



An Investigation of Self-Concept, Clothing Selection, and Life Satisfaction among Disabled Consumers

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Introduction: Because consumer behavior research has typically focused on the population of “haves” and assumed consumers’ normalcy (Miller, 1997), the population of “have nots” has been largely ignored by researchers. As a result, we have a limited understanding of disabled individuals as consumers, particularly their behaviors related to the selection of clothing to wear. Thus, this study is designed to better understand disabled consumers and to investigate the influence of disabled individuals’ multifaceted self-concept on their motivations for clothing selection. Specifically, this study examines the roles of self-concept, including self-efficacy, self-consciousness, state hope, and self-esteem on disabled consumers’ clothing choices and how these choices are related to life satisfaction.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development: Consumers’ beliefs, feelings, and thoughts, particularly those related to aspects of their self-concept, are known to play a significant role in consumer behavior in general (Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004). While the particular aspects of self-concept that influence dress behavior among disabled consumers may differ from those of nondisabled consumers, disabled consumers’ self-concept is likely to affect their dress behavior. Some aspects of self-concept are likely to indirectly influence dress behavior through other aspects of self-concept. First, based on the self-efficacy literature (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) it seems likely that this aspect of self-concept would be positively related to self-esteem, another aspect of self-concept. Thus, *H₁: There will be a positive relationship between disabled consumers’ generalized self-efficacy and their self-esteem.* Second, Kwon and Shim (1999) revealed that individuals who have higher public self-consciousness have lower self-esteem. This pattern is likely to also be reflected among disabled individuals. Therefore, *H₂: There will be a negative relationship between disabled consumers’ public self-consciousness and their self-esteem.* Third, Snyder, Cheavens and Michael (1996) found that degree of hope was positively related to self-esteem. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed. *H₃: There will be a positive relationship between disabled consumers’ state hope and their self-esteem.* Fourth, according to the literature, emotional responses and life satisfaction can be predicted by self-esteem (Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985). Therefore, *H₄: There will be a positive relationship between disabled consumers’ self-esteem and their life satisfaction.* Fifth, according to Kwon and Parham (1994), individuals’ clothing choices, as assessed by specific clothing selection dimensions, may be influenced by aspects of their self-concept. Thus, *H₅: Disabled consumers’ self-esteem will influence their use of specific clothing selection dimensions.* Last but not least, individuals with low life satisfaction may choose clothing to hide the self, while individuals who

are satisfied with their lives may want to express their positive feelings. Thus, *H₆: Disabled consumers' life satisfaction will influence their use of specific clothing selection dimensions.*

Methodology and Results: A survey questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature. Existing measurements with satisfactory reliabilities were selected from the literature to assess each construct and test the hypotheses. The survey was disseminated at universities and community disability organizations. Usable questionnaires were collected from 318 individuals (males=199; females=113; average age=38). Most of the respondents were Caucasian/White. The majority of the participants had a mobility impairment or a visual impairment.

Structural equation modeling was employed to test the hypotheses. Results for the main effects of the conceptual model revealed a χ^2 of 2873.37 (df = 1023; p < .000), GFI of .72, CFI of .94, RMSEA of .076, NFI of .90, and $\chi^2/df = 2.80$. The model was deemed to be an acceptable fit for the data. Results indicated that for disabled consumers, self-esteem is related to public self-consciousness and state hope, and that self-esteem positively influences life satisfaction. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between life satisfaction and the individuality dimension of clothing choice. Therefore, H2, H3, H4, and H6 were fully or partially supported.

Conclusion and Implications: This study provides a conceptual framework that describes the relationships between disabled consumers' self-concept, life satisfaction, and clothing choice. Results shed light on the social-psychological factors influencing the clothing selection behaviors of disabled consumers. Thereby, this study addresses a gap in the literature by considering the use of clothing by this often overlooked consumer segment. Further research is needed that investigates the impact of disability type and duration on clothing selection.

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