

The Interplay of Fashion Self Congruity, Self Esteem and Perceived Peer Perception in Generation Z

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Abstract

Fashion is critical to Generation Z, reflecting self-concept and social relations. This study explores the interplay of fashion self-congruity (FSC), self-esteem, and perceived peer acceptance among Gen Z. Drawing on Self-Discrepancy, Self-Congruity, Sociometer, and Symbolic Interactionism theories, it examines how discrepancies between actual and ideal fashion self shape self-esteem and how peer acceptance affects these relationships. Employing a quantitative survey method with a sample of 128 Gen Z participants, the research assesses these constructs. Results indicate that actual fashion self-congruity significantly predicts higher self-esteem, while a weak negative correlation suggests that less confident individuals may rely more on fashion self-expression. Interestingly, those who feel more accepted by peers reported lower self-esteem, potentially due to pressures of maintaining social approval. No significant link was found between FSC and perceived peer acceptance. The study enhances understanding of fashion's complex role in the psychological well-being of youth, influenced by social comparisons and external validation, informing therapeutic interventions and marketing strategies.

Keywords: Fashion Self Congruity, Self Esteem, Perceived Peer Acceptance, Generation Z, Self Discrepancy Theory

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a universal interest that extends across all the generations, but for Generation Z (born between 1997-2012) it holds a special significance (Moloney, 2022), and is a crucial element of their identity and social interaction. They are highly motivated by their self image and often use fashion as a powerful tool to express themselves (Brantemo et al., 2020). People dress in a certain way according to how they view themselves and also how they want to be viewed. They actively follow and set trends to reflect their personal and social identities. Fashion choices are deeply connected to their self-image, with aligning their style to their self-concept (Kim Johnson et al., 2014) boosting their self-esteem. A well-chosen outfit that mirrors their true self can enhance their confidence and satisfaction, while a mismatch can lead to self-doubt and discomfort. (Vingilyte, J., & Khadaroo, A. 2022)

Fashion Self Congruity :

The degree to which an individual's true fashion self is congruent with their ideal fashion self.

- True Fashion Self refers to how a person actually dresses and how their everyday clothing choices express themselves.

- **Ideal Fashion Self** This refers to how a person wishes to dress or how they dream of looking and how they want others to see them.

Self Esteem:

Self-esteem (introduced by William James, 1890) refers to the overall sense of worth or value a person has about themselves. It reflects how positively or negatively they view their own abilities and qualities.

Perceived Peer Perception:

It refers to the beliefs of an individual about how their peers view or judge them. It involves their perception of others' opinions about their behavior, appearance, or actions.

Previous studies have found that there is a significant association between fashion self congruity and being a Gen Z (Moloney, 2022). And When there is discrepancy between an individual's ideal fashion self and true fashion self, it causes a significant reduction in self esteem of the individual (Moretti, M. M., & Higgins, E. T, 1990).

The study aims to explore how fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and peer acceptance relate to one another within Generation Z. It examines how discrepancies between one's actual and ideal fashion self impact self-esteem and how peer acceptance influences this relationship providing a comprehensive view of how fashion affects the psychological well-being of young people.

Need and Significance of the Study

Fashion is a significant element in the lives of Generation Z, as compared to the older generations (Moloney, 2022) as it shapes their identity and self-expression. There are many researches on fashion self-congruity and its effects on self-esteem yet there is a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics specifically apply to Generation Z and how peer acceptance influences these relationships. Previous researches have found that actual fashion self-congruity positively correlates with self-esteem (Kim Johnson et al., 2014; Vingilyte & Khadaroo, 2022), and discrepancies between the actual and ideal fashion self affect self-esteem (Moretti & Higgins, 1980). There are only limited number of researches which explores how peer acceptance moderates these relationships. This study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the interplay of fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and peer acceptance among Generation Z, thus providing a nuanced understanding of how fashion impacts their psychological well-being.

The investigation of how peer acceptance mediates this relationship, can help us better grasp the social forces that affect self-esteem in Generation Z.

The findings will give a fresh perspective on the mental processes that drive fashion-related actions and help researchers in social psychology gain insight into how fashion has an influence on self-esteem, self-perception, and self-concept. The insights from the study can also help to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks such as Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) and practical applications in fashion psychology and social support.

Also, it can facilitate mental health experts to create targeted therapeutic approaches to assist young adults to handle the emotional challenges linked to fashion and peer perception.

Additionally, the findings will provide valuable insights for fashion brands to align their marketing strategies with Generation Z's self-image and emotional needs. It will also offers educators guidance for developing programs aimed at fostering positive self-esteem and self-acceptance among young adults.

Review of Literature

In the study titled "Examining the Influence of Fashion on Psychological Well-Being: Investigating the Correlation between Apparel Selections, Self Confidence, and Mental Health" by Suganya S., Rajamani K., and S. Lakshmi Buvanesweri (2024) the aim was to explore the relationship between actual and ideal fashion self-esteem and their influence on consumer behavior and fashion consciousness in the Indian context. Using a sample of 513 consumers, the study employed a quantitative survey to assess the constructs of actual fashion self-esteem, ideal fashion self-esteem, fashion consciousness, and status consumption. The results revealed that ideal fashion self-congruity had a more significant impact than actual fashion self-esteem in predicting fashion consciousness and status consumption. Moreover, fashion consciousness acted as a mediator in the relationship between ideal fashion self-esteem and status consumption. The study highlights the importance of the ideal self in the decision-making process, offering crucial insights for marketers in the fashion industry.

In the study titled "You Are What You Wear: Fashion Self-Congruity and its Relationship with Self-Esteem in Generation Z and Millennial Consumers" by Niamh Moloney in 2022 the aim was to examine the relationship between actual, ideal, and ideal-social fashion self-congruity and self-esteem among Gen Z and millennial participants. Using a sample of 120 participants, an online survey was conducted to measure self-esteem and fashion self-congruity. The results indicated that actual fashion self-congruity (AFSC) significantly predicted higher self-esteem, especially among Gen Z, while ideal and ideal-social self-congruity did not show the same effect. This study highlights the importance of actual fashion self-congruity in enhancing self-esteem, particularly for Gen Z, offering valuable insights for both fashion psychology and branding.

In the study titled "Personal Clothing Style and Self-Concept: Embracing the True, the Ideal, and the Creative Self" by Justina Vingilyte and Ameerah Khadaroo (2022), the aim was to explore how women perceive and experience their personal clothing style and its connection to their self-concept from an individual and subjective perspective. Using a homogeneous sample of seven women, the researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to uncover the nuances of personal clothing style. The findings revealed that personal clothing style embodies the true self, represents the ideal self, and expresses the creative self. Key elements of personal clothing style include self-knowledge, consistency, comfort, and the actualization of desired self-conceptions. Although the study does not explicitly measure self-esteem, it suggests that personal clothing style significantly influences self-esteem by aligning with one's authentic identity, ideal self, and creative potential. The study explores how personal style serves as a medium for self-expression and self-conceptualization, thereby contributing to overall self-esteem through the reflection and realization of personal identity and ideals.

In the study titled "Sustainable Conscious Fashion Consumption from the Perspective of Generation Z" by Brantemo, Carlstedt, & Wilhelmsson (2020), the aim was to explore Generation Z's perceptions and motivations toward sustainable fashion consumption. Through a qualitative, deductive approach using semi-structured interviews, the researchers gathered insights on how psychological factors, such as self-image and cognitive dissonance, influence sustainable fashion decisions. The findings revealed that Generation Z is primarily motivated by self-image—seeking to fit in or stand out—when purchasing sustainable apparel. Additionally, they expressed concern for sustainability but felt hindered by a lack of information from retailers, preventing fully informed sustainable fashion choices. The study emphasizes the need for clearer communication from fashion retailers to facilitate sustainable decision-making among

Generation Z consumers.

In the meta-analysis titled "The Link Between Self-Esteem and Social Relationships: A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies" by Michelle A. Harris and Ulrich Orth(2020), the aim was to examine the reciprocal effects of social relationships on self-esteem and vice versa, using longitudinal data to assess how these constructs influence each other over time. The analysis included 48 samples with 46,231 participants to explore the impact of social relationships on self-esteem, and 35 samples with 21,995 participants to examine the effect of self-esteem on social relationships. The results revealed that social relationships and self-esteem reciprocally predict each other with similar effect sizes ($\beta = .08$ in both directions). Moderator analyses showed that the effects were consistent across different sample characteristics, although the impact of self-esteem on relationships was stronger for general relationships and self-reported data. The study supports the notion of a positive feedback loop between social relationships and self-esteem throughout the lifespan, reflecting a reciprocal influence between these constructs.

The study titled "Sociometric popularity, Perceived peer support and self concept in adolescence" conducted by Arantza Fernández-Zabala, Estibaliz Ramos-Díaz, Arantzazu Rodríguez-Fernández, and Juan L. Núñez in 2020 looked at how peer support affects the link between sociometric popularity and general self-concept in teens. The researchers based their work on sociometer theory and focused on secondary school students. They picked 676 students at random from the Basque Country, aged 12 to 18. These students filled out three surveys: the Sociometric Questionnaire (SOCIOMET), the Family and Friends Support Questionnaire (AFA-R), and the Dimensional Self-concept Questionnaire (AUDIM-33). To analyze the connections between these factors, the team used structural equation modeling. They found that sociometric popularity has a positive impact on self-concept through the social support teens think they get from their peers. This backs up what sociometer theory says about how we see ourselves. The study shows why it's key to build good peer relationships to boost self-concept. This could help improve student well-being and social dynamics in schools. The research points out how interactions with peers and their support shape self-concept. This idea could link up with studies on how fashion self-congruity and peer acceptance influence self-esteem.

In the study titled "Perceived Peer Support, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem Among Boarding School Students" by Nurul Hidayah and Mohammad Sahari Nordin (2020), the objective was to examine the relationship between perceived peer support, autonomy, and self-esteem among boarding school students. The study involved 131 students from two selected boarding schools who completed a quantitative survey using established questionnaires developed by Yueming Jia et al. (2009) and Way et al. (2007). Despite high levels of perceived peer support and autonomy reported by the students, the study found no significant correlation between these factors and self-esteem. This finding contrasts with previous research suggesting that peer interactions and autonomy contribute to self-esteem and mental well-being. The results highlight the need for further investigation into how different aspects of social support and autonomy impact self-esteem in boarding school settings, offering insights for educators and psychologists working with boarding school populations. This study focuses on exploration of peer support and autonomy as factors influencing self-esteem, suggesting that while peer relationships are critical, their impact on self-esteem might be moderated by other variables.

In the review titled "Dress, Body, and Self: Research in the Social Psychology of Dress." by Kim Johnson, Sharron J. Lennon, and Nancy Rudd in 2014, they take a close look at main research areas in the social psychology of dress. The review focuses on two main topics: (1) how dress as a stimulus affects others' opinions, self-opinions, and personal actions, and (2) how dress relates to the body and the self. The

authors dig into different theories used in these research areas, sum up key findings, and suggest new research ideas. This review gives a snapshot of new topics and important scholarly work. It's a useful tool for college and grad students, and professors in this field. It shows how clothes shape social views and self-image, which helps us understand how fashion self-match and self-worth connect. The review's insights on how clothes affect self-view and social interactions could guide research on fashion self-match when looking at how clothes impact self-worth and friend approval.

In the study titled “Peer Acceptance Protects Global Self-Esteem from Negative Effects of Low Closeness to Parents During Adolescence and Early Adulthood” by Marianne Skogbrott Birkeland, Kyrre Breivik, and Bente Wold(2014), the aim was to explore whether peer acceptance can mitigate the adverse effects of having a distant relationship with parents on adolescents' global self-esteem. The longitudinal study followed 1,090 Norwegian adolescents aged 13 to 23 and employed a quadratic latent growth curve model to analyze the influence of peer acceptance and parental closeness on self-esteem. The results revealed that peer acceptance generally protects and stabilizes global self-esteem across various ages, even when parental closeness is low. This study underscores the significant role of peer acceptance in maintaining global self-esteem, particularly in contexts where familial relationships may be strained. This finding highlights the critical protective function of peer relationships in bolstering self-esteem, which could be an important factor in understanding how fashion self-congruity influences self-esteem and peer acceptance among different demographics.

In the study titled "Influence of collective self-esteem on fashion clothing involvement among Indian Women by Arpita Khare, Ankita Mishra, and Ceeba Parveen in 2012, the aim was to examine how collective self-esteem, age, income, marital status, and education influence Indian women's engagement with fashion clothing. The sample population included 397 Indian women from offices, colleges, and malls across five cities. Self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data on collective self-esteem and fashion involvement. The findings revealed that fashion clothing involvement is significantly affected by age, the importance of fashion to personal identity, and public esteem. Specifically, younger women showed higher involvement in fashion, likely due to evolving trends and interests. Women who viewed fashion as integral to their identity and those who perceived positive public judgment of their fashion choices were also more engaged in fashion clothing. The study's limitations include a predominantly younger sample and a lack of differentiation between various types of women, suggesting future research could explore differences between working and non-working women. The study focuses on exploration of how collective self-esteem and public perception impact fashion involvement, aligning with the broader investigation into how fashion self-congruity and peer acceptance influence self-esteem and engagement with fashion.

In the study titled "Perceived social support and self-esteem in adolescence" conducted by Ebru Ikiz and Firdevs Savi cakar in 2012, the aim was to explore the relationship between perceived social support and self-esteem among adolescents. The sample included 257 adolescents from various high schools in Burdur, Turkey. Social Support Appraisals Scale for Children and Adolescents was used alongside the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory Short Form. The findings showed a clear positive link between how much social support teens felt they had and their levels of self-esteem. Boys and girls differed in how they saw support from friends and teachers, but their self-esteem levels were about the same. This research sheds light on how social support can boost self-esteem in the teenage years.

In the study titled “Relating Self-Discrepancy to Self-Esteem: The Contribution of Discrepancy Beyond Actual-Self Ratings” by M. Moretti and E. Tory Higgins (1990), the researchers aimed to examine how

discrepancies between actual-self and ideal-self representations relate to self-esteem, beyond the influence of actual-self ratings. The study utilized both nomothetic and idiographic measures to assess actual-ideal discrepancies. The nomothetic measure used a standard set of personality characteristics, while the idiographic measure was based on self-nominated attributes. The findings revealed that while discrepancies measured using the nomothetic approach did not significantly predict self-esteem when actual-self ratings were controlled, discrepancies measured idiographically were significantly related to self-esteem even after accounting for the positivity of actual-self attributes. Positive actual-self attributes that align with the ideal-self were associated with higher self-esteem, while negative actual-self attributes that diverged from the ideal-self were linked to lower self-esteem. This study emphasizes the value of an idiographic approach to understanding self-discrepancy and its impact on self-esteem, suggesting that personalized assessments of self-discrepancy provide more meaningful insights into self-esteem than standardized measures. The study focuses on exploration of self-discrepancy, highlighting how personalized self-concept evaluations can significantly impact self-esteem, potentially informing how fashion self-congruity might affect self-esteem.

In the study titled “Perceived Fashion Risk and Self-Esteem of Males and Females” by Geitel Winakor, Bernetta Canton, and Leroy Wolins (1980), the aim was to examine how individuals perceive fashion risk in relation to their self-esteem. The researchers developed a questionnaire to measure general self-esteem, self-esteem related to clothing, and perceived fashion risk, among other factors. The study involved 400 university students (equal numbers of males and females) and revealed distinct patterns in responses between the sexes. For females, 11 factors were identified, with fashion interest and self-esteem/social approval forming separate, unrelated clusters. For males, 8 factors were derived, with fashion risk intertwined with other types of risk, and no direct relationship found between fashion risk and self-esteem. These findings highlight that for females, fashion interest and self-esteem are discrete constructs, while for males, fashion risk is integrated with other risk perceptions and does not directly impact self-esteem. This study’s relevance to the research on "Interplay of Fashion Self-Congruity, Self-Esteem, and Peer Acceptance" lies in its exploration of how fashion perceptions influence self-esteem differently across genders. It suggests that fashion self-congruity may interact with self-esteem and peer acceptance in complex ways, influenced by individual differences in fashion risk perception.

Method

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between fashion self-congruity and self-esteem in Generation Z.
2. To examine the relationship between self esteem and peer acceptance in Generation Z.
3. To evaluate how peer acceptance affects the relationship between fashion self-congruity and self-esteem.

Variables and Operational Definitions

Fashion self congruity

It refers to the degree to which an individual’s actual fashion align with their ideal fashion self. It shows the relationship between how someone actually dresses and the style they ideally want to be dressed up in. If there's congruence between an individual's real self and the self they want to project, it can boost their confidence and alter how they view themselves.

Self Esteem

It refers to the overall sense of value an individuals hold of themselves. In this study , self esteem measures how an individual evaluate themselves, their qualities, abilities and their worth. If the self esteem is higher it means they have a positive self perception and if the self esteem is low it indicates that the person has feelings of self doubt or inadequacy.

Perceived peer perception

It refers to an individual's belief about how their peers view or perceive them. In this study, perceived peer perception captures how an individual perceives themselves being accepted by their peers. The perception of an individual regarding them being accepted by their peers often influences self esteem and their social standing while fashion choice of an individual often serve as a means of gaining peer validation.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There is no significant impact of Fashion Self-Congruity on Self-Esteem among Gen Z.
- **H02:** There is no significant impact of Peer Acceptance on Self-Esteem.
- **H03:** Peer Acceptance does not affect the relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity and Self Esteem.
- **H04:** Perceived Peer Acceptance mediates the relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity and Self-Esteem.

Sample

This study will focus on Gen Z people between 18 and 27 years old. The study aims to include 128 participants to ensure the statistics are reliable. Demographic data such as gender, educational background, and socioeconomic status will be recorded to provide context for the findings. The research adopted a convenience sampling method to find participants. Inclusion criteria included being between the ages of 18 and 60 years old, irrespective of gender, working status, or occupation. Diverse educational background and professional profiles were considered among participants to reflect a wide spectrum of mental health beliefs, attitudes toward seeking help, social support, mental toughness, and self stigma

Inclusion Criteria

- The participant must belong to Generation Z
- The age of the participant must be 18-27 years old.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals who cannot comprehend English.
- Foreign Nationals
- Individuals with a diagnosed mental health condition.

Tools for the Study

Fashion Self Congruity Scale (Sirgy ,1982)

The Fashion Self-Congruity Scale is used to assess the alignment between an individual's actual fashion self and their ideal fashion self. The scale includes 9 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." In a study conducted by Park and Rabolt (2009), the scale

demonstrated good psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. The construct validity of the scale was supported through significant correlations with identity expression and self-esteem. In another study, the scale showed criterion validity by predicting consumer behavior such as brand attachment and purchase intention (Khare et al., 2011).

Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a 10-item self-report measure developed by Rosenberg (1965) to assess global self-worth. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The scale includes both positively and negatively worded items. The RSES has demonstrated good psychometric properties, with internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 across diverse populations (Gray-Little et al., 1997). Test-retest reliability values are typically above 0.85. The scale shows strong construct validity through correlations with depression, anxiety, and self-concept clarity, and criterion validity through associations with psychological well-being, academic performance, and social functioning (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Perceived Acceptance Scale: The Perceived Acceptance Scale (Brock et al. (1998)) It was developed by Brock et al. (1998) to assess individuals' perceptions of being accepted across various relational domains. The scale provides perceived acceptance scores for four specific categories: friends, family, mother, and father. It consists of 44 items rated on a 5 point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.94 across subscales. Test-retest reliability over a two-week interval ranged from 0.80 to 0.86. Factor analysis supported the multidimensional structure of the scale, confirming its construct validity. Convergent validity was demonstrated through significant correlations with self-esteem, social competence, and loneliness (Brock et al., 1998).

Research Design and Statistical Technique

The present study employs a correlational research design to examine the relationships between fashion self-congruity relates to self-esteem and peer acceptance among Gen Z members. The study adopts a quantitative research approach, utilizing structured surveys or standardized questionnaires to collect numerical data.

These descriptive statistics attempt to provide a clear picture of the central tendency and variability in terms of responses of Generation Z members regarding their fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and perceived peer perception. The mean reflects typical trends, and the median offers a stable central measure, especially with potential outliers. Mode points out the most common responses, and standard deviation indicates the dispersion of data. Minimum and maximum values show extremes. Collectively, these figures offer a broad overview of the influence of fashion on self-esteem and peer opinion in Generation Z.

The study also uses inferential statistical techniques like linear regression, correlation, and moderation/mediation analysis are used to explore relationships between key variables and test hypotheses. Correlation analysis evaluates the strength and direction of relationships, whereas linear regression measures the impact of independent variables on self-esteem. P-values indicate statistical significance, which is used to confirm or refute hypotheses. Overall, these analyses offer a solid framework for understanding the dynamics between self-esteem, peer acceptance, and fashion self-congruity among Generation Z.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Actual Fashion Self Congruity, Ideal Self Fashion Self Congruity, Ideal Fashion Self Congruity, Fashion Self Congruity, Total Self-Esteem, and Total Perceived Acceptance Scale

Descriptives

	AFSC	ISFSC	IFSC	FSC	TOTAL SELF ESTEEM	TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE
N	128	128	128	128	128	128
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.58	3.48	3.35	0.648	21.2	40.2
Median	3.50	3.50	3.33	0.500	22.0	40.0
Standard deviation	0.715	0.795	0.876	0.525	5.43	6.55
Minimum	1.00	1.50	1.33	0.00	10	23
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	2.33	34	60

Table 1 represents descriptive data for the major study variables-Total Perceived Acceptance Scale, Total Self-Esteem, Actual Fashion Self Congruity, Fashion Self Congruity, Ideal Self Fashion Self Congruity, Ideal Fashion Self Congruity, Fashion Self Congruity, and others. The sample consists of 128 participants, and all of the variables have complete data. The mean scores indicate that Actual Fashion Self Congruity ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.715$) and Ideal Self Fashion Self Congruity ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.795$) are similar, suggesting comparable levels across these categories. In a similar vein, Ideal Fashion Self Congruity and Fashion Self Congruity have different functional self-concepts; the former has a mean of 3.35 ($SD = 0.876$), while the latter has a lower mean of 0.648 ($SD = 0.525$).

With a median score of 22.0 and a total mean score of 21.2 ($SD = 5.43$), the participants' self-esteem was determined to be moderate. A wide range of perceived acceptance is reflected in the Total Perceived Acceptance Scale, which has a mean of 40.2 ($SD = 6.55$), a minimum value of 23, and a maximum value of 60. The standard deviations of the responses show that there are significant individual variances in perceived acceptance and self-esteem.

Overall, these descriptive statistics offer a preliminary comprehension of the data's distribution and primary tendencies, which will guide further analysis and interpretations.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Total Perceived Acceptance Scale, Total Self-Esteem, and Fashion Self-Congruity

Correlation Matrix									
			TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE		TOTAL SELF ESTEEM		FSC		
TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE	Pearson's r		—						
	df		—						
	p-value		—						
TOTAL SELF ESTEEM	Pearson's r		-0.466	***	—				
	df		126		—				
	p-value		< .001		—				
FSC	Pearson's r		0.144		-0.207	*	—		
	df		126		126		—		
	p-value		0.104		0.019		—		
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$									

The correlation analysis in Table 2 shows a substantial negative relationship between perceived peer acceptability and self-esteem ($r = -0.466$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that those who feel more accepted by their peers are more likely to have lower self-esteem. This finding is rather contradictory since it is often believed that greater social acceptance increases self-esteem. This could be explained by the fact that those whose feeling of worth is mostly derived from external approval may experience greater pressure to maintain social acceptance and more self-doubt, both of which diminish self-esteem. This supports the Self-Discrepancy Theory, which holds that discrepancies between an individual's perception of themselves and their perceived social standards may lead to low self-esteem.

Additionally, it was found that there was a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between FSC and self-esteem ($r = -0.207$, $p = 0.019$), suggesting that less confident people may also be more fashion self-congruent. This could imply that when a person's fashion choices align with their self-concept, their sense of self-worth is not necessarily enhanced. It might reflect underlying pressures to conform to fashion standards rather than boosting confidence, which could exacerbate self-doubt.

According to the result, there is no link between FSC and perceived peer acceptance ($r = 0.144$, $p = 0.104$) which indicates that a person's fashion choices don't really affect how accepted they feel by their friends. It might mean that even though fashion can express who you are, it's not the main thing that makes this group feel accepted.

Overall, these results show that while FSC and self-esteem often go hand in hand, the relationship between them is complex. How people compare themselves to others social rules, and outside approval all play a part. To get a better grip on what's going on future research should look into other factors like how people see their own bodies or how much they use social media.

Table 3: Linear Regression Model Fit Measures for Fashion Self-Congruity and Self-Esteem

Model Fit Measures					
Model		R		R ²	
1		0.207		0.0429	

Note. Models estimated using sample size of N=128

Table 4 : Omnibus ANOVA Test for Fashion Self-Congruity

Omnibus ANOVA Test					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
FSC	161	1	160.6	5.64	0.019
Residuals	3588	126	28.5		

Note. Type 3 sum of squares

Table 5: Model Coefficients for Total Self-Esteem

Model Coefficients - TOTAL SELF ESTEEM									
Predictor		Estimate		SE		t		p	
Intercept		22.59		0.751		30.08		< .001	
FSC		-2.14		0.901		-2.38		0.019	

Table 6: Linear Regression Model Fit Measures for Perceived Peer Acceptance and Self-Esteem

Model Fit Measures					
Model		R		R ²	
1		0.466		0.217	

Model Fit Measures						
Model		R		R²		
Table 7: Omnibus ANOVA Test for Perceived Peer Acceptance Omnibus ANOVA Test						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE		813	1	813.1	34.9	< .001
Residuals		2936	126	23.3		
Note. Type 3 sum of squares						

Table 8 : Model Coefficients for Total Self-Esteem with Perceived Peer Acceptance									
Model Coefficients - TOTAL SELF ESTEEM									
Predictor			Estimate		SE		t		p
Intercept			36.745		2.6652		13.79		< .001
TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE			-0.387		0.0654		-5.91		< .001

Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC) and Self-Esteem have a negative relationship, according to the regression analysis result in Table 5 ($B = -2.14$, $p = 0.019$). According to this, those who have more fashion-related discrepancies between their ideal and actual selves also tend to have lower self-esteem. The fact that the entire model (Table 4) only explained 4.29% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.0429$) demonstrated a relatively weak effect.

Self-esteem was more strongly predicted by perceived peer acceptance ($B = -0.387$, $p < 0.001$) (Table 7). This demonstrates how important social approval is in forming a person's identity.

With 21.7% of the variance explained by the model for Perceived Peer Acceptance predicting Self-Esteem (Table 6), it was a substantially stronger predictor than FSC ($R^2 = 0.217$).

Table 9: Moderation Estimates for the Interaction Between Fashion Self-Congruity and Perceived Peer Acceptance on Self-Esteem

Moderation Estimates									
			Estimate		SE		Z		p
FSC			-1.245		0.8072		-1.54		0.123

Moderation Estimates							
		Estimate		SE		Z	p
TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE		-0.354		0.0635		-5.58	< .001
FSC * TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE		-0.175		0.1092		-1.61	0.108

According to Table 9, there was no statistically significant relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity and Perceived Peer Acceptance in predicting Self-Esteem ($B = -0.175$, $SE = 0.1092$, $p = 0.108$). This implies that the association between FSC and self-esteem is not substantially moderated by perceived peer acceptance.

These results suggest that other psychological or social factors may be impacting this relationship, which runs counter to the original premise that peer validation would increase the impact of Fashion Self Congruity on self-esteem.

This shows that the impact of Fashion Self Congruity on self-esteem is not much changed by peer acceptance, suggesting that other factors like social media validation, intrinsic self-perception, or personal identity stability may have an impact on self-esteem.

Table 10: Path Estimates for Mediation Analysis of Fashion Self-Congruity, Perceived Peer Acceptance, and Self-Esteem

Path Estimates													
						Estimate		SE		Z		p	
FSC			→	TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE			1.800		1.0898		1.65		0.099
TOTAL PERCIEVED ACCEPTANCE SCALE			→	TOTAL SELF ESTEEM			-0.369		0.0648		-5.70		< .001
FSC			→	TOTAL SELF ESTEEM			-1.476		0.8071		-1.83		0.067

The indirect effect of Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC) on self-esteem through perceived peer acceptance was not statistically significant, as shown by the mediation analysis results in Table 10 (Estimate = -0.665, $SE = 0.419$, $Z = -1.59$, $p = 0.113$). This suggests that perceived peer acceptability does not act as a mediator in the relationship between FSC and self-esteem.

However, Table 10 (Path Estimates) shows that the direct effect of FSC on self-esteem was only marginally significant (Estimate = -1.476, $SE = 0.807$, $Z = -1.83$, $p = 0.067$). This suggests that even in the absence of peer affirmation, FSC has an impact on self-esteem.

Additionally, the overall effect of Fashion Self Congruity on self-esteem was statistically significant (Estimate = -2.141, SE = 0.894, Z = -2.39, p = 0.017). This suggests that those with a greater self-discrepancy in their fashion identity also tend to have lower self-esteem. This bolsters the notion that internalised self-perception is a more important component of self-esteem than external peer approval. Overall, the results indicate that self-esteem, but not functional self-concept, is a significant predictor of perceived acceptance.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC), Self-Esteem, and Perceived Peer Acceptance in Generation Z. The results confirm the rejection of null hypotheses regarding the predictive roles of peer acceptance and fashion self-congruity on self-esteem while also demonstrating that peer acceptance does not significantly moderate or mediate these relationships.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant impact of Fashion Self-Congruity on Self-Esteem among Gen Z. Self-Esteem and Fashion Self-Congruity showed a significant predictive impact ($\beta = -2.14$, $p = 0.019$, $R^2 = 0.0429$) and a weak negative connection ($r = -0.207$, $p = 0.019$). It would appear from this that those who have more differences between their real and ideal selves have lower self-esteem. However, when compared to peer acceptance, the effect of FSC is quite small, accounting for only 4.29% of the variance in self-esteem.

The findings align with Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) which suggests that discrepancies between the actual self and the ideal self contribute to emotional distress, including reduced self-esteem. Further, indicating that the greater the difference between actual and ideal fashion identity, the more negative the impact on self-esteem. Fashion self-congruity, on the other hand, had a lesser predictive effect than peer acceptance, which implies that social approbation shapes self-esteem more strongly than self-perceived fashion identity.

Moloney's (2022) research supports this assertion by showing that self-esteem, especially among Generation Z, is significantly predicted by actual fashion self-congruity.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant impact of Peer Acceptance on Self-Esteem.

The results of the study contradicts this hypothesis stating that there is a significant negative relationship between Perceived Peer Acceptance and Self-Esteem ($\beta = -0.387$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.217$, $r = -0.466$). Now, this suggests that more an individual is accepted by peers their self esteem is low.

The result aligns with Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which suggests that self-esteem functions as a gauge of social inclusion. Although higher self esteem is associated with higher peer acceptance, sometimes people are more into being accepted by others and getting social validation or approval which might lower their self esteem. Sometimes when social approval becomes overwhelming or conditional, it may contribute to insecurity rather than confidence.

The findings also aligns with Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934) which suggests that self-concept is shaped by social interactions and how individuals believe they are perceived by others. When an individual is highly accepted by their peers they tend to feel the pressure to conform with the group every time in order to maintain their image while supressing their true selves this loss of authenticity can lead to the individual feeling alienated which inturn decreases their self esteem.

The Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) supports these findings by highlighting the emotional suffering that arises when people perceive a difference between their ideal degree of acceptance and their

actual peer acceptance. If someone is widely accepted yet feels that they don't belong or need to act differently to maintain that acceptability, they may experience internal conflict, self-doubt, and ultimately low self-esteem. This suggests that perceived peer acceptability and high self-worth are not always associated, especially when people feel that acceptance is conditional or comes at the price of their uniqueness.

Hypothesis 3: Peer Acceptance does not affect the relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity and Self-Esteem.

The moderation results ($B = -0.175$, $p = 0.108$) show that relationship between Fashion self congruity and Perceived Peer Acceptance was not statistically significant. This implies that the impact of fashion self-congruity on self-esteem is not substantially changed by peer acceptance.

According to symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), people build their sense of who they are from their interactions with other people and the meanings they ascribe to social symbols such as clothing. We would anticipate that people with lower FSC would be more sensitive to peer validation if peer acceptance had a moderating effect. The results, however, show that although peer acceptance has a direct impact on self-esteem, the relationship between FSC and self-esteem is not substantially moderated by it.

Peer support affects self-concept but does not always moderate other identity-related factors, according to research by Fernández-Zabala et al. (2020).

Hypothesis 4: Perceived Peer Acceptance mediates the relationship between Fashion Self-Congruity and Self-Esteem.

According to the findings of the mediation analysis, there was no statistically significant indirect impact of FSC on self-esteem through perceived peer acceptance (Estimate = -0.665 , $p = 0.113$). Peer acceptance does not mediate the relationship between fashion self-congruity and self-esteem, but the overall effect of FSC on self-esteem was significant (Estimate = -2.141 , $p = 0.017$). People who experience differences between their ideal and real selves may use cognitive coping mechanisms to lessen their discomfort, according to Festinger's (1957) Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Our results, however, show that peer acceptance does not mediate this relationship, indicating that psychological distress resulting from self-incongruity functions independently of social validation.

Similar findings were reported in studies by Skogbrott Birkeland et al. (2013), showing that although self-congruity affects self-esteem, this effect is not always mediated by outside validation.

Summary

This dissertation explores the fascinating relationship between fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and while also exploring how Generation Z perceive themselves in terms of being accepted by their peers. The study also suggests that for this generation, fashion isn't just about clothes—it's a vital way to express themselves and connect socially, shaping how they see themselves and interact with others. The research looks at how the gap between someone's actual fashion self (the way they currently dress) and their ideal fashion self (the way they wish to dress) affects their self-esteem. It also considers how the acceptance they feel from their peers influences this dynamic. With the help of theoretical frameworks like Self-Discrepancy, Self-Congruity, Sociometer, and Symbolic Interactionism, the study aims to uncover how these differences in fashion self-concept impact self-esteem and how peer acceptance can either strengthen or weaken these effects for Generation Z. The hypothesis is that both fashion self-congruity and peer acceptance will have a significant impact on self-esteem, with peer acceptance acting as a key factor in the connection between fashion alignment and self-worth.

Implications

The results of this research have important implications for fashion marketers and fashion brands, mental health practitioners, and teachers. Since discrepancies between people's ideal and actual selves are self-esteem damaging, fashion brands and marketers ought to prioritize promoting authentic expression of oneself through fashion, rather than projecting unattainable or impossible ideals. Fashion advertisements should encourage individuals to embrace who they are and strive for clothing reflective of themselves. Mental health clinicians must consider how perceived peer acceptance affects the self-esteem of youth. Therapeutic interventions must encompass methods for youth to manage pressure from others, learn healthy strategies for coping with pressure, and establish self-worth independent of external approval. Lastly, awareness campaigns led by brands can advocate that authentic value lies in internal qualities and individuality rather than adhering to external expectations or external validation. In executing these strategies, fashion brands, mental health practitioners, and educators can play a part toward creating a better environment for Generation Z to strengthen their sense of self-esteem.

Limitations

Although this research gives an understanding to the relationship between fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and peer-perceived view among Generation Z, there are some limitations in the study.

The sample size and demographic focus of the study on Generation Z, although a strength in what is known about this specific generation, restrict the generalizability of the results to older generations and culturally diverse groups. When it comes to fashion and its effect on self-esteem there can be variance based on factors like age and culture of the individuals.

Additionally, the use of self-report methods, provides a possibility for response bias. Respondents might give the answers that they think are socially more acceptable, potentially contaminating the results. Although the research employs existing theories and statistical tests to investigate these relationships, it is important to recognize the difficulties in quantifying abstract concepts such as fashion self-congruity, self-esteem, and peer acceptance.

Suggestions for Future Researches

To build upon the findings of this dissertation and develop a more thorough understanding of the complex relationships between fashion, self-esteem, and peer perception, several avenues for future research should be considered. One critical area is the exploration of social media's impact on fashion self-congruity. Social media platforms significantly shape fashion trends, self-presentation, and peer interactions, especially for Generation Z. Investigating how exposure to social media influences the relationship between an individual's online image, fashion choices, and overall self-esteem would offer valuable insights into the digital age's influence on self-perception. Another important aspect that can be explored is the gender-based variations in the relationships between fashion self-congruity, peer acceptance, and self-esteem as most probably males and females are affected or influenced differently by societal norms and expectations regarding fashion.

To understand the long-term psychological effects of fashion self-congruity and peer acceptance, longitudinal studies are required that can track individuals over time and allows researchers to examine how these factors influence self-esteem as individuals navigate different life stages and social contexts, offering a more nuanced understanding of fashion's sustained impact on psychological well-being.

Ethics Followed

The study followed the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of participants throughout the research process. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights before participation. They were required to give informed consent voluntarily, ensuring they understood their role in the research. Participants' personal information was kept confidential, and their responses were anonymized to protect their identities. Data was stored securely and used only for research purposes. They were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences or need for justification. The study ensured that participants were not exposed to any physical or psychological harm. The research questions and procedures were designed to minimize discomfort or distress. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied without discrimination, ensuring ethical recruitment and fair treatment of all participants. After filling of the form, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. Resources for mental health support were provided if needed. By adhering to these APA ethical principles, the study-maintained integrity, respect for participants, and scientific rigor.

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