

Effects of Body-Cathexis and Importance of Ideal Body Image on Satisfaction with Ready-to-Wear (Part One)

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Abstract : The purpose of the present research is to determine, for a sample of female college students, the effects of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear. The sample included 177 female college students aged from 18 to 25. To measure the variables, an instrument was developed based on previous studies. Body-cathexis and importance of meeting the ideal body image were measured for five areas of body parts; head/upper body, lower body, height, weight, and torso. Satisfaction with ready-to-wear includes satisfaction with the fit at pant length, thighs, hips, waist, bust, and neckline, and with the variety in ready-to-wear. Research hypotheses were tested using multiple regression. The results showed that there was a positive impact of body-cathexis for a specific body area on ready-to-wear satisfaction which is related to the body area. The effect of importance of meeting the ideal body image on ready-to-wear clothing was different in regard to different areas of body parts.

Key words : body-cathexis, ideal body image, ready-to-wear satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Body image is the mental view we have of our bodies (Fallon, 1990). It is perceptual and affective in that it reflects our perceptions of our bodies and our feelings about those perceptions (Lennon, Rudd, Sloan, & Kim, 1999). Physical attractiveness is highly valued in western societies, and the media focus on the young and thin body as an important factor of physical attractiveness (Franzoi, 1995; Moriarty & Moriarty, 1988; Seid, 1994). Dissatisfaction with body image appears to be widespread and a major psychological and physical problem of our time (Salem, 1990). Body dissatisfaction has been described as a "normative discontent" (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985).

When people are not satisfied with their bodies, the roles of clothing as symbols and means in social interactions cannot be underestimated (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991; Solomon, 1983). Because clothing is an extension of the bodily self (Shim, Kotsiopoulos, & Knoll, 1991) and has important symbolic meanings in social interactions (Erickson & Sirgy, 1989; Hamid, 1972; Lessig & Park, 1978; Robertson, 1970; Veblen, 1899), many studies have concerned the relationship between body image and clothing behavior (LaBat, 1988; LaBat & DeLong, 1990; Shim, Kotsiopoulos, & Knoll, 1991). Yet, very limited studies exist on

the relationships between satisfaction with specific body areas and clothing behavior (e.g., Hwang, 1997, 1998; Kwon & Parham, 1994; Kwon & Shim, 1999).

The present research sought to augment knowledge about female consumers by examining the relationships of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image to satisfaction with ready-to-wear. There has been abundant literature on satisfaction with ready-to-wear; the possible reason would be that consumer's satisfaction with ready-to-wear may be one of the major concerns which apparel manufacturers and marketers should cope with. However, there have been limited studies on the effect of body-cathexis on satisfaction with ready-to-wear. Because some researchers addressed the importance of body-cathexis to ready-to-wear satisfaction, the research on this problem may generate meaningful information to apparel marketers. Along with body-cathexis, the effect of importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear may also need to be investigated. According to LaBat & DeLong (1990), the current ideal body image of the society is reflected in ready-to-wear clothing. The relative importance individuals place on meeting the ideal body image may differ and it may affect their satisfaction with ready-to-wear clothing. However, there have been almost no studies on the effect of importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear. Research on the effects of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear may engender useful information to apparel manufacturers and marketers to segment and target consumers and make plans for

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them (e.g., in clothing design, advertising, and distribution).

The Part One of this study is exploratory in nature, and its purpose is to determine, for a sample of female college students, the direct effects of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with the fit and variety in ready-to-wear. Female college students are a major clothing consumer segment, and they are said to be very conscious about their bodies (Katzman & Wolchik, 1984; Salem, 1990).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Body image

Body image is the mental view one has of one's own body and is a component of one's self (Fallon, 1990). Because body image plays an important role in one's self, some researchers identified body-cathexis, the indication of individuals' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their different body parts, to evaluate body image (LaBat & DeLong, 1990; Secord & Jourard, 1953). Many studies have supported the idea that body-cathexis is closely related to a person's global self-image, self-esteem, or self-concept (Hwang, 1997; Kaiser, 1990; Lennon & Rudd, 1994; Lennon, Rudd, Sloan, & Kim, 1999). Some researchers have suggested that dissatisfaction with a particular aspect of self can lead to lower self-esteem, depending on the degree of importance ascribed to that aspect of self (Watkins & Park, 1972). Therefore, if physical attractiveness is important to an individual, poor body image may be expected to have a negative effect on his or her self-esteem.

The current ideal body image in American culture can be expressed as narrow as an arrow or pencil thin (Franzoi, 1995; Freedman, 1986; Rudd & Lennon, 1995; Seid, 1994). Colburn (1992) noted that Americans' pursuit of thinness has been cultivated during the past three decades, exemplified by fashion models and Miss America pageant contestants becoming steadily thinner. This phenomenon has resulted in side effects such as dieting illness and flourishing diet industries (Stephens, Hill, & Hanson, 1994). Although as many males as females are not satisfied with some parts of their bodies (Cash, 1990), there are gender differences in the evaluation of body satisfaction (Dionne, Davis, Fox, & Gurevich, 1995; Franzoi, 1995; Greenwood, 1984; Lennon, Rudd, Sloan, & Kim, 1999). Women are more worried about body weight and consider it as a more important component of body satisfaction than are men (Brumberg, 1988; Fallon & Rozin, 1985). Davis (1985) measured college females' perceived somatotype, perceived somatotype-ideal, and body-cathexis. Most subjects in the study selected the slimmest figure as their somatotype-ideal. Subjects' satisfaction with

the body decreased as their perceived body build grew "more muscular" and "fatter".

Body image and clothing behavior

Clothing has been described as an extension of the bodily self which represents one's nearest environment (Kaiser, 1990). Clothing has long been recognized as having more than just a functional use; numerous studies have indicated the symbolic meaning of clothing and its use in social environments (e.g., Ericksen & Sirgy, 1989). There have been numerous studies concerning relationships between body image and diverse aspects of clothing behavior (e.g., Hwang, 1997, 1998, Kwon & Shim, 1999; Shim, Kotiopoulos, & Knoll, 1991). LaBat and DeLong (1990) reported a significant relationship between body-cathexis and satisfaction with fit of apparel, especially for satisfaction with apparel fit on lower parts of the body. Hwang (1997) reported significant correlations between body-cathexis and ready-to-wear satisfaction in women aged 55 years and older. Women subjects who had higher satisfaction with their body parts had higher satisfaction with ready-to-wear clothing. Shim, Kotsiopoulos, and Knoll (1991) also found that those who were satisfied with their bodies and had a favorable attitude toward clothing were likely to be satisfied with ready-to-wear and with product variety/store quality; to enjoy shopping; to be confident in choosing proper clothes for themselves; and to be heavy purchasers of clothing.

Based on the previous studies, the research hypotheses were formulated. The hypotheses of the present study dealt with the relationship of satisfaction with and importance of ideal body image for a specific body area to ready-to-wear satisfaction related to that body area.

H1 : Satisfaction with pant length in ready-to-wear is a function of the body-cathexis scores for two areas (lower body and height) and importance of the ideal body image for the two areas.

H2 : Satisfaction with the fit at thighs/hips/waist is a function of the body-cathexis score for weight and importance of the ideal body image for weight.

H3 : Satisfaction with the fit at bust and neckline is a function of the body-cathexis score for torso and importance of the ideal body image for torso.

H4 : Satisfaction with the variety in ready-to-wear is a function of the body-cathexis scores for two areas (height and weight) and importance of the ideal body image for the two areas.

PROCEDURE

Sample and Data Collection

The researcher distributed 420 questionnaires to the

students who took courses offered in a land-grant university in southeastern U.S. There were 182 questionnaires returned, but some questionnaires were not usable because subjects were males or older than 25. Thus, the researcher used 177 questionnaires from female college students, aged 18 to 25 for statistical analysis.

The Instrument and the variables measured

The questionnaire included body-cathexis, importance of meeting the ideal body image, satisfaction with ready-to-wear measures.

Body-cathexis is defined as the scores of subjects after rating their satisfaction with five areas of body parts on a 7-point Likert scale as follows: extremely satisfied (7) to extremely dissatisfied (1). The five areas encompassing 19 body parts are lower body (legs, calves, knees, feet), head/upper body (face, hair, eyes, nose, teeth, voice), height (overall height, leg length), weight (overall weight, waist, hips, thighs), and torso (bust, neck, muscular strength). The measure of body-cathexis is modified from that of Shim, Kotsiopoulos, and Knoll (1991). The Cronbach alphas for the five body areas ranged from 0.90 for height to 0.74 for torso.

Importance of meeting the ideal body image is measured by the scores on the importance of meeting the ideal body image scale adapted from Salem's (1990) study. Respondents are asked to indicate how important it is that they meet what they consider the ideal standards for the same 19 body parts as on the body-cathexis scale. The response format is a 7-point Likert scale from extremely important (7) to extremely unimportant (1). The Cronbach alpha for height was 0.92, indicating high reliability; those for the four areas ranged from 0.90 for head/upper body and weight to 0.64 for torso.

Satisfaction with ready-to-wear includes fit and variety. The response format is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

Fit is defined as scores obtained by subjects indicating their degree of agreement with the items regarding satisfaction with fit of ready-to-wear. The items come from LaBat and DeLong (1990) and deal with satisfaction with pant length and with fit at thighs, hip, waist, bust, and neckline in ready-to-wear clothing.

Variety is defined as the sum of the scores obtained by subjects indicating their degree of agreement with three items regarding satisfaction with the variety of ready-to-wear. The three items come from Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1991). They are "I am satisfied with the available size range of ready-to-wear clothing", "I am satisfied with the available style selection in ready-to-wear clothing", and "I am satisfied with the variety of colors/prints in ready-to-wear clothing".

Analysis of data

Multiple regression was used to investigate the effects of body-cathexis and importance of meeting the ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of measured variables

Mean values and standard deviations of variables are reported in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, the mean score for importance of ideal body image is higher than for body-cathexis, for four areas. The greatest difference is between body-cathexis for weight and importance of ideal body image for weight. Among the body areas, the subjects were least satisfied with weight but considered it most important. In regard to satisfaction with the fit of ready-to-wear clothing, the subjects are generally more satisfied with the fit at bust and neck than at thighs, hips, and waist in ready-to-wear clothing.

Results of hypothesis testing

H1 : Satisfaction with pant length in ready-to-wear is a function of the body-cathexis scores for two areas (lower body and height) and importance of the ideal body image for the two areas.

T-values in Table 2 show that body-cathexis for height and importance of meeting the ideal body image for

Table 1. Means and standard deviation of variables

Variables	Mean	SD
Body-cathexis		
Head/upper body	5.04	1.09
Lower body	4.41	1.16
Height	4.73	1.41
Weight	3.69	1.37
Torso	4.63	1.14
Importance of ideal body image		
Head/upper body	5.25	1.06
Lower body	4.77	1.04
Height	5.02	1.39
Weight	5.80	0.93
Torso	4.59	1.05
Satisfaction with ready-to-wear		
Pant length	2.99	1.11
Fit at thighs	2.80	1.01
Fit at hips	2.70	1.04
Fit at waist	2.87	1.05
Fit at bust	3.11	0.96
Fit at neckline	3.38	0.86
Variety	3.15	0.85

Body-cathexis & importance of ideal body image: 7 point scale,
Satisfaction with ready-to-wear: 5 point scale

Table 2. Effect of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with the pant length in ready-to-wear

Independent variables	t-value	beta
Intercept	0.69	0.000
Body-cathexis for lower body	0.68	0.054
Body-cathexis for height	5.03***	0.405
Importance of ideal body image for lower body	2.65**	0.257
Importance of ideal body image for height	-0.98	-0.096

F(4, 172)=13.46***

R²=0.24

***p<0.001 and **p<0.01

lower body are significant predictors of satisfaction with the pant length in ready-to-wear. The effect of body-cathexis for height (beta=0.405) was stronger than that of importance of ideal body image for lower body (beta=0.257). LaBat (1988) reported that higher body-cathexis was associated with more satisfaction with the physical fit of ready-to-wear clothing among female consumers. H1 is supported.

H2 : Satisfaction with the fit at thighs/hips/waist is a function of the body-cathexis score for weight and importance of meeting the ideal body image for weight.

T-values in Table 3 show that body-cathexis for weight is a significant predictor of satisfaction with the fit at thighs, hips, and waist. Importance of meeting the ideal image for weight is a significant predictor of sat-

isfaction with the fit at waist. H2 is partially supported. The comparison between the direct effects of body-cathexis for weight and importance of ideal body image for weight shows that the effect of body-cathexis was much stronger than that of importance of ideal body image.

Symbolic interaction theory and social comparison theory may provide an understanding for the finding. When people are trying ready-to-wear clothing, the comparison of their body image to the current ideal body image reflected in ready-to-wear clothing may be inevitable. The fit at thighs/hips/waist in ready-to-wear clothing is related to weight area of body. If one is satisfied with the weight area of her body, she may respond to the fit at thighs/hips/waist in ready-to-wear clothing with satisfaction. LaBat and DeLong (1990) reported a significant positive relationship between body-cathexis and satisfaction with fit of apparel, especially for satisfaction with apparel fit on lower parts (e.g., waist, thighs) of the body. Hwang (1997) reported significant positive correlations between body-cathexis for weight and satisfaction with ready-to-wear for women aged 55 years and older.

H3 : Satisfaction with the fit at bust and neckline is a function of the body-cathexis score for torso and importance of meeting the ideal body image for torso.

T-values in Table 4 show that body-cathexis for torso is the only significant predictor of satisfaction with the fit at bust and neckline. The more one is satisfied with her

Table 3. Effect of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with the fit at thighs, hips, and waist in ready-to-wear

Variables	Thighs satisfaction		Hips satisfaction		Waist satisfaction	
	t-value	beta	t-value	beta	t-value	beta
Intercept	1.01	0.000	1.44	0.000	0.79	0.000
Body-cathexis for weight	8.73***	0.567	9.07***	0.581	7.31***	0.498
Importance of ideal, weight	1.47	0.095	0.87	0.056	2.36*	0.160
F value	38.27***		41.97***		26.89***	
R ²	0.31		0.33		0.24	

***p<0.001 and *p<0.05

Table 4. Effect of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with the fit at bust and neckline

Variables	Bust satisfaction		Neckline satisfaction	
	t-value	beta	t-value	beta
Intercept	1.52	0.000	5.17***	0.000
Body-cathexis for torso	8.32***	0.531	7.29***	0.483
Importance of ideal, torso	1.75	0.111	-0.46	-0.030
F value	35.77***		26.78***	
R ²	0.29		0.24	

***p<0.001

Table 5. Effect of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with the variety in ready-to-wear

Variables	t-value	beta
Intercept	1.15	0.000
Body-cathexis for height	1.43	0.110
Body-cathexis for weight	5.99***	0.484
Importance of ideal body image for height	-3.27**	-0.251
Importance of ideal body image for weight	4.72***	0.377

F(4, 172)=19.93***
R²=0.32

***p<0.001 and **p<0.01

torso area, the more she may be satisfied with fit at bust and neckline in ready-to-wear. However, there is no direct effect of importance of meeting the ideal image for torso on satisfaction with the fit at bust and neckline. H3 is partially supported.

H4 : Satisfaction with the variety in ready-to-wear is a function of the body-cathexis scores for two areas (height and weight) and importance of meeting the ideal body image for the two areas.

Table 5 shows that body-cathexis for weight and importance of meeting the ideal body image for height and weight are significant predictors of satisfaction with the variety in ready-to-wear. That is, the more one is satisfied with weight and considers meeting the ideal weight important, the more she will be satisfied with the variety in ready-to-wear. However, the more one considers meeting the ideal height important, the less she will be satisfied with the variety in ready-to-wear. H4 is partially supported.

When people are trying ready-to-wear clothing, the comparison of their body image to the current ideal body image reflected in the clothing may be inevitable. Current ideal standards for height and weight are reflected in the sizing systems and styles of ready-to-wear clothing. The more one is satisfied with weight and considers meeting the ideal weight important, the more she may be satisfied with the variety of ready-to-wear. While the importance of ideal body image for weight has a positive impact on satisfaction with the variety in ready-to-wear, the importance of ideal body image for height has a negative impact on that satisfaction. Satisfaction theory may explain the negative impact of importance of ideal body image on ready-to-wear satisfaction. According to consumer satisfaction theory, consumers tend to be dissatisfied with the products when their expectations and standards are high. If consumers consider meeting the ideal body image important, they may be dissatisfied with ready-to-wear clothing as a result of high expectations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the present research was to determine, for a sample of female college students, the effects of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear. Body-cathexis was measured for five areas of body parts: head/upper body, lower body, height, weight, and torso. Satisfaction with ready-to-wear consisted of satisfaction with the fit and variety in ready-to-wear clothing. Multiple regression was used to test the research hypotheses formulated in this study.

Results showed that the mean score for importance of ideal body image is higher than for body-cathexis, for four areas. The greatest difference is between body-cathexis for weight and importance of ideal body image for weight; among the body areas, the subjects were least satisfied with weight but considered it most important. In regard to satisfaction with the fit of ready-to-wear clothing, the subjects are generally more satisfied with the fit at bust and neck than at thighs, hips, and waist in ready-to-wear clothing. They had problems with the fit at areas related weight in ready-to-wear, and this may be due to their low body-cathexis score for weight. This finding has a managerial implication for apparel manufacturers by showing that the weight area is seen as a problem with the fit in ready-to-wear clothing.

In testing the research hypotheses, the results showed that there was a positive impact of body-cathexis for a specific body area on ready-to-wear satisfaction which is related to that body area. The effect of importance of ideal body image on ready-to-wear clothing was different in regard to different areas of body parts. Based on the findings of the study, apparel manufacturers and marketers need to understand that the societal ideal body image is reflected in ready-to-wear clothing and that, indeed, the ideal body image can affect consumers satisfaction with ready-to-wear clothing. Special concerns and action should be given to their clothing design and advertising to maximize consumers satisfaction with ready-to-wear.

The Part One of this study explored the direct effect of body-cathexis and importance of ideal body image on satisfaction with ready-to-wear. Compared to the effect of body-cathexis, that of importance of ideal body image seemed weaker and unclear; the nature of effect of importance of ideal body image needs to be investigated further. Because the direction of the effect of importance of ideal body image was ambiguous (positive or negative), the interaction effect between importance of ideal body image and body-cathexis on satisfaction with ready-to-wear may need to be explored, and the research problem will be addressed in Part Two of this study.

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