

The Role of Self-Assured Clothing on Self-Perception and Well-Being for Older Adults: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Youthfulness

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Introduction: Women often use clothing as a means to improve their perceptions of themselves (Sontag & Lee, 2004). Clothing can be used by women to form a healthy self-concept and improve self-esteem (Lee et al., 2020). Research (Ogihara & Kusumi, 2020) suggests that women's self-esteem increases until they reach age 50, at which time self-esteem seems to decrease. Perhaps wearing clothing that makes women feel confident about themselves could be used to improve their feelings about themselves. This study is designed to examine the effect of self-assured clothing selection on the self-perception and well-being of older adults. Because women often tend to feel younger than their chronological age (Rahman & Chang, 2018), the moderating effect of perceived youthfulness is also investigated in this study.

Literature Review: Self-concept seems to be related to normative age changes (Orth et al., 2010). The average level of self-esteem, or perceived self-worth, changes across one's lifespan (Hamilton, 2010; Ogihara & Kusumi, 2020). In general, self-esteem increases as people age, but may start to decline after people reach middle age (Hamilton, 2010; Ogihara & Kusumi, 2020). Building and maintaining a positive self-concept is very important as it influences the quality of life and well-being of individuals. One of the ways to boost one's self-esteem and self-concept is through the clothing they wear (Chang et al., 2014; Lee & Lee, 2020). When older women wear clothing that makes them feel self-assured, they tend to feel better about themselves (Holmlund, Hagman, & Polska, 2011). This may lead to positive self-perceptions, including confidence in their ability to perform tasks successfully (self-efficacy) (Mirza, 2020), confidence in their presence viewed by others (public self-consciousness) (Gould & Barak, 1988), and positive beliefs about their value to the world (self-esteem) (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). Positive perceptions of oneself likely lead to perceptions of well-being (Schimmack & Diener, 2003). For the theoretical foundation, we applied *Higgins' (1989) self-discrepancy theory*, postulating that individuals' self-esteem and well-being are higher when there is less gap between their actual and ideal selves. Thus, we posit the effect of perceived youthfulness on self-perception and well-being to predict this gap. Therefore, the relationships of latent variables in our proposed model may be moderated by how old a woman feels, or perceived youthfulness, especially if self-esteem does decrease after middle age. Based on this previous research, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Self-assured clothing selection will affect a) self-efficacy, b) public self-consciousness, c) self-esteem, d) perceived well-being.

H2: a) Self-efficacy, b) public self-consciousness, c) self-esteem will affect perceived well-being.

H3: There is a moderating effect of perceived youthfulness on the relationships among variables.

Method: The quantitative online survey method was used for this study. The participants for this study were recruited from the Qualtrics panel. Table 1 gives a summary of the demographic information. For screening, they should be aged over 60 and females. Survey instruments were adopted from existing literature. The CFA and SEM were to find the measurement validity, reliability, model fit, and hypothesis results. The median split was used to test the moderating effect of perceived youthfulness, which was calculated for the difference between their actual age and felt age (i.e., actual-felt age). The median score of 11, means that they felt 11 years younger than their actual age.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N_{LPYG} = 108, N_{HYPYG} = 108).

Characteristics	Frequency/Percentage			
	Low		High	
Number of Respondents	108		108	
Ethnicity	Total	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
White/Caucasian	92	85.2	90	83.3
Black/African American	9	8.3	11	10.2
Hispanic or Latino	1	0.9	3	2.8
Asian	1	0.9	1	0.9
American Indian	1	0.9	2	1.9
Other	4	3.7	1	0.9
Education				
Finished high school	24	22.2	38	35.2
Completed technical college	15	13.9	8	7.4
Completed community college	20	18.5	17	15.7
Completed college	22	20.4	21	19.4
Completed graduate school	20	18.5	12	11.1
Other	7	6.5	11	10.2
Household Income				
\$19,999 or less	18	16.7	14	13.2
\$20,000-34,999	23	21.3	34	31.5
\$35,000-49,999	16	14.8	21	19.4
\$50,000-64,999	16	14.8	15	13.9
\$65,000-79,999	13	12.0	7	6.5
\$80,000-99,999	5	4.6	8	7.4
\$100,000 or above	13	12.0	6	5.6
Marital Status				
Single, never married	7	6.5	9	8.3
Married	53	49.1	52	48.1
Widowed	24	22.2	27	25.0
Divorced	22	20.4	19	17.6
Other	2	1.9	1	0.9

Results: First, CFA and SEM were performed for the low-perceived youthfulness group. The CFA result showed the acceptable-good model fit (CFI=0.91, NFI=0.90, and TLI=0.90). The composite reliability of all latent variables above .70 confirmed the internal consistency of the measurements. Also, the convergent validity was established by the average variance extracted (AVE) being above .50 for all five variables. The SEM result showed the acceptable-good model fit (CFI=0.91, NFI=0.90, and TLI=0.90). The results show that self-assured clothing selection positively influenced public self-consciousness, and negatively influenced perceived well-being. All self-perception construct positively influenced perceived well-being of participants with low perceived youthfulness. Second, CFA and SEM were performed for the group with high perceived youthfulness. The CFA result showed the acceptable-good model fit (CFI=0.93, NFI=0.91, and TLI=0.91). The composite reliability and convergent validity

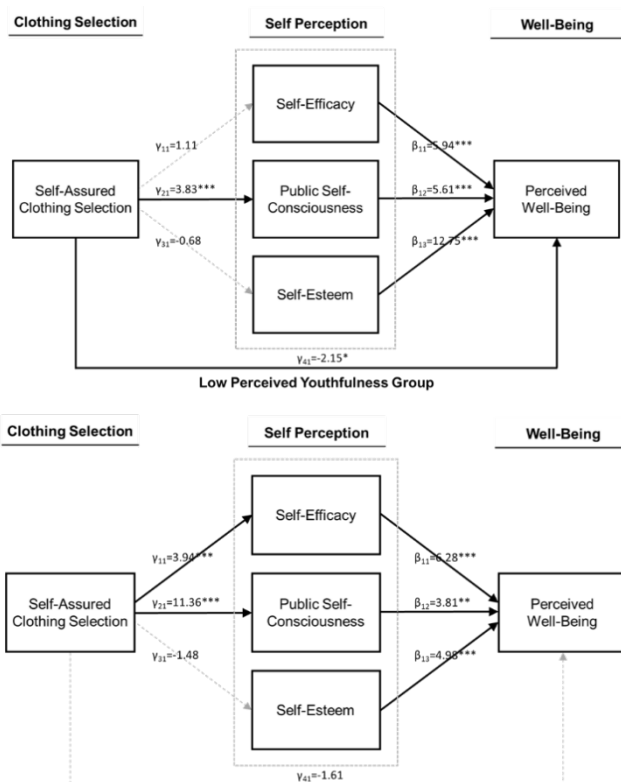


Figure 1. The Path Diagrams for Low and High Perceived Youthfulness Groups.

were also confirmed. The SEM result showed the acceptable-good model fit (CFI=0.91, NFI=0.90, and TLI=0.89). The results show that self-assured clothing selection positively affected self-efficacy and public self-consciousness. In turn, self-efficacy, public self-consciousness, and self-esteem positively affected perceived well-being. Thus, H1-3 were partially or fully supported (Figure 1).

Discussion and Implications: Findings of this study illustrate that there are differences in the relationships among clothing selection, self-perception, and perceived well-being between low and high-perceived youthfulness groups. Interestingly, self-assured clothing directly but negative affected perceived well-being only for the low perceived youthfulness group. On the other hand, self-efficacy significantly and positively influenced perceived well-being only for the high-perceived youthfulness group. That is, clothing selection has a more indirect effect on well-being through the self-concept. As the self-discrepancy theory delineates, there seems to be more positive self-perception for the high-perceived youthfulness group. In addition, as self-assured clothing selection influences the public self-consciousness the most for both groups, the role of the dress might be more related to building the individuals' social identity instead of the private self-identity. A larger sample size can provide more generalizable research findings for future research.

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