

Appearance management effect and self-conquest of physical and psychological changes in middle-aged women's lifespan

Abstract

Advancements in technology extend the average human life expectancy; therefore, the period of the middle-age is substantially emphasized in related studies. This study aimed to identify the clothing behaviors and appearance management methods to improve the quality of life (QOL) of middle-aged women—who are often ignored by society—in maintaining their health and a high QOL. The objectives are: First, identifying the major period of physical or/and psychological change for middle-aged women in their overall lives. Second, identifying cases of self-conquest of women's physical or/and psychological change and effects of appearance management on appearance satisfaction. Third, identifying effects of appearance satisfaction on self-esteem. This study was conducted with 40 middle-aged Korean women over the age of 50, residing in and around Seoul between April and May 2018. A 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions on the appearance management effect and self-conquest of physical and psychological changes were used. Participants over the age of 50 who had experienced menopause selected the period of menopause as the major period of physical or/and psychological change. Of the participants, 70% had experienced appearance management and recovered from any difficulties from their physical or/and psychological change. They identified ways to manage their appearance and enjoyed these processes. Middle-aged women who were highly satisfied with their self-appearance showed high self-esteem.

Keywords: middle-aged women, lifespan, menopause, appearance management, self-esteem

Volume 4 Issue 3 - 2020

 Yoon Kyung Lee,¹ Min Sun Lee²
¹College of Human Ecology, Seoul National University, South Korea

²Department of Fashion & Textiles, Sangmyung University, South Korea

Correspondence: Min Sun Lee, Fashion & Textiles, Sangmyung University Seoul, South Korea, Email minsun@smu.ac.kr

Received: May 24, 2020 | **Published:** June 04, 2020

Abbreviations: QOL, quality of life

Introduction

With the development of science and technology and the prolongation of human life, the proportion of middle-aged and older adults is gradually increasing. According to Statistics Korea data, from 1990 to 2011, the average life expectancy in Korea increased from 67.3 to 77.6 years for men, and 75.5 to 84.5 years for women.¹ The overall increase was 30.8% in 2010 (30.9% for men and 30.7% for women), 21.2% for both men and women in 2011, and 33.2% in 2017 (16.4% for men and 16.8% for women).^{2,3} This increase has largely impacted the consumer market.⁴ In particular, middle-aged and older adults, who have been marginalized from the fashion world, have emerged as the major consumers of fashion as trends such as A-jae (uncle) Fashion and Mino Core have emerged corresponding to changes in the composition of the population.⁵ Therefore, understanding the interests and lives of middle-aged and older adults who have emerged as another consumer group is important to effectively prepare for a longer life cycle and an aging society.

To lead a happy older life in an aging society, a correct understanding of middle and old age is needed. The periods of middle and old age have a great influence on future QOL, depending on the individual's levels of hope, self-esteem, and positive support.^{6,7} In particular, in the case of middle-aged and middle-aged women, physical changes due to menopause and aging, and mental changes caused by the accumulation of fatigue experienced during long marital relationships can lead to a confusion of values. Negative or inexperienced responses to these changes can result in a crisis

for middle-aged men and women, which can be linked to negative perceptions of self and negative consequences for the body or mind at a later age.⁶ Therefore, while middle and old age are parts of the second half of life's life cycle, they are also periods of desire for the future, active participation, inner motives, trust, and practical possibilities. People also tend to use these periods to form smooth relationships with others and meet their individual expectations and hopes.

The purpose of this study was to examine ways in which middle-aged and older women can lead a healthier older life. This study targeted middle-aged and middle-aged women in their 50s and older. First, it intended to identify the period when they experienced the most significant physical and psychological changes. By examining the effect of fashion's appearance management behavior on the occasion of these physical and psychological changes, the authors attempted to understand the positive effects of a woman's physical and appearance management behavior on overcoming physical and psychological difficulties. In addition, this study's purpose is to investigate the effect of fashion-based clothing behavior on the lives of middle-aged and older women by clarifying the relationship between self-esteem and the act of increasing appearance satisfaction through appearance management behavior using clothing.

The objectives of the research questions are as follows:

Objective 1: Investigate the period when older women and middle-aged women felt the most significant physical and psychological changes during their entire life cycle.

Objective 2: Investigate cases of overcoming physical and psychological changes through middle-aged and older women's

appearance management behaviors and determine how these appearance management behaviors impact appearance satisfaction.

Objective 3: Understand the correlation between appearance satisfaction and self-esteem of middle-aged and older women.

Literature review

Physical and psychological changes of middle-aged and older women and behavior of appearance management

In modern society, there is increasing interest in appearance and the desire to lead a young and healthy life.⁸ Accordingly, various efforts are made—styling, hair, skin care, and body care—to show one's image positively and attractively to others. In particular, public self-consciousness, which forms the evaluation of others, is greatly influenced by forming public self-image through fashion.^{9, 10} Middle and old age comprise the important periods when self-esteem is completed. However, middle-aged women may experience a crisis and change physically and mentally during menopause, and may have a lower level of self-esteem than before.^{6, 7} In particular, middle-aged and older women experience physical, psychological, and neuroendocrine changes as female hormones rapidly decrease with menopause. As a result, middle-aged and older women experience a period when their physical attractiveness declines and satisfaction with their body and health also significantly decreases. For women, although middle and old age are characterized by the fear of losing femininity, weakening family ties as their children gain independence, and the loss of roles and conflict, it has not been recognized for its overall value in life. During this time, women tend to experience a sense of collapse in the process of re-establishing self-identity and helplessness due to a socially disadvantaged status.⁶ Therefore, it is necessary to understand the physical and psychological changes that occur in middle-aged and older adults, and understand how to minimize the impact of these changes and overcome them to have healthier middle-aged and older adults.

The concept of how to accept aging can be understood as identity assimilation and identity regulation. Identity assimilation refers to a tendency to maintain one's previous identity while minimizing phenomena caused by aging, and identity control refers to a tendency to recognize the aging phenomenon as a new experience and attempt to form a new, different identity. According to Son,¹¹ adults with high personality traits showed better psychological adaptation than those with high identity control. There are often differences between people's ideally pursued image and actual image which can be overcome by realizing an identity assimilation by managing appearance or purchasing and wearing clothing.^{12, 13}

When aging—an inevitable process in life—progresses, it increases the gap between one's own image and actual image. To bridge this gap, people use an approach with more active clothing and appearance management behavior. De Long et al.¹⁴ studied women in their 50s and above in Korea and the United States and found that women who are active in clothing and appearance tend to styles that they like and suit them. Women who had exhibited management behavior and had been dressing in formal clothing for longer than a decade have shown that they had not been greatly impacted of physical changes in their 50s. If attention and management have been habituated from a young age, it results in strong identity assimilation and stable psychological adaptation, and can, in turn, lead to an active attitude in maintaining

previous identity while minimizing the phenomena caused by aging after menopause. It can be said to be an example that can lead to.

Middle-aged and older women's appearance satisfaction and self-esteem

Spending this time in a healthy way is an important part of determining the health and QOL for middle-aged and older adults. For middle-aged and older women with healthy bodies, in addition to high living standards and high self-esteem, they were also found to have good mental health.¹⁵ It is reported that self-esteem in middle age is an important factor in determining the QOL in old age. Middle-aged women with low self-esteem were also characterized by low health promotion and lifestyle transition, high levels of depression and anxiety, social isolation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of failure.⁶

According to Maslow, self-esteem is explained as the previous stage of self-actualization.¹⁶ A person who has a realized self is highly satisfied with and positive about the factors that are his/her own, external, and interpersonal. In addition, people with high self-esteem show high social, mental, and aesthetic levels. A person who realizes one's self creates new things, meaningful experiences, discovers beauty, and actively leads life with elegance and courage. Therefore, we must pay attention to the fact that the act of managing appearance is an activity to create one's own image.

Clothing reflects identity as an extended field of self (space). According to a previous study, people with high involvement in styling suited to them showed positive appearance management behavior, and high satisfaction and confidence in their appearance. This result shows that satisfaction is required to restore the self-esteem that deteriorates as women get older.¹⁷ Appearance management behavior through fashion can be said to be an act of realizing the desire to make one look younger and healthier.^{18, 19} In addition, the accumulation of daily experiences of one's own tastes and ways to stand out can lead to real self-awareness and create a more positive outlook on the lives of middle-aged and older women entering the later stages of life. In other words, the accumulation of experiences enables a more positive self-image formation.²⁰ Kim²¹ said that interpersonal ability was correlated with appearance satisfaction, body image, and self-esteem. This shows that the act of forming a self-style that positively forms one's own image is effective in controlling the stress arising from internal and external environmental changes, that is, physical and mental changes. According to Kim, et al.,⁴ study on self-concept and stress, the higher the level of self-confidence for a positive self-concept and independent attitude toward life, the lower the level of stress. In addition, Hwang & Kim demonstrate that people who consistently manage their appearance on a daily basis tend to be more psychologically stable and have higher life satisfaction.

Therefore, everyday experiences of understanding one's body and ways to make it stand out can be made with styling, appearance management, and clothing behavior that suits oneself using clothing. These small daily experiences can lead to positive and healthy self-awareness, and positive awareness and satisfaction of one's appearance can lead to daily habits that form a positive self that respects and values oneself.

Materials and methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate when women experience the most psychological and physical changes in their life cycle and determine the correlation between the period of psychological

change and that of physical change. In addition, this study intends to determine whether psychological changes can have a positive effect on self-esteem by increasing appearance satisfaction through appearance management and styling through clothing. Finally, in the process of middle-aged women experiencing periods of psychological and physical changes, we intend to grasp the self-esteem of women who have increased their appearance satisfaction through physical and physical management.

The study was conducted via an online survey from April to May 2019. Participants in the survey included 40 women over the age of 50 living in Seoul and its suburbs (born 1946–1969, averaged 1961.53), and a multiple-choice questionnaire using a 5-point scale, and included questions on population statistics, clothing involvement, and physical and psychological changes. The questionnaire was composed of subjective questions on cases of overcoming physical and psychological changes related to the timing of change, appearance satisfaction, self-esteem, and appearance management behavior. The results of the final collected questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 25.0: Middle-aged women in their 50s or older who participated in the survey that were single comprised 7.5% and the remaining 92.5% were married; 60% were in their 50s, 32.5% in their 60s, and 7.5% in their 70s. Moreover, 32.5% were housewives, 22.5% worked in education, 22.5% in the arts, 12.5% in service sectors, and 10% in others. Further, 65% of participants had expenses less than KRW 300,000 per month on the management of one's body, appearance, and clothing, and another 30% spent between 30–200million won. Finally, 55% of participants spent an average of between 5–8hours per week on appearance management and clothing.

Results and discussion

Physical and psychological changes of middle-aged and middle-aged women

As women enter their 30s, various social roles change, such as employment, marriage, and childbirth. For women in their 30s and 40s, the timing of physical and mental changes coincided, and it was found that they experienced the most physical and mental changes before and after childbirth. However, middle-aged and older Korean women who participated in the survey chose menopause (55%) as the time they experienced the most physical changes in their lives. In addition, 42.5% of participants responded that menopause was the period in which they most experienced psychological change (Table 1). Socially, menopausal menstruation due to hormonal changes is a period of time when women experience their greatest physical and psychological changes as they enter their 50s, rather than before and after childbirth when they are expected to experience the most physical changes—and is worth noting. In the meantime, information about the physical and psychological difficulties faced during menopause have not been extensively generalized. Until now, women of the older generation had a strong tendency to quietly solve physical and psychological difficulties with their own solutions. As a result, difficulties that middle-aged and older women face are simply considered as problems specific only to them. However, middle-aged and older women are the protagonists of their families and their roles in society should not be overlooked. In modern society, problems faced by the more active social advancement of women have led to double distress between family and society, and has become a significant burden for modern women. Accordingly, the correct understanding of the physical and psychological changes of middle-aged and older

women, and the provision of extensive information about menopause, is also very important for young women in the future. Therefore, the result evinces that menopause is considered the biggest physical and psychological change in a woman's whole life and is the first of many steps towards becoming middle-aged, mature, and old age. It further shows that physical preparation is required.

Table 1 The period of physical and psychological changes in the lives of middle-aged and mature women

Factor	Physical change		Psychological change	
	Frequency(N)	%	Frequency(N)	%
Employment	0	0	1	2.5
Marriage	1	2.5	7	17.5
Childbirth	15	37.5	11	27.5
Menopause	22	55.0	17	42.5
Age shift	2	5.0	4	10.0
Total	40(N)	100	40(N)	100

Experience of overcoming psychological changes through appearance management and clothing styling of middle-aged and older women

Among middle-aged and older women who participated in this study, 70% (n=28) had experience overcoming negativity caused by psychological changes through styling via appearance management or clothing (Table 2). They were well aware of the styles that suited them (Mean=3.714), and rather than pursuing the latest fashion (2.5%), it is important to style their clothes or accessories while enjoying their own specialty (55%). They were also was aware of their shortcomings (37.5%) and knew how to neutralize them to highlight their physical strengths. Moreover, they considered it important to style themselves in ways that suited them.

Table 2 Experience in overcoming psychological changes through appearance management and styling of clothing

Perceived values	Frequency(N)	Mean	Mean difference	SD
Experienced	28	3.714	.599	.599
Non-experienced	12	3.333	.492	.492

Middle-aged and older women who participated in the study experienced the most physical changes due to weight gain and psychological depression during menopause. Participants with the experience of overcoming these physical and psychological difficulties through the period of psychological change through clothing styling were able to escape from being depressed by expressing their own beauty and enjoying life through changes in exercise and fashion style.” One participant said, “If you look pretty while you are depressed, you will feel better.” She also reported that she felt good and confident when she changed her hairstyle to one that suited her or wore clothes that suited her. In particular, respondents actively managing their appearance and styling themselves showed that they are actively implementing physical and health management simultaneously through exercise (30%) and diet (35%). This result supported the findings of Lee and Yang²⁰ and Lee & Wee²² Lee and Yang²⁰ found a significant correlation between appearance management behavior and

psychosocial health. When people perceived themselves as healthy, they showed a positive attitude toward their work, and perceived their relationship with others as important. In addition, those who demonstrated a positive attitude toward their body or emotions have a high interest in clothing and perform several behaviors to present the image they are pursuing; likewise, fewer behaviors to artificially change their body shape such as plastic surgery are seen.²²

Appearance satisfaction and self-esteem

The steady accumulation of experiences through fashion style or appearance management suited to women more than helps overcome the period of physical and psychological changes that they will inevitably experience in their lives, such as menopause, due to the changes in hormones of their bodies: It was shown to help them actively cope. Looking at the results of this study, participants who have positive self-experiences that influence their mood through the act of managing themselves consistently recognize the style that suits them to improve their appearance satisfaction as well as the situation around them, and enabled them to cope actively. A successful experience of self-management can lead to a recovery of high self-esteem. In particular, middle-aged participants who showed high degree of satisfaction with their appearance also showed a tendency to have high self-esteem (0.562, $p < 0.001$) (Table 3). This result supports the finding that people with a high interest in appearance have high subjective views on their style and show high confidence through appearance management behavior. Therefore, styling oneself can be a way to improve one's self-esteem by actively participating in self-realization by inducing activities as the subject of creation. As argued by Kaiser²³ and Chung²⁴ it can be seen that a certain degree of self-esteem is required for healthy psychological stability, and appearance management plays an important role in positive self-esteem. The positive evaluation of one's body attractiveness had a significant effect on self-esteem and satisfaction, and was also partially related to daily appearance management behavior. The higher the self-perception of physical attractiveness, the higher the self-esteem.

Table 3 Correlation between appearance satisfaction and self-esteem

		Appearance satisfaction
Self-esteem	Pearson correlations	.562***
	Significant	.000
	N	40

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine a way to improve the QOL of middle-aged and older women who can become socially neglected as middle and mature ages become longer as life expectancy is extended and aging increases. In particular, middle and old age is a period in which women experience not only physical changes due to menopause and aging, but also mental changes resulting from fatigue due to long marriages and changes in values. Therefore, this study found that postmenopausal women over 50 had undergone the greatest physical and psychological changes in their lives. These results shine a new light on menopause, focusing on accurate understanding and social attention needs in women's lives. Although menopause is a period in which a woman experiences the greatest variety of physical and mental changes in her entire life, social interest and support for such women has not been generalized.

Care, social interest, and support for women before and after childbirth is plentiful to encourage this procedure as it is closely related to population policy or national policy, although it is a steadily increasing social problem. Similarly, the nation should aid in solving the difficulties women experience by physical and mental changes during menopause. In reality, such efforts are insufficient. It is necessary to reconsider the reality that menopause should be considered only as a problem for women and therefore excluded from social concern. Despite menopause being an experience women must undergo in their lives, associated problems have so far been neglected as difficulties and concerns only for middle-aged and older women. This study makes it possible to recognize the need for more academic research and social interest to overcome difficulties faced during menopause more positively and healthily.

As much as 70% of middle-aged women who participated in this study responded that they had overcome negative emotions caused by psychological changes through appearance management behavior. They were aware of the styles that suited them, and instead of pursuing the latest fashions (2.5%), they enjoyed their own specialty and styles to neutralize their shortcomings through clothing action to highlight their physical strengths. In addition, middle-aged and older participants who showed high satisfaction with their appearance also tended to have high self-esteem. This shows that experiences that overcome physical or psychological changes through fashion style or appearance management behavior can have a positive effect on self-esteem through high appearance satisfaction. In addition, high self-satisfaction in middle and old age is a remarkable factor because it serves as the energy to be more positive and healthy in old age. Knowing one's style and connecting it with high appearance satisfaction is possible through the understanding of one's own body and a psychologically negative situation to overcome one's own psychologically. This steady scale of experience can provide an opportunity to more actively cope with the period of physical and psychological changes that must inevitably be experienced in life, such as menopause, in the future. In addition, in this study, when actively managing and styling oneself, active body and health management through exercise (30%) and diet (35%) were simultaneously implemented. Through this study, it was possible to recognize the need for more academic research and social interest to overcome menopause more positively and healthily. As seen in the study results, using fashion for appearance management behavior has a positive effect during this period. To lead a happy elderly life at the age of 100, it is necessary for middle-aged and older adults to perceive themselves more positively and develop high self-esteem. In addition, the positive support of those around them is also important to improve the QOL in old age.

This study shows a positive effect on the formation of high self-esteem with high appearance satisfaction through appearance management behavior; however, this positive experience is more widely experienced as the biggest obstacle in women's life cycles, in particular through menopause. It was verified that it could be issued. In addition, it was found that appearance management behavior using fashion can serve as a tool to promote more positive vitality into the daily lives of middle-aged and mature women. Based on this study's results, all women in the future will experience a more vigorous middle and older age, and have a healthy old age by pursuing healthy clothing behaviors in terms of improving their self-esteem and managing their body and mind. By doing so, they are expected to live a more active

and positive life. It is also expected that a variety of studies on ways to expand lifestyles that make life healthier and more prosperous will be actively conducted.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

None.

References

1. Korea National Statistical Office. *Mortality table*. Daejeon: Statistics Korea; 2012.
2. Korea National Statistical Office. *Population Survey*. Daejeon: Statistics Korea; 2011.
3. Korea National Statistical Office. *Population Survey*. Daejeon: Statistics Korea; 2018.
4. Kim JS, Kim SC, Yoo SK. Factors influencing stress levels of adolescents: with a focus on the impact of positive self-concept and self-confidence. *Korean J Youth Stud*. 2011;18(3):103–126.
5. *Big shopper' 5060 serve new senior*. The Hankyoreh. 2011.
6. Kang HS, Lee SY. Effects of post-traumatic, self-esteem, and hope on quality of life among middle-aged female. *J Korea Contents Assoc*. 2017;17(10):518–525.
7. Jung YO, Oh HS. The effects of social support, self-efficacy and perceived health status on aging anxiety of the middle-aged women. *J Korean Public Health Nursing*. 2016;30(1):30–41.
8. Lee YK, Lee HA. Tendency of appearance management behavior and pursuing ideal age. *J Korean Soc Cloth Text*. 2015;39(3):468–475.
9. Doherty K, Schlenker BR. Self-consciousness and strategic self-presentation. *J Pers*. 1991;59(1):1–18.
10. Miller LC, Cox CL. For appearances' sake: public self-consciousness and makeup use. *Pers Soc Psychol Bull*. 1982;8(4):748–751.
11. Son JE. Critical factors of the intention of plastic surgery among women: a comparison of young and middle-aged groups. *Korean J Couns Psychotherapy*. 2012;24(1):149–173.
12. Choi & Wee. 2015.
13. Youn SY, Lee KH. Self-image and fashion leadership: focusing on clothing involvement and consumer confidence. *Korea Fash Text Res J*. 2015;17(3):382–391.
14. De Long M, Min S, Casto MA, et al. Sustainable clothing from the older female user's perspective. *Clothing Cultures*. 2017;4(3):219–234.
15. Kweon YR, Jeon HO. Relationship of fatigue, family function and self-esteem of middle-aged women. *Menopausal J Korea Academia-Ind Cooperation Soc*. 2012;13(6):2579–2588.
16. McLeod S. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Simply Psychol*. 2007;1.
17. Priddy L. A critical analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. *J Humanistic Psychol*. 2011;51(4):428–431.
18. Ahuvia A. Beyond the extended self: loved objects and consumers' identity. *J Consum Res*. 2005;32(1):171–84.
19. Tian K, Belk R. Extended self and possessions in the workplace. *J Consum Res*. 2005;32(2):297–310.
20. Lee IS, Yang EM. The relationship among body image, appearance management behavior and psychosocial health of female undergraduates. *J Korea Contents Assoc*. 2015;15(2):301–312.
21. Kim HJ. The effects of sociocultural attitudes toward appearance, appearance satisfaction, body-image, and self-esteem on interpersonal relationship ability of nursing students. *J Korean Acad Soc Nurs Educ*. 2012;18(1):62–70.
22. Lee JY, Wee EH. A study on the self-concept and the appearance management behavior in middle school students. *Korean Home Econ Educ Assoc*. 2013;25(3):19–38.
23. Kaiser SB. *The social psychology of clothing: symbolic appearance in context*. 2nd edn. New York: Macmillan; 174;1990.
24. Chung MS. The influence of self-perceived physical attractiveness on self-esteem and appearance management behavior of adult women. *J Korean Soc Costume*. 2003;53(3):165–179.