



Dress, Body Modifications, and Emotional Attachment

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Innovative Approach: Dress consists of all body modifications and supplements added to the human body. Dress includes not only changes that can be seen by the eye, but changes to the body that involves taste, smell, sound, and touch of the body. Dress supplements are inclusive of hats, shoes, and jewelry (Roach Higgins & Eicher, 1992). There is also an emotional attachment to dressing the body. When one dresses feelings about the clothes, the body, curves, and personal perceptions form when dressing. Dressing can include dressing up and having special moments when wearing a particular garment. Sometimes, dressing can take effort, even extra effort, but the emotional aspects can lead to confidence, recall, and body positivity. Dress and its meaning is useful for fashion students to learn to better meet customer expectations. If students can make connections to their own experiences, they likely can better relate to others.

For adult learners, new knowledge is better realized when a student connects it to prior knowledge. Building upon knowledge is part of schema theory where students make connections to previous knowledge about events as they learn about the world. These connections help students develop “schemas” of knowledge (Piaget, 1952). The strategy is used in helping students read where, prior to reading, students connect with ideas in the reading by relating it to their prior experiences. Studies have shown that these strategies help students understand the reading (Gunning, 2012).

The *purpose* of this study was to introduce a learning activity that used prior knowledge to increase student knowledge of the concept of dress and to raise their awareness of dress as a form of identity and communication.

Implementation of the strategy: The proposed teaching strategy was completed in a Gender, Dress, & Society course. To provide context, the class read the article, *Dress and Identity* by Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992). The textbook provides terminology of dress, what body modifications and supplements include, and jargon that describes modification including those of taste, touch, sound, sight, and smell. The strategy included two parts. For the first part of the strategy students read the book, *Love, Lost & What I Wore*, which is a short book (144 pages}. The price of the book ranges from \$3.87 to \$12.59. Reading this short memoir was used to prompt students to reflect on how dress is used in their respective life. After reading *Love, Loss & What I Wore* students discussed how reading the novelette recalled fashions, styles, and fads that emotionally marked a time in their life chronologically. For example, students might recall the

outfit worn on their first date, to high school graduation, on their 21st birthday, upon hearing about a death, going through a gender transition, attending camp, working at a first job, attending a celebration, etc. Students had to make certain to include who or what influenced their selection of dress for that occasion. They were told that influences come from many aspects of life – your parents, siblings, friends, peers, television, movies, celebrities, books, etc. Discussions about their individual memories and dress, along with body modifications and supplements were scaffolded into drafts of three sections of their assignment. These drafts were submitted for feedback to ensure students were understanding the extent of the assignment before final submission.

For part 2 of the teaching strategy, students created a book that included 15 to 20 recollections of when they used dress as a visual marker for an event. Students had to make certain to include who or what influenced their selection of dress for that occasion. They were told that influences come from many aspects of life – your parents, siblings, friends, peers, television, movies, celebrities, books, etc. The students were provided the guidelines to create a book that was guided by paragraph. Paragraph one required: (1) *Who?*-Names of people, establish the relationships: and (2) *What* was the event? - Address, place, and details...find the address, what did the place look like? Appear like? And (3) *When* did it occur? - Give the date or approximate date of the event. The second paragraph included responses to the questions: (1) *How did you get prepare for the event in terms of body modifications?* Did one wash hair to clean and add gel to add *texture and volume*? Did one *clip or adhere plastic nails to lengthen or add a surface design*? Did you where perfume or cologne to *modify one's scent*? The third paragraph was a discussion of their dress worn to the event using concepts related to dress as described by Roach-Higgins & Eicher (1992). Students were required to use and italicize the terms related to modifications and supplements (e.g., attachment, enclosure, wrapped) discussing details such as taste, touch, sound, smell. The last or fourth paragraph or chapter, focused on what *influenced* the dress worn for that event and what were the *emotions associated* with the dress items worn to the event. The students were encouraged to explain their feelings and the related dress in detail. Last, students were instructed to provide a visual diagram of the dress discussed in their book. Students were reminded that the presentation of the book, diagrams, and writing style and grammar was graded in accordance with APA in-text citations and professionalism in presentation counted.

Activity Assessment: Students completed a survey prior to and post the activity. Both surveys included open-ended questions on dress, including: What does dress mean to you? What does the term “getting dressed” mean to you? How does dress differ from fashion? When you think about dress, does this include other items besides clothing? The post activity question included the question: Reflect on the assignment Dress, Gender, & Society Reflections. What did you gain from completing the assignment? What did you learn? Students were asked demographic questions (gender, age, and academic standing). Responses to pre and post questions were

analyzed for themes separately and then compared. Frequencies were calculated to assess the demographic questions.

Description of Effectiveness and Learning Outcomes: Using previous knowledge, particularly events that evoke emotions to learn about dress resulted in a beneficial outcome. Twenty-four students completed the pre and post surveys. Analysis of pre and post responses revealed students became much more aware of the significance of dress. They could articulate what the scholarly concept of “dress” meant, particularly in comparison to fashion. The students identified more body modifications and supplements on the post survey when compared to the pre survey. Students discussed gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of and connections to dress. A student noted: “I learned how dress is more than just clothes.” Students later shared how this assignment was similar to a contemporary diary to preserve or to give as a personal gift for *Mother’s Day* or for holidays.

The project can be adopted for several apparel and textiles classes, such as history of costume where students can reflect upon historical events and what they were wearing at these times. The results support scheme theory (Gunning, 2012; Piaget, 1952) of using previous knowledge to support adult learners. In this activity, an emotional event was an important component of the related previous experience. More research could examine how degree of emotion impacts learning new dress concepts.

References:

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