Clothing Preferences of College Students: What Factors Matter?

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Abstract A survey research design was used to examine factors impacting undergraduate students' (n= 71) clothing choices. In this study, factors influencing clothing choices were mood, personal style, their desire to feel comfortable, whether or not they had to make a presentation during the class session, and the weather. Generally, female students had a stronger perception of mood as influencing their outfit choices. A discussion and suggestions for further research are provided.

Index Terms— **clothing preferences, undergraduate students, mood**

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has indicated that individuals' choice of clothing is associated with their self-concept, self-esteem, self-expression, personality, body, and mood (e.g. Francis, 2011; Kwon, 1991, 1994; Moody, & Sinha, 2010; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Trautman, Worthy, & Lokken, 2007). For example, Francis (2011) interviewed several women, posing questions about how their attire affects their mood and attitudes in everyday life. The interviewees reported that they felt a sense of power depending on their clothing and to them clothing is a way of expressing who you are. Kwon (1991) reported that clothing practices can be used to boost one's self-concept, especially if they have negative perception about themselves. Moreover, the findings of research by Kwon (1994) implied that clothing practices are "a very personal and emotional issue to an individual and a very important means to define, refine or enhance one's self-esteem" (p. 137).

Trautman, Worthy, and Lokken (2007) stated that women who were less satisfied with their bodies and had greater disordered eating behaviors were found to be more likely to engage in clothing-related appearance-management behaviors, including wearing apparel to camouflage their bodies, avoiding revealing, brightly colored, or tightly-fitting clothing. Similarly, Kang, Johnson, and Kim (2013) asserted that undergraduate female students tended to select clothing based on how they could camouflage flaws in appearance and provide

assurance as well as fashionability and individuality. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) interviewed thirty-eight young individuals and found that their clothing choices were closely tied with their self-concept and how they expressed themselves while making judgments about others. Their research findings also yielded that clothing influenced one's confidence.

Gbadamosi (2012) suggested that weather condition, social and personal factors, and religion impact clothing acculturation among women. Essentially, the study showed that clothing acculturation among these women was influenced by of the following interconnected factors: weather condition, social factors, religion, and personal factors. Subhani, Syed, and Osman (2011) investigated the relationship between new articles of clothing and the mood of an individual and reported that a new item of clothing made an individual feel happy and hence prompted positive mood.

Moody and Sinha (2010) explored the relationship among clothing style, preferences, personality factors, emotions, and mood. They administered two sets of questionnaires to the female participants to examine emotion, mood, and personality before and after they tried on eight sets of clothing of various styles. The results suggested that mood was a significant predictor of preference, while personality was a moderate factor.

The purpose of this research is threefold: to examine (1) whether undergraduate students believe mood was influential in their clothing preferences, (2) gender differences in perceptions of mood as a factor in clothing

choices, and (3) other factors influencing college students' clothing choices.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants (N=71) were undergraduate students ranging in age from 19 to 58 years. 24 (33.8 %) identified themselves as male and 44 (61.9 %) identified themselves as female. 3 (4.3%) students failed to report their gender in the survey. Of the 71 students, 19 (26.8%) were freshmen, 22 (31 %) were sophomores, 13 (18.3 %) were juniors, and 16 (22.5 %) were seniors. 1 (1.14 %) student failed to report their academic classification.

Materials

A survey was designed by the researchers that consisted of 2 parts. Part 1 consisted of items assessing demographic information such as students' academic classification (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior), gender, academic major, and style of attire (professional, semi-formal, business casual, and campus casual). Part 2 consisted of 20 items assessing factors that influence which outfit to wear to classrooms such as "I choose my outfit according to other students in the classroom", " I choose my outfit according to other students in the classroom", "My academic level affects what I wear to class", "I dress to make an impression to my fellow students", "My attitude is shown in what I wear", "My mood is influential in my clothing choices for the day The weather affects what I choose to wear", "I dress professionally when I feel sad so I can feel better", "I get dressed as a desire to be comfortable", "I like to dress up when I have a presentation", "I dress professionally to class to make an impression to the professor", and "I choose my outfit according to my own personal style". The undergraduate students were instructed to respond to the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

Procedures

Faculty teaching classes in the University's College of Education were contacted through email and telephone for permission to recruit students from their regularly scheduled class meetings. Upon the professors' approval, researchers visited the classes, explained the scope of the research to the students, and asked for their participation. The students who agreed to participate met with the researchers outside of the classroom at an arranged time, signed the informed consent document, and completed the survey.

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses suggest that age, attitude, and concerns regarding others' impression had no impact on the students' clothing preference. To examine whether undergraduate students believed that mood was influential in their clothing preferences, data were transformed to percent max, with a possible range of 0 % to 100%. The results suggested that 70 % of the students reported mood to be very influential in their clothing choices ($p < .05$).

To investigate whether there was a statistically significant difference between male and female students' perceptions of mood as a factor in clothing choices, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The homogeneity of variance assumption was tested using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances with no violation being reported ($p > .05$). A statistically significant difference was reported between male students (M = 2.96, SD= 1.296) and female students (M = 3.82, SD = 1.167), $t(65)$ = 2.763, $p < .01$. Accordingly, female students perceived mood as more influential in their clothing preferences.
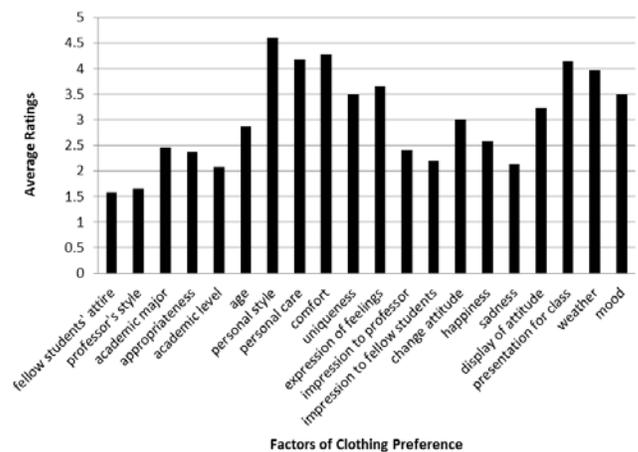

Fig. In the figure, the numbers on the ordinate symbolize the participants' ratings. Participants rated the following items significantly higher than the others: personal style (I choose my outfit according to my own personal style); comfort (I get dressed as a desire to be comfortable); presentation for class (I like to dress up when I have a presentation); and weather (The weather affects what I choose to wear).

Finally, to explore factors influencing college students' clothing choices, a repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results indicated a statistically significant difference among 20 items $p < .001$, eta=.91 (very strong effect size). Please see the Figure. The attire of fellow students, professor's style of attire, academic level, and academic major had minimal impact on the students' outfit selections. In summary, according to the analyses, the factors related to clothing choices were identified as mood, personal style, desire to feel comfortable, presentation during the class session, and weather.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated factors that are influential in

HBCU undergraduates' clothing preferences. Mood was influential in college students' clothing choices for class. Personal style, comfort, whether the student made a presentation during class, and weather also were significant factors in college students' decision on what to wear. In general, male and female students demonstrated similar perceptions related to clothing choices. Due to the sampling procedure used in this study, generalization of the findings is somewhat limited but this research does contribute to the literature a closer look at what prompts undergraduate students to choose specific classroom attire. We note that additional factors such as self-concept, body image, sense of fashion, academic major, and academic classification could be explored in future research studies with larger samples.

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