

Development of Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale for Gen Z College Students

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ABSTRACT

Oversized clothing has emerged as a prominent aesthetic among Generation Z college students; however, beyond fashion, it appears to serve important psychological functions. Many young adults report choosing oversized garments to manage body image concerns, reduce social evaluation anxiety, regulate emotions, and express identity. Despite these observations, no standardized instrument has existed to systematically assess this behaviour. The present study addresses this gap through the development and pilot validation of the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale (OCBS). Grounded in literature on body image, self-presentation, emotional regulation, and self-concealment, the OCBS conceptualizes oversized clothing behaviour across six domains: Body Concealment Motivation, Social Appearance Safety, Self-Concealment Expression, Emotional Relief and Comfort, Style and Identity Expression, and Behavioural Frequency and Choice. Thirty positively worded items were administered to 104 Gen Z college students (18–25 years) from colleges in Chennai and Chengalpet using a five-point Likert scale. Item analysis showed satisfactory item–total correlations (all > 0.45), and all items were retained. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .967$), and content validity established through expert review yielded a high validity index ($\sqrt{r} = .983$), indicating strong preliminary psychometric properties.

Keywords: Body Image, self-presentation, oversized clothing behaviour, Gen Z students.

1. Introduction:

The Pilot Scale for Oversized Clothing Behaviour was developed to examine the psychological, emotional, and social motivations underlying Gen Z college students' preference for wearing oversized clothing. Although clothing choices are often interpreted as fashion-driven, they may also function as mechanisms for self-expression, body regulation, emotional comfort, identity formation, and psychological shielding. This pilot scale seeks to systematically investigate these underlying dimensions among college students aged 18 to 25 years and to evaluate the reliability and clarity of the items prior to large-scale validation. By identifying patterns in oversized clothing behaviour within this population, the scale aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how apparel choices relate to body image, self-perception, and emotional regulation among Generation Z.

2. Psychological Theories related to Oversized Clothing Behaviour:

2.1. Social Identity Theory:

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains that individuals form their identity and sense of self based on their membership in social groups. Social Identity Theory explains that individuals define themselves through their membership in social groups and seek a sense of belonging and positive identity from these groups. In the context of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students, wearing oversized outfits may function as a symbol of affiliation with specific subcultures such as streetwear communities, K-pop fandoms, or hip-hop culture. Clothing thus becomes a visible marker of in-group identity and social belonging. This theory helps in measuring dimensions like peer influence, group conformity, and subcultural affiliation within the scale.

2.2. Self-Concept Theory:

Self-Concept Theory, proposed by Carl Rogers, explains that individuals' behaviour is influenced by how they perceive their real self in relation to their ideal self. Self-Concept Theory focuses on how individuals perceive themselves, particularly the relationship between the real self and the ideal self. In the context of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students, wearing oversized outfits may reflect a comfort-oriented identity, a rejection of traditional beauty standards, and an expression of body positivity. Such clothing choices can serve as a means of aligning external appearance with internal self-perception. This theory supports scale dimensions such as self-expression, body image comfort, and authenticity.

2.3. Body Image & Self-Objectification Theory:

Body Image and Self-Objectification Theory, proposed by Barbara Fredrickson and Tom Roberts, explains that individuals internalize societal appearance standards and may engage in continuous monitoring and evaluation of their bodies. Body Image and Self-Objectification Theory explains how individuals internalize societal appearance standards and may engage in constant body monitoring. In the context of oversized clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students, wearing oversized outfits may help reduce body surveillance and function as a psychological shield against appearance-based judgment. This theoretical perspective is useful for developing scale items related to body satisfaction, physical comfort, and avoidance of social evaluation.

3. Need of the Study:

Clothing behaviour among Gen Z college students is often interpreted through fashion or cultural perspectives; however, the psychological motives underlying specific clothing preferences remain insufficiently examined. Oversized clothing has become increasingly prevalent within this age group, yet there is a lack of empirical instruments to systematically assess the behavioural and psychological factors influencing this choice.

Gen Z students may prefer oversized clothing due to body image concerns, emotional comfort, perceived social safety, identity expression, or self-regulatory needs. In the absence of a standardized measurement tool, these motivations remain largely anecdotal, limiting structured research in areas such as body image, self-concept, emotional coping, and social perception.

Therefore, the development of the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale is essential to provide a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the multidimensional nature of this behaviour among college students aged 18–25 years. The scale enables systematic investigation and contributes to a more comprehensive psychological understanding of clothing as a behavioural and expressive medium within the Generation Z population.

4. Operational Definitions:

The operational definitions of Oversized Clothing Behaviour and Gen Z college Students are:

4.1 Oversized Clothing Behaviour

Oversized Clothing Behaviour refers to the extent to which an individual intentionally prefers and regularly wears garments that are significantly looser or larger than standard body fit, as measured by the total score obtained on the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale. Higher scores indicate a stronger tendency toward oversized clothing use across dimensions such as concealment motivation, social appearance safety, emotional comfort, and identity expression.

4.2 Gen Z College Students

Gen Z College Students refer to individuals born between 1997 and 2012, with the present study focusing on those aged approximately 18 to 25 years who are currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs in colleges. In this study, Gen Z college students are operationally defined as participants within this age range who meet the inclusion criteria and are actively pursuing higher education at the time of data collection.

5. Review of Related Literature – Studies related to Oversized Clothing Behaviour:

Indian Studies:

Gautam (2026) conducted a descriptive study to examine how clothing choices shape the psychological and social well-being of Gen Z adolescents in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. The research utilized a structured close-ended questionnaire administered to 125 undergraduate students selected through convenience sampling, and the data were analyzed using percentage analysis to identify trends in fashion awareness, peer influence, self-image, and emotional responses. The instrument captured domains including fashion trend engagement, social media influence, peer pressure, self-esteem, body image, and emotional reactions to clothing choices. Findings indicated that a majority of adolescents actively follow contemporary fashion trends and draw style inspiration from social media and influencers, with most reporting that clothing choices significantly affect their confidence, mood, and identity expression while also contributing to peer comparison, social pressure, and financial stress when branded clothing is unaffordable. The study highlighted clothing as both a tool for self-expression and social signaling and a potential source of psychological strain, underscoring the complex role apparel plays in young people's everyday lives. (Gautam, 2026)

Ajwani (2020) examined the psychological relationship between dressing and body image in an analytical review published in the International Journal of Indian Psychology. Using a theoretical review methodology, the author synthesized prior empirical and conceptual research from social psychology, body image studies, and dress research rather than employing primary data collection or questionnaires. Drawing from established frameworks such as social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), self-discrepancy theory, objectification theory, and body image models proposed by Cash and Pruzinsky, the paper highlighted how clothing interacts with both the perceptual and affective components of body image. The review emphasized that dress influences mood, self-esteem, identity construction, and social participation, and that dissatisfaction with body size often shapes clothing selection, including the tendency to use garments to conceal or manage appearance concerns. The article concluded that clothing operates not merely as physical covering but as a psychological medium through which individuals regulate self-perception, express identity, and negotiate social evaluation. (Ajwani, 2020)

Foreign Studies:

Hester & Hehman (2023) provide a comprehensive theoretical review on the role of dress in person perception, arguing that clothing should be treated as a core component of how people form impressions of others. Unlike traditional person-perception research that prioritizes facial and bodily cues, this article synthesizes existing literature across social cognition, social categorization, status signaling, and aesthetic inference to propose a working model in which perceivers integrate target dress, face/body, and context through their own cultural and cognitive lens. Rather than empirical measurement with specific questionnaires, the authors use a rigorous narrative review methodology, drawing on decades of research from social psychology to illustrate that observers reliably infer social categories, cognitive states, status, and aesthetic preferences from dress cues alone. The article highlights that dress routinely shapes first impressions in real-world situations, such as job interviews and social interactions, yet has been underrepresented in formal psychological theory and methodology. By delineating pathways through which attire affects perception and identifying theoretical and methodological barriers to its study, this work lays critical groundwork for future empirical investigations and justifies the need for psychometric tools like the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale in systematic research on clothing choices. (Hester & Hehman, 2023)

Tiggemann and Lacey (2009) conducted a cross-sectional investigation into the relationships between body satisfaction, appearance investment, and the functions of clothing among adult female consumers in Adelaide, Australia. Using a structured self-report questionnaire, 162 female clothes shoppers aged 18–55 completed validated measures of body image, appearance investment, self-esteem, and clothing function, including items assessing clothing used for assurance, fashion, comfort, and camouflage purposes. Data analysis highlighted that clothing was worn primarily for assurance and fashion across ages, but individuals with higher body dissatisfaction and body mass index (BMI) were more likely to use clothing for camouflage and concealment. Body image and appearance investment were also associated with differential enjoyment of shopping and clothing engagement, demonstrating that apparel choices extend beyond aesthetics into psychological and self-regulatory domains. These findings underline that clothing behaviour is tightly linked to body image processes and motivations such as self-presentation and concealment, suggesting that patterns of dress carry meaningful psychological functions rather than merely reflecting fashion preferences. (Tiggemann & Lacey, 2009)

6. Pilot Study:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale, consisting of 30 statements prepared for the pilot study, was administered to a sample of 104 college students from Colleges in the Chengalpeta and Chennai districts. The responses were systematically scored, after which item analysis was conducted to evaluate the quality and performance of the statements.

7. Construction of the Scale:

7.1 Construction of Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale was developed by the investigator under the guidance of the research supervisor. The instrument consisted of 30 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The preliminary version was administered as part of a pilot study, and all 30 items were retained for the final study, as they satisfied the established criteria during item analysis.

The statements were designed to represent five dimensions: Body Concealment Motivation, Social Appearance Safety, Self-Concealment Expression, Emotional Relief & Comfort, and Style & Identity Expression. The pilot study was conducted with a sample of 104 Gen Z college students aged 18–25 years. All items were positively framed and scored from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha, and items demonstrating item–total correlation values greater than 0.45 were retained in the final version of the scale.

The results of the pilot study for the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale among Gen Z college students, including the statements retained based on Cronbach’s alpha analysis, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Statement Analysis for Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale for Gen Z College Students and selection of statements for final study

Statement Number	Item Total Cronbach’s Alpha Correlation	Selected / Not Selected
1	0.613	Selected
2	0.740	Selected
3	0.684	Selected
4	0.765	Selected
5	0.758	Selected
6	0.693	Selected
7	0.703	Selected
8	0.786	Selected
9	0.790	Selected
10	0.744	Selected
11	0.783	Selected
12	0.793	Selected
13	0.748	Selected
14	0.777	Selected
15	0.844	Selected
16	0.605	Selected
17	0.787	Selected
18	0.830	Selected
19	0.784	Selected
20	0.795	Selected
21	0.530	Selected
22	0.507	Selected
23	0.659	Selected
24	0.466	Selected
25	0.649	Selected
26	0.613	Selected
27	0.588	Selected
28	0.533	Selected
29	0.533	Selected

30	0.546	Selected
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7.2. Description of the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale was developed and validated by the investigator under the guidance of the research supervisor. The construction of the instrument was grounded in an extensive review of relevant literature on clothing behaviour, body image, and self-presentation processes among college students.

The scale was designed to assess six theoretical dimensions: Body Concealment Motivation, Social Appearance Safety, Self-Concealment Expression, Emotional Relief & Comfort, Style & Identity Expression, and Behavioural Frequency & Choice. Based on these dimensions, an initial pool of items was generated, and a total of 30 statements were finalized to represent the construct of Oversized Clothing Behaviour.

7.3. Dimensions of the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale comprises six dimensions: Body Concealment Motivation, Social Appearance Safety, Self-Concealment Expression, Emotional Relief & Comfort, Style & Identity Expression, and Behavioural Frequency & Choice. Each dimension is represented by 5 items, resulting in a total of 30 statements.

Body Concealment Motivation reflects the tendency to wear oversized clothing to hide or divert attention from one’s body. Social Appearance Safety refers to the perceived reduction in social evaluation or appearance-related anxiety when wearing loose-fitting attire. Self-Concealment Expression denotes the use of oversized clothing as a means of maintaining psychological privacy or limiting self-disclosure. Emotional Relief & Comfort represents the emotional soothing and physical comfort derived from such clothing choices. Style & Identity Expression captures the deliberate use of oversized clothing as an aesthetic preference and a medium of personal or social identity expression. Behavioural Frequency & Choice assesses the regularity and intentional preference for selecting oversized clothing in everyday situations.

Following the pilot study, 30 statements were finalized in alignment with the identified dimensions of Oversized Clothing Behaviour, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Dimensions-wise distribution of selected items in the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale

S.No.	Dimensions	Questionnaires	Total
1	Body Concealment Motivation	1 to 5	5
2	Social Appearance Safety	6 to 10	5
3	Self-Concealment Expression	11 to 15	5
4	Emotional Relief & Comfort	16 to 20	5
5	Style & Identity Expression	21 to 25	5
6	Behavioural Frequency & Choice	26 to 30	5
Total No. of Statements			30

7.4. Scoring Procedure:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale consists of 30 positively worded statements. Respondents were asked to carefully read each statement and select one response option that best reflected their level of agreement. A five-point Likert scale was used, with response options ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree,

2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. Each response was assigned a numerical value corresponding to the selected option. Scores for each dimension were calculated by summing the responses to the 5 items under that dimension. The total scale score was obtained by summing all 30 item responses. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency toward oversized clothing behaviour.

8. Reliability:

A reliability coefficient reflects the consistency and precision of a measurement instrument. Internal consistency reliability for the present scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which estimates the degree of interrelatedness among the items. The obtained Cronbach's alpha value for the scale was **0.967**, indicating a high level of reliability.

9. Validity:

Validity of the Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale was established through expert evaluation. The preliminary draft of the scale was circulated among faculty members in the Department of Psychology, and their suggestions were incorporated to refine the items and ensure content relevance and clarity. The validity index was computed using the square root of the reliability coefficient. The obtained validity value was **0.983**, indicating that the scale demonstrates a high level of validity.

10. Conclusion:

The Oversized Clothing Behaviour Scale was systematically developed and validated to assess the psychological dimensions underlying oversized clothing use among college students. The scale demonstrates high reliability and validity, confirming its psychometric strength. The five dimensions collectively capture the multidimensional nature of oversized clothing behaviour, making the instrument suitable for future research in this area.

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