Exploring Caregivers' Clothing Choices for Individuals with Severe Alzheimer's Disease: An Application of the Theories of Self-Complexity and Choosing for Others

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Introduction: Alzheimer's disease is a form of dementia that is often thought of as senility, which reflects the incorrect belief that mental decline is a normal part of the aging process. The disease can cause problems with memory, thinking, and behavior (Alzheimer's Association, 2018). Individuals with Alzheimer's disease may not be able to dress themselves due to memory limitations, although certain clothing items may provide familiarity and enhance their mood or behavior by supporting a sense of security and individuality (Bruse & Twigg, 2016; Kasper et al., 2011). Moreover, individuals with severe stage Alzheimer's may not be able to choose what they want to wear, and therefore must rely on the choices of their caregivers. Thus, the role of caregivers is important, as they are the individuals who assist those with Alzheimer's in completing not just medical tasks, but fundamental activities of daily living, such as selecting garments to wear and getting dressed. The purpose of this study was to understand how caregivers make such choices.

Literature Review: Linville (1987) developed the social-cognitive model of self-complexity. This theory explains the diverse aspects of one's self that are developed for meaningful aspects of one's life and pertains to activated self-aspects and related experiences (Pilarska & Suchańska, 2015). According to Linville (1987), the individual can express self-concepts for diverse roles, and as the number of roles in one's life increase, stress-buffering may occur due to the possibility that failure of many roles is more likely than the possibility of failure of few roles. In the case of individuals with severe stage Alzheimer's, the self-concept becomes fragmented, as some roles may surface while others recede, and new roles develop. Those caring for individuals with the disease must identify the appropriate means of assisting with expressing self-concepts that align with the individual because the individual is likely to no longer be able to do so him/herself. Thus, choices made by the caregiver are made complex by the need to express another's self-concept. Indeed, everyone is surrounded by circumstances prompting them to make choices not only for themselves, but sometimes also for others. The latter may be explained by the "choosing for others" theoretical perspective (Liu, Dallas, & Fitzsimons, 2019). According to Liu et al. (2019), consumer choices for others can be categorized based on the interaction of two fundamental dimensions: (1) the chooser's social focus, and (2) the chooser's consideration of consumption preferences. The chooser's social focus can be either relationship-focused or recipient-focused. The chooser's consideration of consumption preferences can either highlight the recipient's preferences or balance the recipient's preferences with the chooser's own preferences based on the situation. For example, if one's choice is based on a relationship focus and balancing the recipient's preferences with the chooser's own preferences for the situation, the chooser will likely select the option which combines preferences for both the recipient and the chooser, and which improves the relationship.

On the other hand, if one's choice is based on the recipient focus and highlights the recipient's preferences, the chooser will consider the option that best approximates the recipient's preferences. The present study applies this framework to better understand how clothing choices are made by caregivers for individuals with Alzheimer's.

Method: This study employed qualitative interviews with caregivers in order to develop an in-depth understanding of their approaches to choosing clothing for others. Interviews with twelve caregivers of individuals with severe stage Alzheimer's were conducted in nursing homes located in the Southwestern United States. Of the total, six are professional caregivers and six are family member caregivers (Table 1). Each interview was audio recorded and lasted 20 to 60 minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed iteratively (Spiggle, 1994) and interpreted through the lens of social-complexity theory (Linville, 1987) and the theory of choosing-for-others (Liu et al., 2019).

Results: Four themes emerged to structure the interpretation, *The Role of Proxy, Routine Selections, Gift-Giving for Loved Ones, and Triangular Relationships*. The caregivers, whether professional or family members, are acting as an informal proxy for the individual. That is, the caregiver chooses what individual wants to wear

Table 1. Information of Professional and Family Member Caregivers

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Relationship	Length of Caregiving	Alzheimer's Stage of the Individual
James	49	Male	White	Nurse	More than 4 years	Severe
Kathy	25	Female	Hispanic	Nurse	More than 4 years	Severe
Amanda	30	Female	White	Nurse	More than 4 years	Severe
Cynthia	24	Female	White	Caregiver	6-12 months	Severe
Carol	44	Female	Hispanic	Caregiver	6-12 months	Severe
Bailey	43	Female	White	Caregiver	2-4 years	Severe
Samantha	24	Female	Hispanic	Granddaughter	2-4 years	Severe
Ruth	77	Female	White	Sister-in-law	6-12 months	Severe
Olivia	25	Female	White	Granddaughter	More than 4 years	Severe
Ava	60	Female	White	Adult child	More than 4 years	Severe
Grace	80	Female	White	Spouse	More than 4 years	Severe
Ivy	81	Female	White	Sister-in-law	More than 4 years	Severe

based on what they know about him or her (e.g., "I think she spent most of her life being...you know she always had to be well dressed, well-mannered, and I think that's the way she likes to appear and that's what I choose"). For *Routine Selections*, the caregivers tend to choose clothing that the individuals themselves routinely choose for daily activities (e.g., "I'll let her pick it out and she actually picked out what she's wearing today, and she's worn the same thing before"). The theme *Gift-Giving for Loved Ones* emerged primarily among family member caregivers as they buy new clothing as gifts to give to the individual (e.g., "Sometimes she might not want to wear it when we buy it, but it's just talking her into it."). *Triangular Relationships* between the caregiver, the individual, and others were important for participants, in that they expressed concern about how others see the individual they are caring for. When it is a professional caregiver, she/he wants to make sure the patient looks acceptable to family members. When it is a family member as caregiver, there was similar concern for how the loved one would be seen by others (e.g., "When family visits, I want him to be comfortable and clean. He always dressed neatly and matched his clothing. He was very modest").

Discussion and Implications: In general, the higher self-complexity of individuals with Alzheimer's stems from the confusion and frustration caused by the disease. Thus, caregivers assist in dressing and selecting clothing for these individuals, but seek to do so by expressing their respect for reflecting what can be assumed to be the individual's own preferences (Figure 1). Because the

individual is unable to choose for him/herself, existing clothing from the individual's wardrobe and knowledge of his/her past clothing choices are clues for caregivers to use. Based on the framework of choosing-for-others (Liu et al., 2019), the clothing choices of individuals with Alzheimer's by family member caregivers illustrate options based on the relationship and highlight the recipient's preferences. Clothing choices by professional caregivers are based on the recipient and either highlight the recipient's preferences or balance the recipient's preferences with the chooser's preferences for the situation. In all cases, the recipient's preferences were important to caregivers' choices. Because of the complex nature of making product choices that are personally and socially expressive, such as clothing, further research on the factors important to and the outcomes of making choices for others, especially others who at one time made their own choices, is needed.

Figure 1. The Clothing Choices for Individuals with Alzheimer's

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