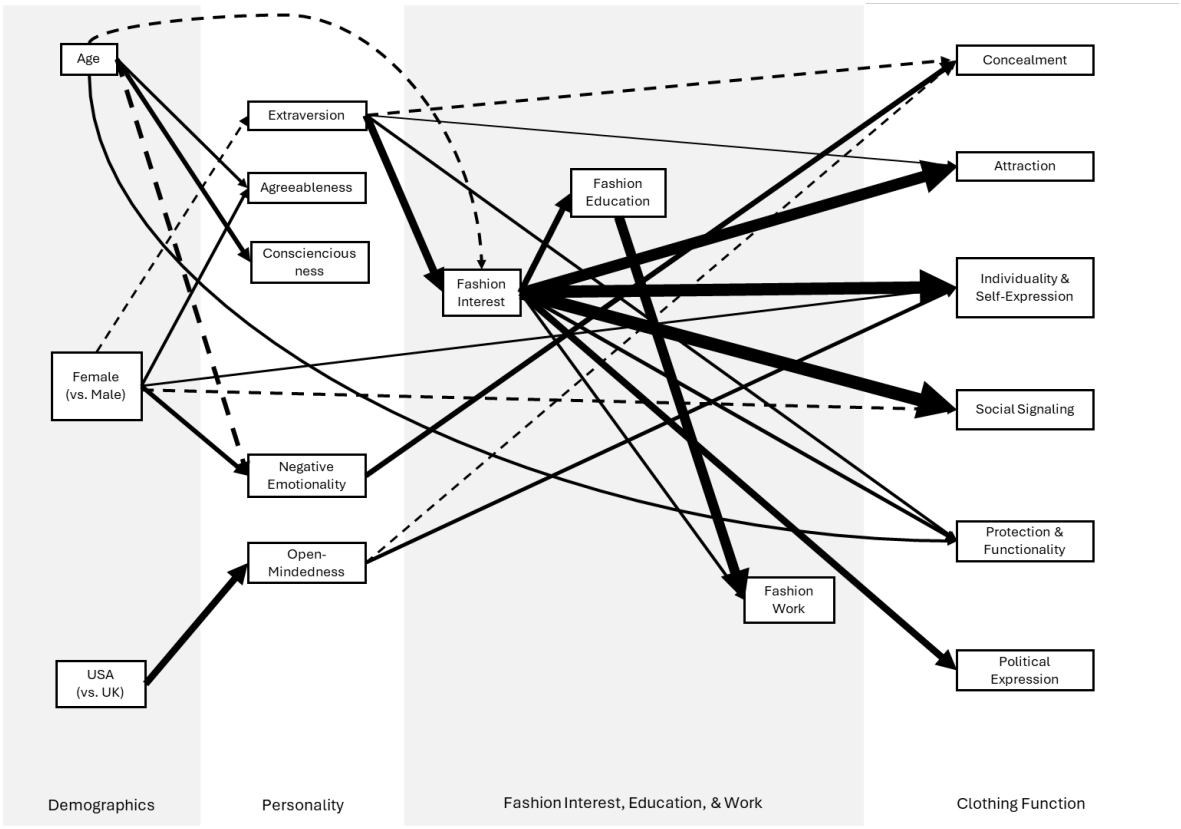
positively predicted at significant levels the owning of Polo Shirts and Suits ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .001$) but negatively Hoodies and Sweatpants ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .001$).

Unsurprisingly, general fashion interest positively predicted all clothing preference factors (Denim: $\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$; Dresses and Skirts: $\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$; Hoodies and Sweatpants: $\beta = 0.30$, $p < .001$; Activewear and Sportswear: $\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$; Knitwear: $\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$; and Polo Shirts and Suits: $\beta = 0.12$, $p < .001$), indicating that fashion interest is an important predictor of owning various clothing.

Of clothing functions, only two paths emerged as significant factors in predicting clothing preference, with Social Signaling function predicting Polo Shirts and Suits positively ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$) and the Protection and Functionality function positively predicting Activewear and Sportwear ($\beta = 0.09$, $p = .001$). Last but not least, extraversion was a significantly positive predictor of Activewear and Sportwear ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < .001$).

Figure 2

Path Diagram Predicting Clothing Function, Fashion Experience, and Personality



Note. To simplify the diagram, the path coefficients are omitted from the visualization (they are instead discussed in the main text). However, the thickness of the visualized significant ($p \leq .001$) paths is approximately proportional to the beta coefficient. The dashed lines represent negative beta coefficients, while the solid lines represent positive beta coefficients.

In addition to the paths predicting clothing preference, the path analysis revealed 26 significant paths in predicting clothing function, fashion experience, and demographic variables. In terms of clothing function, the Concealment function was predicted positively by negative emotionality ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$) and negatively by extraversion ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < .001$) and open-mindedness ($\beta = -0.11$, $p = .001$). The Attraction function was positively predicted by fashion interest ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < .001$) and extraversion ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < .001$). The Individuality and Self-Expression function was positively predicted by fashion interest ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < .001$), open-mindedness ($\beta = 0.19$,

$p < .001$), and being female (vs. male; $\beta = 0.11$, $p < .001$). The Social Signaling function was positively predicted by fashion interest ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < .001$) and was more likely to be carried out by males ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < .001$). The Protection and Functionality function was predicted positively by fashion interest ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .001$), extraversion ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .001$), and age ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .001$). Finally, the Political Expression was positively predicted by fashion interest ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$).

Moving onto the fashion experience variables, the likelihood of working in the fashion industry was positively predicted by formal training/education in fashion ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < .001$) and fashion interest ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$). The likelihood of receiving formal training/education in fashion, in turn, was predicted by fashion interest only ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$). When it comes to the predictors of fashion interest, the variable was predicted by extraversion ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$) and negatively by age ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .001$).

The predictors of the Big 5 personality variables consisted of demographic variables, which showed that extraversion was predicted negatively by gender (male participants had higher levels; $\beta = -0.13$, $p < .001$). Agreeableness was predicted gender (female participants had higher levels; $\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$) and positively by age ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .001$). Conscientiousness was only predicted positively by age ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$), while negative emotionality decreased with age ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$) and exhibited higher levels among females than males ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$). Last but not least, open-mindedness showed a discrepancy in residence, with residents in the USA demonstrating higher levels of it than residents in the UK ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .001$).

All in all, the path analysis from Figure 2 demonstrates a similar picture to what was observed in Figure 1, in that demography and fashion interest played major roles in predicting fashion variables (i.e., fashion experience and clothing function). However, it was also noticeable that some of the Big 5 personality variables, notably extraversion and open-mindedness also played important roles.

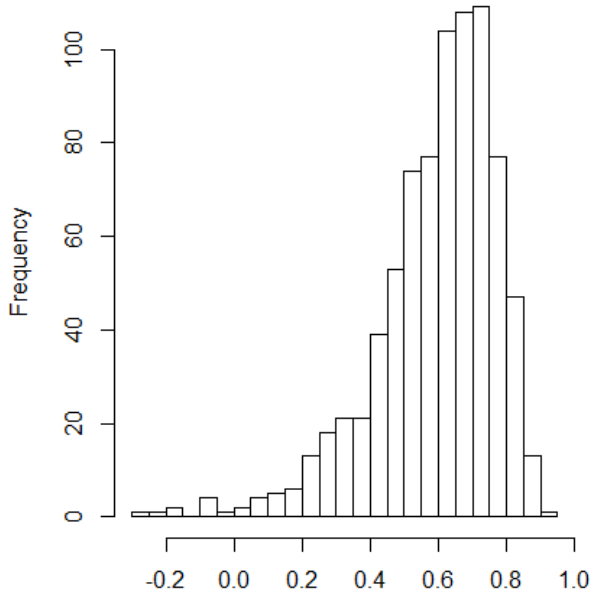
The Relationship Between Owning and Liking

A relevant topic in discussing the preference and aesthetics of everyday clothing is the relationship between owning and liking (Hur et al., 2023). After all, in the context of everyday clothing, preference can have two meanings, namely, to own and to like. An exploration into the

relationship between the two measures may allow an understanding of the nature of everyday clothing preferences. Instead of aggregating the owning and liking data, a correlation between owning and liking was computed for each participant. The mean correlation coefficient across all participants was .59 (*SD* = 0.18), which was significantly different from 0, t (800) = 93.74, $p < .001$, $d = 3.31$.[6] This indicates that, in general, people seem to like what they own and vice versa. However, as can be seen in Figure 3, the distribution of the correlation coefficients (ranging from -.27 to .92) indicates the presence of individual differences.

Figure 3

Histogram of Owning and Liking Rating Correlation Coefficients Across the Sample Data



To determine the cause of this individual variation, a new path analysis was run. Specifically, the previous path analysis – retaining its original causal orderings – was used to predict the owning-liking (Fisher's Z-transformed) correlation coefficient. The path analysis revealed a good fit (CFI =

[6] In total, there were 801 valid participants as one participant did not have any variance for their liking rating. It should also be noted that when owning and liking were correlated per clothing item, the mean correlation coefficient was .48 (*SD* = .09; range: .29 - .64), which was significantly different from 0, t (42) = 33.93, $p < .001$, $d = 5.17$.

0.96 & RMSEA = 0.05). More relevantly, the analysis revealed the presence of two positive significant predictors of the owning-liking variability, namely owning of Hoodies and Sweatpants ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .001$). The Supplementary Dataset reveals raw correlations between the variables used in the path analysis.

Discussion

The ubiquity of clothing notwithstanding, a systematic and generalizable exploration of everyday clothing preferences remains sparse. The present study addressed this issue through four research aims: (1) to understand the factor structure of clothing preferences and their generalizability across two national cultures, (2) to explore psychological, fashion, and demographic variables in predicting clothing preference, (3) to understand how people describe their own preferred clothing, and (4) to examine the nature of clothing preferences by looking at the relationship between owning and liking clothing items.

The analysis revealed that the preferences for everyday clothing have six underlying factors or six groups of clothing items. Citing the most representative item(s) per factor, these factors consisted of (1) Activewear and Sportswear, (2) Dresses and Skirts, (3) Polo Shirts and Suits, (4) Knitwear, (5) Hoodies and Sweatpants, and (6) Denim. This basic factor structure was demonstrated to be invariant across two national cultures (i.e., the UK & the USA), each representing a major English-speaking fashion market. Using datasets from both national samples, the preference for each of the preference factors was predicted by a unique set of variables, including a set of fashion-related variables (i.e., general interest in fashion, formal training/education in fashion, work experience in the fashion industry, and perceived function of clothing).

While an attempt was made to further characterize and describe the preference factors by associating each preference factor with a set of adjectives people use to describe their own clothing, the analysis did not reveal a consistently interpretable output (neither did clothing description factors or individual adjectives uniquely and strongly correlate with each clothing preference factor). Despite this outcome, the analysis regarding people's choice of words in describing their own clothing was left in the paper as it still provides an interesting narrative and context to the daily interactions people

have with their clothing. Last but not least, examining the relationship between two types of clothing preferences, namely, liking and owning, the present data revealed that for most people, there was a positive correlation between the two measures. However, the degree of this positivity was modulated by individual differences, notably conscientiousness.

The study contributes to the literature on preference research and fashion psychology in several ways. Where previous works on clothing preferences – both in the fields of psychology and marketing – were focused on localized preference behaviors surrounding specific target populations and specific garments (e.g., Stolovy, 2021; Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017), the present work presents a more systematic approach to underscoring general preference behaviors across a wide range of clothing items and participants. The study in particular builds on the work by Hur et al. (2023), where the current work presented enhancements in methodology (e.g., broadening the scope of clothing items and participants, the use of a more intuitive rating scale, & gender-balanced sampling) and analysis (e.g., cross-validation approach to factor analysis & verification of the factor structure on two national cultures,). As such, the present work's six-factored everyday clothing preference represents an update of Hur et al.'s (2023) four-factored Everyday Clothing Preference Factors (ECPF).[7] Henceforth, the updated ECPF will be called ECPF-2.

Given the invariance of ECPF-2 across both UK and USA datasets, does this provide evidence of the universality of the clothing preference factors? The answer is more nuanced than not. On the one hand, the fact that a factor structure was replicated in two different national cultures where potential language effects can be discounted (since both are English-speaking countries) represents a triumph of constants, especially for a trend-sensitive activity such as fashion. In the broader context of preference research, this outcome speaks for findings that claimed cross-cultural invariance which claims a certain universality of aesthetic appreciation (e.g., Eysenck & Iwawaki, 1975). On the other hand, claims of universality should be made with caution since the item pool consisted of items that

[7] It should be noted that when confirmatory factor analysis was run on the present dataset using Hur et al. (2023)'s four-factored ECPF, there was a reasonable model fit (CFI = 0.89 and RMSEA = 0.09), meaning that the original ECPF ought not to be categorically dismissed. However, because the present study adopted more nuanced methodological and analytical approaches, the updated ECPF (i.e., ECPF-2) should take priority for a more generalized measure of everyday clothing preference using a continuous scale.

were chosen on the basis of their commonality across many Western cultures in the first place. The fact that the item pool did not include culturally unique items and the study only selected participants from two (English-speaking) Western cultures limits claims of true universality (the raw list of clothing and resulting preference factor structures may look entirely different across different cultures). Instead, the study represents the satisfaction of a minimum requirement towards such a conclusion and represents the study of a common denominator in everyday clothing preferences across these two selected Western cultures (see also Che et al.'s [2018] criticism of cross-cultural studies in preference research).

In predicting the ECPF-2, the majority of the significant correlations were derived from general fashion interest and demographics (i.e., gender & country of residence). Indeed, it makes sense that general interest in fashion – itself predicted by age, gender, extraversion, and openness – predicts the amount of clothing one owns regardless of the clothing type. Perhaps reflecting much of the past literature in fashion (e.g., Hur et al., 2023; O'Cass, 2000) and general preference research (e.g., Rentfrow et al., 2011), gender played an important role in predicting ECPF-2. Female participants were more likely to own Dresses and Skirts, Denim, and Knitwear whereas male participants were more likely to own Polo Shirts and Suits, and some of these effects reflected the largest effects in the path analysis predicting ECPF-2. As a reviewer rightfully noted, it is hard to imagine such an extreme case of gender-based ownership in fields like visual arts, music, and architecture. This renders the study of fashion not only an important indicator for gender research, potent with socio-cultural implications, but also positions fashion as a comparatively unique aesthetic domain among (everyday) aesthetic objects and activities.

While age also played some roles in predicting ECPF-2 (and other fashion-related variables), the effects were relatively small so their actual impact in real life can be taken with a pinch of salt. Finally, it was interesting to observe certain clothing types to be more popular in the USA than in the UK (i.e., Polo Shirts and Suits, and Hoodies and Sweatpants) while Knitwear was more popular in the UK than in the USA. In other words, despite the similarity of factor structures that exist between the two countries, there seem to be differences in popularity.

559 Perceived clothing function did not show an obvious and strong relationship with clothing
560 preference, apart from the Protection and Functionality function predicting the owning of Activewear
561 and Sportswear and the Social Signaling function predicting the owning of Polo Shirts and Suits. This
562 general lack of relationship may initially seem counter-intuitive to the expectation that people choose
563 their clothing based on how they like to use clothing. However, this expectation is rooted in the
564 assumption that each clothing type has a uniquely corresponding clothing function. Indeed, a recent
565 pilot study indicated that the same type of garment may be used for different functions. If this latter
566 scenario is true, it may well be – not considering specialized garments worn for specific functions –
567 the function or the way people use clothing (e.g., Flügel, 1930), may be at least partially independent
568 of one's choice of clothing. This dynamic relationship between the how and the why of clothing, and
569 how this is modulated by individual differences and the type of clothing, is an exciting venue of future
570 inquiries and examinations.
571 The paper also presented data on the language people use to describe their own clothing,
572 exploring its factor structure. While it was hoped that this analysis would shine light onto how people
573 describe the clothing they own and thereby help in further describing the ECPF-2, the analysis did not
574 reveal a consistently interpretable finding. To better understand this relationship, a more direct
575 approach, such as asking people to describe specific garments, may result in more interpretable
576 findings. Lastly, when the relationship between owning and liking a piece of garment was examined
577 per participant, there was a group-wise tendency to like what one owns and vice versa. However, a
578 closer examination of the matter revealed much dispersion among individuals, indicating individual
579 differences (however, much like the recent work by Hur et al., [in press], the presence of individual
580 differences in the data was not easily captured by some of the self-report measures of individual
581 differences). While this provides important commentary on previous works on the distinction between
582 liking and wanting in the human reward/motivation system (Aharon et al., 2001) or the aesthetic
583 possibility of "disinterested interest" (Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2016), the outcome highlights the
584 importance of individual differences. These analyses, by inquiring about the network of relationships
585 between liking (evaluation), owning (wanting and behavior), and the linguistic representation of

clothing, add crucial texture to the aforementioned inquiry into the everyday psychology of clothing choices.

Limitations and Future Directions

A set of limitations can be addressed. Firstly, despite the sampling method adopted in the present work that attempted for representativeness (e.g., sample size & balance of gender), the sampling method remained an opportunity sampling. A particular worry (via anecdotal evidence) was that the study unintentionally but systematically attracted mostly participants interested in fashion, regardless of the wide range of fashion backgrounds and experiences that were attempted to be captured during sampling. This would ultimately affect the study's purpose as a generalizable observation of everyday clothing behaviors across the general population. Fortunately, an inspection of fashion interest did not reveal such a trend in both samples, with both samples' mean fashion interest level (from a scale of 1 to 7) being 3.15 (SD = 1.33) and 3.34 (SD = 1.42) for the UK and USA samples respectively. Furthermore, there were no indications of the distributions for each country having a negative skew (i.e., skewness < .30). Still, future works may consider improving the representativeness of the sample by adopting alternative sampling methods.

Secondly, given that the literature demonstrates varying levels of stability regarding human visual preference across time (McManus, Cook, & Hunt, 2010; Pugach, Leder, & Graham, 2017), a more long-term investigation concerning one's clothing preference may shine light into the mechanism and stability of clothing preference. In studying long-term fashion preference, future studies should show particular sensitivity to the social forces at play, e.g., the fashion industry's constant search for novel trends and/or the role of trends themselves on the reception of clothing styles (e.g., Laver's Law; Laver, 1937). That said, a study of such nature should determine the degree of change instead of relying on absolute conclusions. For example, in the case of music, the preference structure is often retained regardless of the specific musical stimuli (Rentfrow et al., 2011, 2012).

Thirdly, future works may ask further questions as to the nature of preference and where it exactly comes from. Such works can explore clothing preference from directions from empirical

aesthetics, on how preference derives from, for example, but not limited to, psychophysical properties, viewing contexts, (Leder & Nadal, 2014), the simultaneous presence of stimuli of differing modalities (Hur, Medeisyte, & McManus, 2024), personal associations (Ortlieb, Kügel, & Carbon, 2020), arousal (Berlyne, 1971), meaning (Martindale, Moore, & Borkum, 1990), and biological-environmental mechanisms (Germine, Russell… Wilmer, 2015). Beyond preference, recent works have also explored aesthetic experiences through the lens of broader experiences such as sublimity and beauty (Hur, Gerger, Leder, & McManus, 2020; Hur, Hallam-Evans… & McManus, 2024).

Fourthly, while not a limitation of the present work *per se*, future research can explore fashion's relationship with various other everyday aesthetic objects. A prime target is design (Hekkert & Leder, 2007), which, like fashion, operates (at least in theory) on the premises of functionality as well as aesthetics. Indeed, John Laver's works (1937) emphasize the close relationship between trends in clothing and interior design and even suggest that the former foreshadows the latter. By contextualizing the phenomenon of clothing into other aesthetic objects in everyday contexts, future studies can explore the phenomenon of clothing as a holistic aesthetic experience embedded within the everyday.

Conclusion

The present work investigated the preference structure of everyday clothing – using both UK and USA samples – and explored psychological, demographical, and fashion variables that predict one's clothing preference. The study further explored two topics that contextualize people's relationships with clothing: the language used to describe one's clothing and the relationship between liking and owning clothing. Studying one of the most commonplace and consumable (aesthetic) everyday objects inevitably brings forth a range of implications, from neuromarketing to applied psychology and empirical aesthetics. Yet given the numerous contextual, individual, and social factors that surround the fashion phenomena, it is also no understatement to admit to fashion's apparent unpredictability. Where certain variability within fashion behaviors can be accessed, measured, and predicted, much variability remains unveiled and perhaps will remain so. To that end, the authors

hope that the present work represents a small step toward understanding the forces behind everyday clothing choices, on which future knowledge can build.

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