



THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPT ON CLOTHING DECISIONS

The way you feel about yourself is called self-concept; the way you see yourself is called self-image. Your self-concept is an assessment of your psychological self; your self-image is an assessment of your physical self. However, our self-concepts and/or self-images frequently determine the clothes that we choose to wear. At the same time, the clothes we wear may influence the way we feel about ourselves. Throughout our lifetime, our self-concept continues to evolve and to be modified as we change and get to know ourselves better.

The Outer Self (Self-Image)

One aspect of self-image is related to how you see your physical self, your size, your attractive features, and those features you feel are less attractive. Each person is born with certain unchangeable physical characteristics—bone structure, shapes of body features (nose, mouth, eyes, and ears) and personal coloration. Your choices about changeable attributes like clothing, and how well these choices complement your features and style, reflect your self-concept. If your self-image is not realistic, others will receive a negative message from your appearance. For example, you have probably seen a very thin person wearing skin-tight clothing that makes him/her look even thinner. Such a person probably sees himself/herself as being overweight. Or, you may have observed a chubby person poured into tight pants that outline every bulge. Have you wondered how a person could appear in public in such an unbecoming garment? The person may not perceive himself/herself as overweight; instead his/her self-image allows him/her to believe that he/she appears slim, trim, and attractive in the pants.

What is considered to be the "ideal" body or a handsome/beautiful individual changes from one period to another and from one country to another. Very few people, if any, have all the so-called "ideal" features.

Can you think of anyone who you feel is truly a perfectly handsome or beautiful individual? If you analyze the person's looks, you will probably find that he or she is attractive because of a combination of good grooming practices, wearing becoming clothes, and assuming a pleasant manner. Most movie stars and models use knowledge of hair styling and care, other grooming aids, color, line, and design to make their natural features look closer to the current "ideal" physical features.

Individuals who have anorexia nervosa have a very distorted view of their body size in relation to the "ideal, thin body." Victims of this illness starve themselves into drastic weight losses and ultimately starve to death if the disease goes untreated.

Researchers have found that persons with bulimia—pattern of binge eating followed by self-induced vomiting—overestimate body size to an even greater degree than do anorexics. These two eating disorders are most frequently found in women from 12 to 25 years of age, most of them from middle-class and upper-class homes. However, boys as well as adults of either sex can also be affected.



THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPT ON CLOTHING DECISIONS - PAGE 2

Why do these individuals voluntarily starve themselves? Basically their self-concept is so low that their self-image is severely distorted. Their desire to gain acceptance is so hinged on physical appearance that they lose all sense of logic in relation to their bodies.

The Inner Self (Self-Esteem)

Another part of self-concept is "the sort of person I am" or a sense of inner self. This is known as self-esteem. We visualize ourselves as having certain characteristic behavior. Our behavior changes as frequently as do our roles in life and the clothing we choose to fit those roles. Clothing also reflects our different moods and emotions. Our favorite garments are comfortable—psychologically as well as physically. Psychological comfort or lack of it may be closely related to how well our garments express the self-esteem that each of us has.

The teen years are partly spent discovering one's own identity and individuality. This is a time when individuals enjoy experimenting with different types of clothing, hairstyles, accessories, and makeup. Through trial and error, you accept or reject styles, colors, and ideas. This experimentation plays an important role in the decisions you make about yourself and in developing your own identity and individuality.

At the same time that you are striving to achieve your identity as an individual, you do not want to be too different from your friends. Most people want the security of identifying with a group or with people they admire. Conformity in personal appearance is a way of expressing and fulfilling this need.

However, no one stays the same forever. As you change, you have experiences that affect how you see yourself and feel about yourself. What you liked to wear when you were younger may not be what you like today. And, as an adult, your clothing choices will continue to change to reflect your self-concept.

Some of our physical features cannot be changed, such as our height, bone structure, foot size, or eye color. Instead of being unhappy or uncomfortable about these unchangeable features, capitalize on the features you have and make the most of them.

Source: Cooperative Extension Service, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Agriculture.