

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLEDGE

Psychology of Clothing: Implications for Strengthening Marital Relationships

Mawutor Wovenu

Lecturer, Department of Fashion Design and Textiles, Ho Polytechnic, Ghana

Abstract:

The study evaluated the implications of the symbolism of clothing on conjugal relationships. The study was a survey conducted in Kpando and Klepe in the Volta Region of Ghana. 180 samples made up of 90 middle-aged men and 90 middle-aged women were selected conveniently from sympathizers to funerals and interviewed using an interview guide. Findings revealed that 70% of the respondents had failed in their first marriage. Another 57% had had their second marriage abrogated already. Ninety percent of the men confirmed that their marriage failures were due to the sexual dissatisfaction that set in along the line. Ninety-four percent of the women claimed that their husbands were involved in extra-marital relationships. Married couples were advised to value seductive clothing as it would go a long way to strengthen their marital relationships.

Keywords: *Seductive clothing, sexual dissatisfaction, sexual arousal, divorce, psychological*

1. Introduction

Basically, the psychology of clothing and personal adornment is concerned with the role clothing plays in people's everyday interactions with one another. When psychologist Sigmund Freud and others became interested in the process of sexual attraction, they became aware of the importance of clothing symbolism in sexuality. McDowell (1992) states that clothing is the social shorthand, unequivocally proclaiming what we are, where we belong, it reveals at a glance our attitudes, values, ideologies, and standards.

Throughout history, men have chosen their partners in life by their attractiveness as women. Many women possess some garments that are intended to attract attention to show off the body. This is the case because it is the custom in our society at present for people to select their partners on the grounds of finding them sexually attractive. Along with face, figure and personality, clothing can play a part in such an assessment. In particular, it has been seen as a woman's duty to be sexually attractive and this has had implications for the clothes women wear

Clothing and personal appearance are forms of aesthetic expression; they are related to the social, psychological and physical aspects of the self. Secondly, as forms of non-verbal communications, clothing provides symbols or cues that people use to understand one another (Kaizer, 1997). Clothing becomes an important domain of life in the process of redefinition of the self and in the attraction to a different group of significant others. Appraisals by their peers of their appearance and actions become a major concern in the lives of adolescents and play a significant role in developing their self-concepts (Kaizer, 1999). Adolescents identify themselves with peers and develop their self-concepts, in part, through conformity to preferred styles of clothing, attitudes, or actions established in the adolescent subculture (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Therefore, adolescents may become more and conscious about and interested in their clothing than younger children. Adolescents select or use clothing to strive toward or to maintain a salient self-concept by reference to meanings of clothing operative within their subculture (Levin, 1992).

If the psychosocial needs satisfied by clothing are also considered along with the basic physiological needs, clothing can contribute to a quality existence. According to Cash, (1990), educators and parents need to comprehend their adolescents' patterns of clothing behaviour and realize the various needs that clothing satisfies. Also, it is necessary for parents to help the youths to learn to use clothing to express an authentic self-concept and allow their dress and other aspects of their material environment to assist them in building self-worth in a way that does not compromise the individual or the common good. Clothing symbolism assists the individual in presenting their image and expressing themselves. Individuals can manipulate their appearance to fit their interpretation of a specific situation in which they find themselves.

Psychology has it that males spontaneously get in touch with their potentials for sexual arousal, while females become initiated into their sexual potentials within the context of a romantic relationship and a loving touch of a man (Laan and Everaerd, 1995). This explains why men and women become sexually aroused by different stimuli – while men are turned on by physical sex, pictures of women in alluring clothing and pictures of sexual acts, women supposedly are more aroused by the romantic aspects of loving relationships. Men are more likely to specify that, the object of sexual desire should be physically and sexually attractive, and in romantic dresses (Regan and Bercheid, 1996).

In contrast to single life, marriage presents different sexual development patterns. As the novelty of early marital bliss dissolves in the process of learning to live with one another's quirks and habits, as early dreams of conquering the world give way to a more practical

focus on details of everyday life, and as the woman ceases to hold onto the very practical cultural practices (including autoerotic use of clothing), sex is likely to become less exciting and sometimes less gratifying for one or both partners. Reflecting this, the frequency of sexual activity generally declines in the later years of marriage (Cherlin, 1992). As a result, they may turn to extramarital sex, professional counselling, or divorce. Each of these paths seems well travelled at the present time.

In a study conducted by Cherlin (1992), it was reported that most marriages were experiencing decreased amounts of sexual activity. There is evidence that marriages that fail as a result of sexual problems do not stand if they stage a comeback. This is because unless passion is enlivened through arousal enhancers, many of the problems that plague a first marriage tend to reappear in subsequent ones: selfishness, alcohol abuse, lack of communication, and other similar problems that are left in the wake of sexual problems do not disappear easily. Some men turn to younger girls (sexual partners) to heat up their passion and others succeed, at least to a certain degree, in blaming the problem on their wives who, by virtue of traditional demands, must adopt a hypocritical decency as married women. The woman at this phase of life is just as likely as her mate to seek out extramarital sexual opportunities: (Grosskopf, 1983; Heyn, 1992; Botwin, 1996).

1.1. Problem Statement

The world over, there have been increasing rates of divorce here and there. Several attempts have been made and are still being made to correct this social problem, but little results are being seen. Marital dissatisfaction has been said to be the foretaste of divorce. If a woman's sexual beauty, instead of being framed well, is rather covered up in clothes that are not in any respect sexually appealing, she ceases to be the performer of that role nature has assigned her. Included in the possible explanations for the dissatisfaction is the receding female sexual role in the relationship. The problem at hand is therefore the waning sexual arousal and response. The impact of clothing on enhancing sexuality is therefore the concern of the study.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the symbolism of clothing and its implications on husband-wife relationships. Specifically, the study determined:

1. To find out the extent of marital problems in society
2. To access the proportion of married women whose wardrobe has sexual appeal
3. To find out the main factors that account for the extra-marital affairs on the part of married men.
4. To find out the extent to which clothing can enliven marital relationships.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What is the extent of marital problems in society?
2. What proportion of married women has seductive clothing in their wardrobe?
3. What factors account for extra-marital affairs on the part of married men?
4. To what extent can clothing enliven marital relationships?

2. Methodology

2.1. Area of Study

The study was conducted in two communities in Kpando and Klepe in the Volta Region of Ghana. The first community was Kpando-Aziave and the second one, Klepe Dome.

2.2. Sample of the Study

The sample of the study was made up of 180 respondents of which half (90) were middle-aged women and the remaining half were middle-aged men between the ages of 35 to 45 years. The sample size was selected using the convenience method. They were selected at a funeral where most of the natives came home to pay their last respect to a very important citizen of the land. The 180 respondents selected were the ones willing to participate in the study. The exercise took place after burial on Saturdays the 23rd and the 30th of May, 2009.

2.3. Instrument for Data Collection

This was a survey conducted using a structured interview guide. It was developed based on the objectives of the study. The instrument was validated and coefficient of internal consistency estimated at 0.8 using Cronbach's alpha reliability.

2.4. Data Analysis

Simple frequency tables and figures (descriptive analysis) were used to analyze the data collected from the respondents.

2.5. Findings

The following findings were made and are summarized in tables and figures:

1. Marital status of the respondents.
2. Wardrobe content of the female respondents.
3. Wives' positions to the question of husbands' extra-marital affairs.

4. Ten (10) various factors responsible for husbands’ extra-marital affairs.
5. Twelve (12) psychological functions of seductive clothing underlying men’s attraction to females.

Status	Frequency		Percentage (%)
	MEN	WOMEN	
Still in 1 st Marriage	21	9	17
1 st Marriage ended	52	74	70
2 nd Marriage ended	45	57	57
Single Parent	7	62	38

Table 1: Marital status

Table 1 shows that those who were still in their first marriage were 17%. There were more women (62) single parents than men (7).

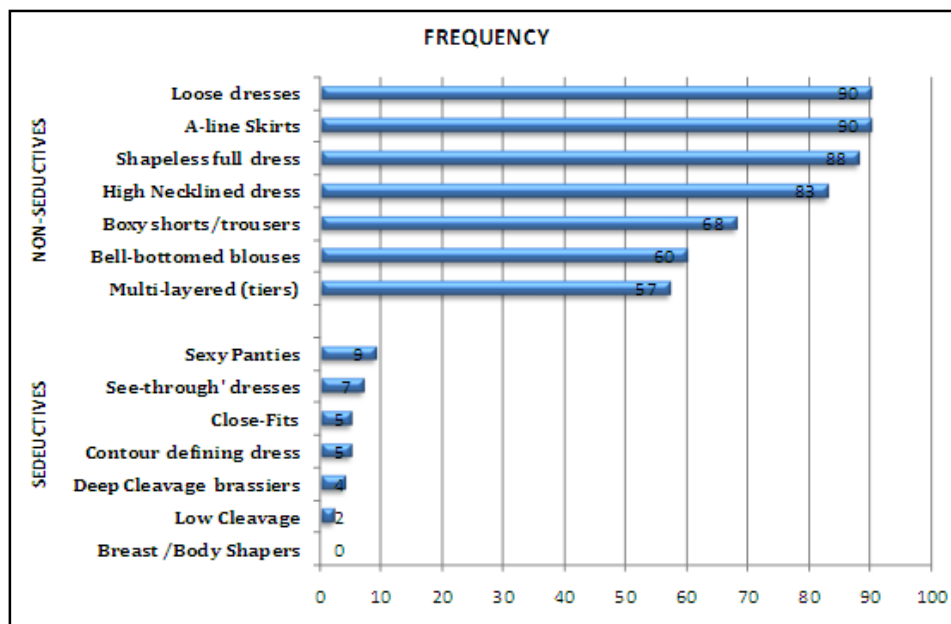


Figure 1: Female Respondents' Wardrobe Content

The data presented in figure 1 shows that very few of the female respondents (ranging from 2 to 9) have seductive dresses. Those who have the non-seductive dresses were by far more than those having the seductive dresses in their wardrobes.

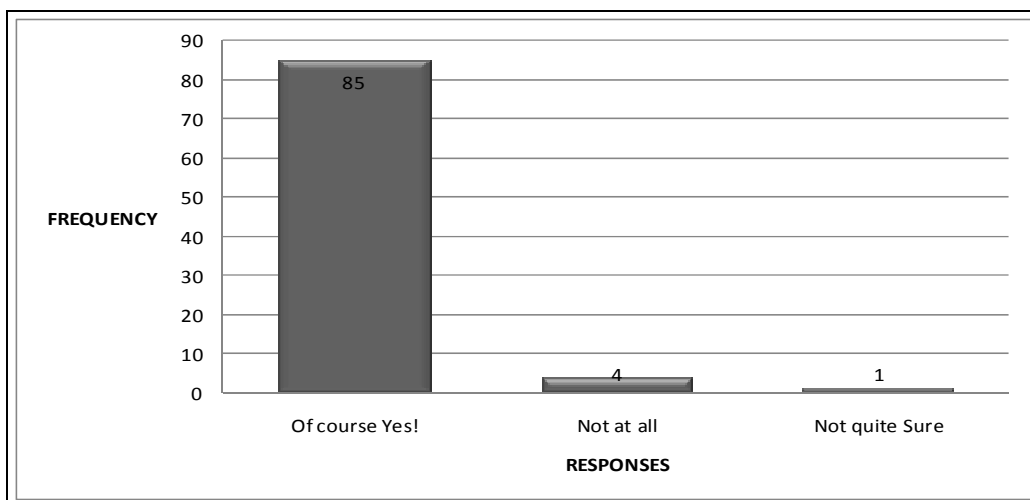


Figure 2: Wives' positions to the question of Husbands' Extra-marital affair

The data presented in figure 2 shows that 85 out of the 90 female respondents agreed that most marriages today were fraught with extra-marital affairs and that their male partners were no exception. One was no sure her partner was engaging in extra-marital affair. Four (4) claimed their partners were faithful to them.

Factors	Response	Frequency
It is a choice one makes	Rejected	85
It is a habit	Rejected	85
Sexual dissatisfaction with spouse	Accepted	90
Low-flickering sexual drive towards spouse	Accepted	90
Some ladies dress providing sexual stimulus	Accepted	90
Other ladies appear more inviting & mood-driving	Accepted	90
To ease sexual boredom	Accepted	90
Looking for a child with a particular sex (male/female child)	Accepted	90
As a better option to child-adoption	Accepted	90
More attractive-looking ladies abound	Accepted	90

Table 2: Factors responsible for men's extra-marital behaviour

Table 2 shows majority of the male respondents (85) rejecting two factors as not responsible for their extra-marital behaviour. The remaining eight (8) factors were accepted by all the male respondents as responsible for their extra-marital behaviour.

Psychological Function	Response	Frequency
The wearer ignites the man inside me	Agreed	90
It facilitates sexual moodiness	Agreed	90
Normally feels carried away	Agreed	90
Makes me appreciate female beauty	Agreed	90
It breeds lustful thoughts	Agreed	90
It provides sexually stimulating environment	Agreed	90
It frames and perpetuates female beauty	Agreed	90
It fans one's ego to want to see more!	Agreed	90
It ensnares a suitor to want to hold onto the relationship	Agreed	90
It provides a fore-running phase of ecstatic romance	Agreed	90
The wearer holds me spell-bound	Agreed	90
It rejuvenates the libido	Agreed	90
It is licentious and off-putting based on my religion	Disagreed	90

Table 3: What Seductive Clothing does in the minds of men

Table 3 shows that all 90 male respondents disagreed that seductive clothing was licentious and off-putting. They all however, agreed to the remaining twelve functions of seductive clothing as what they actually felt within themselves when they saw a lady wearing seductive clothing.

3. Discussion

The results of the study were discussed in the face of the research questions.

3.1. To What Extent Are the Problems of Marriage in Society?

Findings of the study show high divorce rates. Very few of the respondents (17%) were found to be still holding onto their first marriage, 83% constituted divorced respondents in first and second marriages, and single parents. Seventy percent (70%) were found to have ended their first marriage while 57% have ended their second marriage. Sixty-two (62) out of the 90 female respondents were found to be single parents as compared to only seven (7) on the part of the male respondents. According to the Daily Graphic (Boateng, June 9, 2009), studies have shown an estimated 515 marriages breaking up every year. Between 2000 and 2008 the Registrar General's Department registered 20,564 marriages. And between 2000 and 2006 the Record Unit of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) has also recorded divorce cases totaling 4,065. This figure excludes divorce cases recorded at homes and the law courts.

The high rate of divorce being experienced is a sign of failure of any institutionalized means to control it. Between 1970 and 1997, the proportion of babies born outside marriage leaped from 11% to 30%. The divorce rate has quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 in the United States to 18.3 million in 1996 (Wineberg and McCarthy, 1998). The effects on the individual, and the family especially children are enormous. Divorced people often experience upheavals in their lifestyles that create new stresses and pressures. Adjusting to it can be very traumatic experience. They may feel depressed or anxious and feel a loss of self-esteem. Women are more likely to see a decline in their standard of living following divorce and are typically left with more of the parenting responsibilities if children are involved (Barber and Eccles, 1992). This tally with the 69% single parents found among the female respondents.

3.2. What Proportion of Married Women Has Seductive Clothing in Their Wardrobe?

Findings indicate that majority of the female respondents have more non-seductive clothing in their wardrobe than the seductive ones. Users of any particular seductive clothing according to the study were only up to nine (9) in number. This probably partly explains

why those still in their first marriage were only few (17%). Non-seductive clothing lacks the sexual desire and so, its usage is not likely to provide one with the psychological security needed in a conjugal relationship. A host of research works have established the evidence that lack of sexual desire is more prevalent among married couples: (Cherlin, 1992; Kolodny& Clifford, 1983; Rubenstein, 1983). All this might be as a result of lack of value for seductive clothing in conjugal settings. Perceivers of a person wearing seductive clothes select (often unconsciously) clothing cues to assist them in understanding that person's motives for interaction and in predicting future actions. This implicit or unstated process is generally referred to as impression formation. This process includes the perception of others, using clothing or appearance as cues (Kaizer, 1999). These clothing and appearance cues serve as sexual signals from a woman and are interpreted as stimuli capable of turning on a man and thereby declaring the woman sexually attractive.

3.3. What Factors Account for Extra-Marital Affairs on the Part of Married Men?

Most marriages today are fraught with many problems including extra-marital affairs. Findings indicate that 94% of the female respondents confirmed that their partners indulged in extra-marital affairs. This means that the situation is more prevalent in society today. In a study conducted by Laan et al (1993), it was reported that most marriages were experiencing decreased amounts of sexual activity. There is evidence that marriages that fail as a result of sexual problems do not stand if they stage a comeback. This is because unless passion is enlivened through arousal enhancers (such as seductive clothing), many of the problems that plague a first marriage tend to reappear in subsequent ones: selfishness, alcohol abuse, lack of communication, and other similar problems that are left in the wake of sexual problems do not disappear easily. Some men turn to younger girls (sexual partners) to heat up their passion and others succeed, at least to a certain degree, in blaming the problem on their wives who, by virtue of traditional demands, must adopt a hypocritical decency as married women. (Heyn, 1992; Botwin, 1996). Odeleye (2000) observed that in making clothing choices, adolescents are demonstrating awareness that a style or mode of appearance has meaning. The young ladies' kind and mode of dressing is out to entice and arouse the opposite sex for sex and other related sexual behaviours irrespective of whatever opinion they have about it.

Among the ten factors identified, eight (8) were accepted as responsible for men's extra-marital behaviour. Among those factors were arousal enhancers (clothing) some ladies adopt as their mode of dressing and thereby appear mood-driving to most male observers.

3.4. To What Extent Can Clothing Enliven Marital Relationships?

Findings show that among the thirteen psychological functions of seductive clothing, only one (item 13) was rejected by the respondents as not applicable in their case. The remaining 12 were said to be applicable in real life. This explains what men look out for in romantic relationships. When men find an environment sexually stimulating, they value it. Men are more likely to specify that, the object of sexual desire should be physically and sexually attractive, and in romantic dresses (Regan and Bercheid, 1996). According to Laan and Everaerd (1995), men are sexually aroused by pictures of women in alluring clothing and pictures of sexual acts whereas women supposedly are more aroused by the romantic aspects of loving relationships. It is therefore more likely that conjugal relationships that employ the use of seductive clothing have an advantage of becoming stronger. Women are socialized to pay more attention to appearance than men (Kaiser, 1997). Therefore, some women are more aware of the manipulative potential of appearance than the rest. Clothing can be used to create a favourable public image and influence the perceptions of others. By modifying the body through the use of clothing, an individual can change the perceptions of others so that they become more favourable.

Clothing can be used to reduce the discrepancy between the ideal and actual body images of individuals. Cox & Dittmar (2005) theorized that a change in dress could result in a change in the attitude toward the body and self. Clothing can be used as a means to attain the aesthetic ideal, as well as to improve one's body image to be as attractive as ever. Every article of clothing carries a cultural, social and psychological meaning. The clothes that a person chooses are to a great extent an expression of the concept he has of himself, reflect his personality and express the values that are important to him. Rowland-Warne (1992) also corroborated this by asserting that clothing in any culture is a means of communication. This assertion, points to the fact that clothing conveys messages when members of a society who share a given culture have learned to associate types of clothing to a given customary usage. Through this customary association, certain types of clothes become symbols of mood, social role, socio-economic status or political class. Clothing satisfies basic physiological needs for survival along with food and shelter, but it also satisfies psycho-social needs (Kwon, 1997). If the psycho-social needs satisfied by clothing are also considered along with the basic physiological needs, clothing can contribute to a quality existence.

4. Conclusion

The study has successfully identified marital problems resulting from sexual dissatisfaction. Based on sexual dissatisfaction divorce cases continued to rise in society. More people especially women were being rendered single parents and the resultant effects on the individual and children are enormous. Very few women had seductive clothing in their wardrobe and were using it to their advantage. Based mainly on sexual dissatisfaction with spouse, and that some women dress providing sexual stimulus, more men were being driven into extra-marital affairs. The seductive clothing being employed by certain female wearers were functioning to attract men and heighten their sexual desires.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Hypocritical decency in dressing in marriage should be discouraged in order to cut down on the high cases of divorce and single-parenting.
2. Men would continue to feel what they feel towards wearers of seductive clothing so, wives should be encouraged to value and adopt the types of seductive clothing which would ensnare their husbands to remain forever committed and faithful to the relationship.
3. If love is initiated in a non-romantic fashion, it becomes regrettable. So, arousal enhancers such as seductive clothing could represent a fore-runner of ecstatic romance.

6. References

- i. Barber, B. L. & Eccles, J. S. (1992). Long-term influence of divorce and single parenting on adolescent family and work related values, behaviours and aspiration. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111 (1), 108 – 126.
- ii. Boateng, M.K. (June 9, 2009). Causes and effects of divorce. *Daily Graphic*. p. 11.
- iii. Botwin, M.D. (1996, May) A taxonomy of human intersexual flirtation. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Santa Clara, CA
- iv. Cherlin A.J. (1992). *Marriage, divorce and remarriage (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press
- v. Cash, T.F. (1990). The psychology of physical appearance: Aesthetics, attributes, and images. In T.F. Cash & T. Pruzinsky (Eds.), *Body images: Development, deviance, and change* (51-79). New York: The Guilford Press.
- vi. Darling, N., & Steinberg, L. (1993). Parenting style as context: An integrative model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113(3), 487-496.
- vii. Grosskopf, D. (2008). *Sex and the married woman*. New York. Pocket Books. 3rd Ed.
- viii. Heyn, D. (1992). *The Erotic Silence of the American Wife*. New York. Random House Inc,
- ix. Cox, J., & Dittmar, H. (2005). The functions of clothes and clothing (dis) satisfaction: A gender analysis among British students. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 50, 243-246.
- x. Kaiser, S.B. (1997). *The social psychology of clothing: Symbolic appearances in context (2nd ed., rev.)*. New York: Fairchild Publications.
- xi. Kaizer, S. B. (1999). Women's appearance and clothing within organizations. In Laura K.G. & Devito J.A (Eds.), *The Nonverbal communication reader: Classic and contemporary readings* (pp 106-113). Long Grove, IL: Waveland.
- xii. Kolodny, R. & Clifford, C. (1983). Sex therapy for couples. In B. Wolman & C. Stuker (Eds), *Handbook of family and marital therapy*, pp. 421-449). New York. Plenum Press.
- xiii. Kwon, Y. (1997). Sex, sex-role, facial attractiveness, social self-esteem and interest in clothing. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 84, 899-907.
- xiv. Laan E., Everaerd W., VanAanhold M. T. & Rebel M. (1993). Performance demands and sexual arousal in women *Behaviour research and therapy*. 31(1):25-35.
- xv. Laan E. & Everaerd W. (1995). Desire for passion: Energetics of sexual response. *Journal of sex & marital therapy* 21(4):255-63.
- xvi. Odeleye, A.D. (2000). *Psychological Correlates of Contemporary clothing behaviour of Nigerian Undergraduate Students*. An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Faculty of Education, Department of Foundations and Counselling.
- xvii. Regan, P. C. & Berscheid, e. (1996). Belief about that state, goal and objects of sexual desire. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 22, (2), 110 – 120.
- xviii. Rowland-Warne, L. (1992). *Costume*. Alfred a Knopf Inc. New York, pp 38- 39.
- xix. Wineberg & McCarthy, (1998). Separation and reconciliation in American marriage. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. pp. 131 – 146.