A Survey of Motivations and Concerned Psychological Characteristics of Sexy Clothing among College Students

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Abstract. Contemporary young people often express their pursuit of sexy beauty by sexy clothing. It is of great significance to investigate their motivations and concerned psychological characteristics of sexy clothing behavior based on the aesthetic theory and self-objectification theory. 558 college students from three key universities in Nanjing were investigated with Body Monitoring Scale (BMS) and the self-designed questionnaire, it was found that the motivations mainly includes sexy performance motivation, self-objectification motivation, body comfort motivation and homosexual competition motivation; although sexy performance motivation is related to aesthetic motivation, it is also closely related to self-objectification motivation; it’s imperative to carry out clothing aesthetics education for college students.

1. Introduction

With China's reform and opening up, the social tolerance tends to increase and people have become more bold in their clothing behavior. The sexy dressing behavior studied in this paper has a more consistent connotation in China and the West. It mainly refers to the way of exposing body or wearing see-through clothes together with tights to demonstrate figures and increase sexual appeal. The clothing history of various nationalities can be traced back to increasing sexuality since its very beginning. In a sense, the expression of sexual attraction is the eternal theme of clothing [1]. The motivations of sexy clothing must include the motivation of expressing attraction. In a not so strict sense, people get used to the idea that exposing the body or highlighting the psychical attraction always equals sexy beauty. However, if we regard all objects aroused sexual pleasure as beauty without any distinction, it will lead to anomie of sexual desire and uncontrollable social consequences [2]. In addition to being pleasant and vivid, aesthetic objects must also have value, which means that they will bring positive meaning to the life, or they can not violate the principle of truth and kindness [3].

Since the 1990s, the theory of self objectification in western psychology has become a research hotspot. According to the theory, due to the unequal power in social life, the body of a certain gender (usually females, including males in recent years) is treated as an object that can provide hedonic value, which is called sexual objectification. The internalization of other persons’ discriminatory attitudes towards one’s body is the so-called self-objectification[4]. According to the theory of self-objectification, sexy dressing behavior may involve the motivation of self-objectification, that is, the motivation of wearing sexy clothes is to meet the sexual and power needs of others.

Sexy dressing behavior belongs to the cross field of clothing science and psychology. So far, there are few empirical studies on the motivations of sexy dressing behavior at home and abroad.
The aim of the study was to enrich and deepen the research on sexy dressing behavior, and provide some enlightenment for aesthetic education.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Participants

By convenient sampling method, 580 college students (both undergraduate and postgraduate students) from three key universities in Nanjing were selected to give questionnaires, of which 558 were valid, with an effective rate of 96.2%. The subjects ranged from 18 to 28 years old, with an average age of 21.1 and a standard deviation of 2.1. 247 females (44.3%) and 311 males (55.7%). There were 157 students (28.1%) in liberal arts, 104 (18.6%) in science, 271 (48.6%) in engineering, and 26 (4.7%) in medicine and art. There were 274 urban students (49.1%) and 284 rural ones (50.9%). There were 295 the only children (52.9%) and 263 non only children (47.1%).

2.2. Measurement Tools

(1) Body monitoring scale (BMC). BMC has widely been used in domestic and foreign studies to measure the trait of self-objectification[5]. The higher the score, the higher the degree of self-objectification. The Cronbach's α of BMC in this study was 0.770, indicating the reliability was good.

(2) Self made questionnaire. The situational story about other persons' sexy dressing behavior are presented to subjects who are required to experience and answer from the perspective of the protagonist. There are six motivations involved: (1) physical comfort motivation; (2) attraction motivation; (3) self objectification motivation; (4) fashion motivation; (5) same-sex competition motivation; (6) self-confidence motivation. The quality of scenario story writing has been recognized by 2 psychology experts. 60 college students from the same schools as the formal subjects were selected to carry out the pre-research measurement. Through factor analysis method, it was found that the motivations of attracting others, fashion motivation and self-confidence promotion motivation could be aggregated into one factor. The common factor was named as sexual performance motivation, it’s Cronbach's α was 0.836, and the test-retest reliability after 3 weeks interval was r = 0.786 (P < 0.001).

The self-designed questionnaire also includes the tendency to sex objectify other people and the satisfaction with one’s own figure. All the above psychological characteristics are designed to be scored on a scale of 1-7 points. The higher the score, the more the characteristics. The test-retest reliability of the self-designed questionnaire was r = 0.757 (P < 0.001). In the formal study, Cronbach's α of the self-designed questionnaire was 0.734, which indicated a good reliability.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Spss22.0 was used to input and analyze the data, including factor analysis, descriptive statistics, single sample t-test, independent sample t-test, and correlation analysis.

3. Results

3.1. The Descriptive Statistics and Single Sample t-test

Among the different motivations of college Students' sexy dressing behavior, it was found sexual expression motivation (5.04 ±1.09) > physical comfort motivation (4.25±1.49) > self objectification motivation (3.88 ±1.50) > same-sex competition motivation (3.40 ±1.57). The results of single sample t-test showed that the motivation of sexy performance is above average (there is no significant difference with 5 points, P > 0.05), among which the motivation of attracting others exceeding above average (5.19 ± 1.29; > 5, P < 0.01); the motivation of physical comfort is higher than average (> 4 , P < 0.01), the self objectification motivation is average (there is no significant
difference with 4 points, \( P > 0.05 \)); the same-sex competition motivation is higher than lower (\( > 3 \), \( P < 0.001 \)).

When watching other people's sexy clothing, the objectification of the opposite sex is higher (\( 4.22 \pm 1.61 \)) than that of the same sex (\( 3.79 \pm 1.70 \)). The single sample t-test showed that the objectification of opposite sex is higher than average (\( > 4 \), \( P < 0.01 \)), and that of the same sex is higher than lower (\( > 3 \), \( P < 0.001 \)). College Students' trait self-objectification is average (\( 4.01 \pm 1.06 \), no significant difference with 4 points, \( P > 0.05 \)); body satisfaction is lower (\( 3.51 \pm 1.71 \); \( > 3 \), \( P < 0.001 \)).

3.2. Gender Differences

In the motivations of sexy dressing, girls' motivation of sexy expression (\( 5.41 \pm 1.03 \)), physical comfort motivation (\( 4.42 \pm 1.38 \)), and same-sex competition motivation (\( 3.81 \pm 1.59 \)) are significantly higher than boys (\( 4.74 \pm 1.04 ; 4.11 \pm 1.55 ; 3.07 \pm 1.47 \)), while boys' self-objectification motivation (\( 4.06 \pm 1.45 \)) is significantly higher than girls (\( 3.65 \pm 1.52 \), \( P < 0.05-0.001 \)).

In the aspect of sex objectification, boys' objectification of the opposite sex (\( 4.72 \pm 1.47 \)) is significantly higher than that of girls (\( 3.58 \pm 1.55 \)), \( P < 0.001 \). However, there is no significant difference between males and females in the objectification of the same sex, \( P > 0.05 \).

In the aspect of trait self-objectification, girls (\( 4.27 \pm 1.04 \)) are significantly higher than boys (\( 3.81 \pm 1.03 \)), \( P < 0.001 \). In terms of body satisfaction, boys (\( 3.64 \pm 1.71 \)) are significantly higher than girls (\( 3.35 \pm 1.69 \)), \( P < 0.05 \).

3.3. Correlation Analysis

For males, most of the four motivations are significantly correlated. Among them, the highest correlation is between sexual expression motivation and self-objectification motivation (\( r = 0.52 \), \( P < 0.001 \)), and all kinds of motivations are significantly correlated with sex objectification. Among them, the correlation of same-sex competition motivation and the same-sex objectification is the highest (\( r = 0.49 \), \( P < 0.001 \)). There is a significant low correlation between sexuality motivation, trait self-objectification and body satisfaction (\( r = 0.12, r = 0.14, P < 0.05 \)).

For females, most of the four motivations are significantly correlated. There are relatively higher correlations among self-objectification motivation, same-sex competition motivation and sexy performance motivation (\( r = 0.48-0.62 \), \( P < 0.001 \)). There exist significant relationships between sexual objectification of others and the motivations except for physical comfort motivation. Among them, self-objectification motivation has the highest correlation with heterosexual objectification (\( r = 0.52, P < 0.001 \)). There is a significant low correlation between the four motivations and body satisfaction (\( r = 0.13-0.23, P < 0.05-0.001 \)).

4. Discussions

4.1. How to Understand the Relationship Between Different Motivations of Sexy Dressing Behavior

In this study, direct investigation of the aesthetic motivation of sexy dressing wasn’t made, because people always have different opinions on what is beauty. For example, many people tend to mistake sexy expression motivation for aesthetic motivation. It was found that there is no significant or small correlation between the physical comfort motivation and the other three motivations, while the other three motivations have significant medium (or even relatively high)correlation, which indicated that the physical comfort motivation may be a relatively independent motivation, while the other three motivations may have the common components. The physical comfort motivation involves the basic functions of clothing such as protection and health. The motivation of sexuality expression based on the original dressing image of instinctive impulse, also involves high-level
aesthetic dressing image. Self-objectification motivation and same-sex competition motivation are related to the dressing image of sexual instinct impulse, but the former is mainly concerned with the forced and passive need for power (those who are sexually objectified by others or self-objectified tend to have lower sense of social and personal power, and a low sense of strength [6]), the latter is mainly related to the challenging and proactive need for power.

4.2. How to Carry Out Aesthetic Education of Dressing

It was shown the self-objectification together with body satisfaction can influence the motivations of sexy clothing. According to these findings, it is helpful for college students to understand the correct aesthetic standards of dressing by educating the essence of different motivations of sexy dressing behavior. The goal of aesthetic education of dressing is to form appropriate clothing image, that is, to establish correct aesthetic standards, and to meet the aesthetic needs in the practical experience of dressing.

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