



THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEALMENT IN OVERSIZED CLOTHING BEHAVIOUR AMONG GEN Z COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract: Clothing functions not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a medium through which individuals manage self-presentation and regulate social visibility. Among Generation Z, oversized clothing has emerged as a prominent fashion trend; however, its psychological implications remain relatively underexplored. The present study investigates the relationship between self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Generation Z college students. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 456 college students using standardized measures, including the Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990) and the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale for Gen Z college Students, prepared & standardized by the investigator & the supervisor. Statistical analyses such as descriptive analysis, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation were used to examine differences and relationships among the study variables. The findings indicated no significant differences in oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment based on gender and age groups. However, significant differences were observed based on the primary reasons for wearing oversized clothing. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment ($r = .466, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with higher tendencies toward self-concealment are more likely to engage in oversized clothing behaviour. The study highlights that clothing choices may serve as subtle behavioural expressions of underlying psychological tendencies. Understanding such associations contributes to a broader perspective on appearance-related behaviours, self-presentation, and psychological processes among young adults.

IndexTerms - Self-concealment, Oversized clothing behaviour, Generation Z, Appearance management, Self-presentation, College students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Clothing functions not only as a form of aesthetic expression but also as a medium through which individuals manage self-presentation and regulate social visibility. Among Generation Z, oversized clothing has emerged as a prominent fashion trend; however, its psychological implications remain relatively underexplored. The present study investigates the relationship between self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Generation Z college students. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 456 college students using standardized measures, including the Self-Concealment Scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990) and the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale for Gen Z college Students, prepared & standardized by the investigator & the supervisor. Statistical analyses such as descriptive analysis, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation were used to examine differences and relationships among the study variables. The findings indicated no significant differences in oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment based on gender and age groups. However, significant differences were observed based on the primary reasons for wearing oversized clothing. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment ($r = .466, p < .001$), suggesting that individuals with higher tendencies toward self-concealment are more likely to engage in oversized clothing behaviour. The study highlights that clothing choices may serve as subtle behavioural expressions of underlying psychological tendencies. Understanding such associations contributes to a broader perspective on appearance-related behaviours, self-presentation, and psychological processes among young adults.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Self-Concealment Theory

The concept of self-concealment was introduced by Larson & Chastain, 1990, who defined it as a predisposition to actively conceal personal information that an individual perceives as negative, distressing, or threatening. Such information may include thoughts, emotions, experiences, or behaviors that are consciously known to the individual but intentionally kept hidden from others to avoid judgment or negative evaluation. According to Larson & Chastain, self-concealment can be understood within the framework of privacy regulation and self-presentation, where individuals manage what aspects of themselves are revealed or withheld during social interactions. They also emphasized that self-concealment is distinct from self-disclosure, as individuals may disclose certain personal experiences while still concealing more distressing information. The authors further suggested that persistent self-

concealment may contribute to psychological distress, as continuously suppressing personal information can create internal stress and reduce opportunities to receive social or emotional support.

2.2 Encllothed Cognition Theory

The concept of Encllothed Cognition, introduced by Adam & Galinsky (2012), explains how the clothes people wear can influence their psychological processes. According to this idea, clothing not only affects how others see us but can also shape how we think, feel, and behave. The theory suggests that this effect happens through two main factors: the symbolic meaning attached to clothing and the experience of actually wearing it. Many types of clothing carry cultural meanings such as professionalism, authority, or attentiveness. When people wear such clothing, these meanings can influence their mindset and behavior. In their experiments, participants who wore a lab coat described as a doctor's coat showed higher attention and better task performance than those who did not wear it or wore it with a different description. This shows that the psychological effect of clothing depends on both wearing the garment and the meaning associated with it. Overall, the theory of encllothed cognition highlights that what we wear can subtly influence our thinking, attention, and behavior.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 Review of Literature related to Self-Concealment

Kumar, C., & Srivastava, S. (2024), conducted correlational study among 194 college students aged 18–25 to examine the relationship between attachment style, inferiority complex, and self-concealment. Using the MOAS, Self-Concealment Scale, and Inferiority Complex Shortened Scale, the study found significant positive correlations between inferiority complex and self-concealment ($r = .608$), attachment style and inferiority complex ($r = .373$), and attachment style and self-concealment ($r = .331$). The findings also indicated that insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent) were strongly linked with higher self-concealment and feelings of inferiority, while secure attachment showed a protective role. (Kumar & Srivastava, 2024)

Garg, L. (2023), conducted cross-sectional study among 60 young adults aged 18–25 to examine the relationship between self-concealment, perceived social support, and mental health help-seeking behaviour. Using standardized scales and statistical analyses, the study found no significant correlations among the three variables. Gender comparison showed no significant difference in self-concealment or perceived social support, but females showed significantly higher help-seeking behaviour than males. The study suggests the importance of creating supportive environments and improving mental health awareness among young adults. (Garg, 2024)

Salazar-Fernández et al. (2024), examined the relationship between self-concealment, depressive symptoms, and professional help-seeking among 1,014 university students in Chile. The findings showed that self-concealment was positively related to depressive symptoms, while depressive symptoms were negatively related to help-seeking intentions. The study concluded that self-concealment indirectly reduces help-seeking behaviour through increased depressive symptoms, highlighting the need for early mental-health support in universities. (Salinas-Oñate et al., 2024)

Akpınar, E. et al. (2024), investigated the relationship between self-concealment, social appearance anxiety, sensation seeking, and attitudes toward social media among 354 adolescents. The results showed that self-concealment was moderately associated with social appearance anxiety and also related to sensation seeking, while social media attitudes had a weaker influence. The study concluded that body-related anxiety and thrill-seeking tendencies play an important role in adolescents' self-concealment behaviour. (Akpınar et al., 2024)

3.2 Review of Literature related to Oversized Clothing Use

Gautam (2026), examined how clothing preferences relate to psychological well-being among Gen Z adolescents in India using a cross-sectional survey approach. The findings indicated that clothing choices were linked with self-confidence, emotional well-being, and social comfort, suggesting that apparel can act as a medium through which adolescents express identity and regulate emotions. (Gautam, 2026)

Rani (2025), explored the relationship between clothing choices and adolescents' self-image through a theoretical review of existing studies and reports. The study highlighted that the adolescents with higher self-confidence tend to show more expressive clothing behaviour, while those with lower self-image often follow peer norms to avoid social judgment. The review emphasized the influence of social media, peer comparison, and cultural expectations on clothing behaviour. (Rani & Mahavidhyalya, 2025)

Adam and Galinsky (2012), introduced the concept of Encllothed Cognition, demonstrating through experimental studies that wearing certain clothes can influence cognitive processes and behaviour. Their findings showed that participants wearing a lab coat associated with a doctor performed better on attention tasks, suggesting that both the symbolic meaning of clothing and the experience of wearing it can affect psychological functioning. (Adam & Galinsky, 2012)

Kinley (2010), investigated how clothing size and fit influence women's self-esteem and body image through an experimental design. The results indicated that garment fit and perceived size can affect body perception and self-esteem, showing that clothing characteristics can play a role in shaping individuals' psychological experiences related to appearance. (Kinley, 2010)

4. RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have explored psychological concepts such as body image, self-presentation, and social comparison, particularly among young adults. However, much of this research has focused on internal experiences like appearance anxiety or social media behaviour, while everyday expressions such as clothing choices have received less attention. Oversized clothing has recently become a common trend among Generation Z college students. Although it is often explained through fashion or cultural influences, the psychological factors behind this preference remain understudied.

Similarly, self-concealment has mainly been examined in relation to emotional disclosure and interpersonal communication, with limited attention to how it may appear in nonverbal behaviours such as clothing choices. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the relationship between self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Generation Z college students.

5. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Oversized clothing has become increasingly popular among Generation Z college students, yet the psychological factors influencing this behavior remain largely unexplored. Understanding the role of self-concealment in oversized clothing use can provide insight into how individuals manage self-presentation and social visibility through clothing choices. This study contributes to understanding the connection between psychological tendencies and everyday appearance-related behaviors among young adults. Therefore, the investigator felt that the need of this study entitled, "The role of self-concealment in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students."

6. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

6.1 Objectives of the study

1. To assess the level of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students.
2. To assess the level of self-concealment among Gen Z college students.
3. To find out whether there is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to
 - a) Gender
 - b) Age
4. To find out whether there is any significant difference in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit.
5. To find out the significant relationship between Self-Concealment and Oversized Clothing Behaviour among Gen Z college students.

6.2 Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to
 - a) Gender
 - b) Age
2. There is a significant difference in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit.
3. There is a significant relationship between Self-Concealment and Oversized Clothing Behaviour among Gen Z college students.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Method

In this present study the researcher has employed the normative survey method to analyses the role of self-concealment in Oversized Clothing Behaviour among Gen Z college students.

7.2 Sample

The investigator used random sampling technique for selecting the sample of 456 Gen Z college students from the various colleges & universities in Tamilnadu.

7.3 Tools used in the Study

The tools used for the present investigation are presented below:

1. **Self-Concealment Scale (SCS)** by Larson David and Chastain Robert (1990)
2. **Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale (OCBS)** – constructed & validated by the investigator & the research supervisor (2026)

7.4 Scoring Procedure

The Self-Concealment Scale (SCS) developed by Larson and Chastain (1990) consists of 10 items that measure the tendency of individuals to conceal personal information perceived as distressing or negative. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The total score is obtained by summing the responses to all items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-concealment. The maximum possible score was 10 and the minimum score was 50. The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale consists of 30 items that assess the tendency of individuals to prefer or use oversized clothing. Responses are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The total score is calculated by summing the responses to all items, and higher scores indicate a greater tendency toward oversized clothing use. The maximum possible score was 30 and the minimum score was 150.

7.5 Analysis and Interpretation of data

The collected data were systematically processed and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to ensure accurate interpretation of the study findings. The statistical methods employed for data analysis and hypothesis testing include measures of central tendency, independent samples t-test, Pearson correlation, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression analysis. These techniques were used to examine the relationships among the variables and to determine the significance of differences within the sample.

8. TESTING OF OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Objective 1: To assess the level of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students.

Table 1: Level of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students

OVERSIZED CLOTHING BEHAVIOUR	N	MAXIMUM SCORE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	PERCENTAGE OF MEAN
Body Concealment Motivations	456	25	14.32	5.360	57.28%
Social Appearance Safety	456	71	14.83	5.904	20.88%
Self-Concealment Expression	456	25	14.38	5.652	57.52%
Emotional Relief & Comfort	456	25	15.47	5.406	61.88%
Style & Identity Expression	456	25	16.55	5.012	66.2%
Behavioural Frequency & Choice	456	25	16.31	5.152	65.24%
Total Score of Oversized Clothing Behaviour	456	180	91.86	26.658	51.03%

The mean and standard deviation of the level of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students are presented in the table 1. The results indicate that Gen Z college students exhibit a moderate level of oversized clothing behaviour overall (M = 91.86, 51.03%). Among the dimensions, style and identity expression (M = 16.55, 66.2%), behavioural frequency and choice (M = 16.31, 65.24%), emotional relief and comfort (M = 15.47, 61.88%), self-concealment expression (M = 14.38, 57.52%), and body concealment motivation (M = 14.32, 57.28%) reflect moderate levels. In contrast, social appearance safety (M = 14.83, 20.88%) shows a comparatively low level among the participants.

Objective 2: To assess the level of self-concealment among Gen Z college students.

Table 2: Level of self-concealment among Gen Z college students

VARIABLE	N	MAXIMUM SCORE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	PERCENTAGE OF MEAN
Self-Concealment	456	50	32.47	8.475	64.94%

From the above Table 2, it is observed that the maximum possible score for self-concealment among Gen Z college students is 50. The mean score obtained is 32.47, which corresponds to 64.94% of the total score, indicating that Gen Z college students exhibit a moderate level of self-concealment.

Hypothesis 1(a): There is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Gender

Table 3: Significant difference of self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Gender

DIMENSIONS OF OVERSIZED CLOTHING BEHAVIOUR	GENDER	N	MEAN	SD	't' VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE
Body Concealment Motivations	Male	205	14.41	5.678	0.348	Not Significant
	Female	251	14.24	5.097		
Social Appearance Safety	Male	205	15.27	5.427	1.438	Not Significant
	Female	251	14.47	6.255		
Self-Concealment Expression	Male	205	14.89	5.821	1.764	Not Significant
	Female	251	13.96	5.486		
Emotional Relief & Comfort	Male	205	15.71	5.611	0.849	Not Significant
	Female	251	15.27	5.236		
Style & Identity Expression	Male	205	16.81	5.281	1.017	Not Significant
	Female	251	16.33	4.782		
Behavioural Frequency & Choice	Male	205	16.95	4.850	2.382	0.05 Significance
	Female	251	15.80	5.340		
Oversized Clothing Behaviour-Total	Male	205	94.04	27.651	1.585	Not Significant
	Female	251	90.07	25.736		
Self-Concealment	Male	205	33.02	8.877	1.270	Not Significant
	Female	251	32.01	8.121		

From the above Table 3, it is inferred that the calculated 't' values for the dimensions of oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment among Gen Z college students are compared with the table value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. It is observed that there is no significant difference with respect to gender in the dimensions of oversized clothing behaviour, namely Body Concealment Motivation (0.348), Social Appearance Safety (1.438), Self-Concealment Expression (1.764), Emotional Relief & Comfort (0.849), Style & Identity Expression (1.017), and there is a significant difference in the dimension Behavioural Frequency & Choice (2.382). Further, there is also no significant difference in Oversized Clothing Behaviour–Total (1.585) and Self-Concealment (1.270) with respect to gender. Therefore, it is concluded that the formulated hypothesis, "There is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Gender" is not accepted.

Hypothesis 1(b): There is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Age.

Table 4: Significant difference of self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Age

VARIABLES	SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	df	MEAN SQUARE	F	SIGNIFICANCE
Oversized Clothing Behaviour	Between Groups	4495.173	3	1498.391	2.124	Not Significant
	Within Groups	318844.561	452	705.408		
	Total	323339.735	455			
Self-Concealment	Between Groups	279.089	3	93.030	1.298	Not Significant
	Within Groups	32402.418	452	71.687		
	Total	32681.507	455			

From the above Table 4, it is inferred that the calculated 'F' values (2.124 & 1.298) are less than the table value (3.84) at the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference among Gen Z college students across different age groups in terms of oversized clothing behaviour and self-concealment. Hence, the formulated hypothesis, "There is a significant difference in self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to Age" is not accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit.

Table 5: Significant difference of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit.

VARIABLE	TIGHT FITTING N=17 (1)		REGULAR FIT N=236 (2)		SLIGHTLY LOOSE N=134 (3)		OVERSIZED/ VERYLOOSE N=69 (4)		F	SIGNIFICANCE	GROUP DIFFERENCE
	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD	MEAN	SD			
Oversized Clothing Behaviour	75.18	20.079	87.08	26.755	96.76	23.719	102.77	27.733	10.755	0.01	(1,2), (1,3), (1,4), (2,3), (2,4), (3,4)

From the above table, it is inferred that the calculated 'F' value (10.755) is greater than the table value (3.84) at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a significant difference in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit. The significance value (0.01) further confirms that the difference is statistically significant. The mean scores show a gradual increase across groups, with the highest mean observed in oversized/very loose fit (M = 102.77), followed by slightly loose fit (M = 96.76), regular fit (M = 87.08), and tight fitting (M = 75.18). Therefore, it is concluded that the formulated hypothesis, "There is a significant difference in oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students with respect to their preferred clothing fit" is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between Self-Concealment and Oversized Clothing Behaviour among Gen Z college students.

Table 6: Showing Correlation Coefficient Values for Oversized Clothing Behaviour and Self-Concealment among Gen Z college students

VARIABLE	CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
Oversized Clothing Behaviour and Self-Concealment	0.466	0.01 Significance

From the above table 6, it is inferred that the value of correlation between Oversized Clothing Behaviour and Self-Concealment (0.466) is higher than the table value 0.115, to be significant at a 0.01 level of significance. The correlation between these two variables is positive and significant. Hence, the formulated hypothesis, “There is a significant relationship between Self-Concealment and Oversized Clothing Behaviour” is accepted.

9. EDUCATION IMPLICATION

- The study helps educational institutions understand the psychological reasons behind students’ preference for oversized clothing.
- The findings highlight that clothing choices may reflect students’ emotional comfort and self-concealment tendencies.
- The results can help teachers and counsellors better understand students’ emotional and identity-related behaviours.
- The study encourages institutions to create supportive and non-judgmental campus environments.
- The findings can assist counselling services in identifying students who may struggle with self-expression or emotional concerns.
- The study supports the development of student wellness programs focusing on emotional comfort and self-acceptance.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educational institutions should promote awareness programs on body positivity and self-acceptance to help students feel more confident about their appearance.
- Colleges should strengthen counselling and psychological support services to assist students who may experience self-concealment or emotional discomfort.
- Workshops and seminars can be conducted to encourage healthy self-expression and emotional openness among students.
- Institutions should create inclusive and supportive campus environments where students feel comfortable expressing their identity and individuality.
- Faculty members and student mentors can be trained to recognize subtle behavioural indicators of emotional distress or self-concealment among students.

11. SUGGESTIONS

- Future studies can include larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings.
- Researchers may examine additional psychological variables such as body image, self-esteem, and social anxiety to gain deeper insights into clothing behaviour.
- Comparative studies can be conducted to explore differences across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, or educational settings.
- Future research may also use qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to better understand the personal meanings behind clothing choices.
- Longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine how self-concealment and clothing preferences change over time.

12. CONCLUSION

Understanding the psychological factors that influence behavioural expressions among Gen Z college students is important, particularly in relation to self-concealment and oversized clothing behaviour. Clothing choices are not always driven only by fashion trends but may also reflect emotional comfort, identity expression, and personal insecurities. The present study reveals that oversized clothing behaviour has a significant positive relationship with self-concealment, indicating that some students may use clothing as a subtle way to manage or conceal personal feelings and experiences.

Recognizing such behavioural patterns can help educators and counsellors develop a more empathetic understanding of students’ psychological needs. By acknowledging these aspects, colleges and universities can foster supportive and inclusive environments that encourage healthy self-expression and student well-being. Overall, the study highlights the importance of considering psychological well-being in understanding students’ everyday behaviours.

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