Materialism, Fashion Clothing Involvement, Proximity of Clothing to Self, and US Sorority Member Selection Based On Clothing and Appearance

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의복과 외모를 근거로 한 미국여대생 클럽회원 선택결정과 물질주의성향, 패션의복관여도, 의복의 자아근접성에 관한 연구

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the importance of personal attributes as they related to developing first impressions and managing group acceptance in the context of sorority recruitment process. Specifically, we examined how certain characteristics of a sorority member were related to her use of a potential member's clothing and appearance as non-verbal cues during the member selection process. The characteristics identified through the literature review were materialism, fashion clothing involvement, and proximity of clothing to self. A questionnaire was distributed to members of two sorority houses at a southeastern university in the United States. A total of 140 US sorority members participated in the study. The results showed that a member's satisfaction with her chapter, her level of participation, and her length of membership in the chapter had no relation with her tendency to base her member selection on clothing and appearance. However, members' use of clothing and appearance as guiding their member selection decisions was related to other individual characteristics selected for the study(materialism, fashion clothing involvement, and proximity of clothing to self). Fashion clothing involvement and proximity of clothing to self(*clothing for acceptance*) were most significantly related to clothing-based member selection. Partial correlations were also produced to examine the mediating role of clothing-based impression formation.

Key words: Sorority, Impression formation, Materialism, Fashion clothing involvement, Proximity of clothing to self; 여대생 클럽, 인상형성, 물질주의성향, 패션의복관여도, 의복의 자아근접성

I. Introduction

The importance of personal presentation and appearance maintenance is frequently discussed, not only in the business world but also in the college sorority and its recruitment process. In fact, many college campuses

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publish a guidebook that elucidates what clothing is appropriate for each round of the sorority recruitment process. The existence of such guidebooks, compounded by the many stereotypes regarding sororities, often lead sorority applicants to believe that their chance for acceptance into a sorority will be strengthened by their conformity to the image represented by a particular sorority. That belief therefore is often subsequently fol-

lowed by modifications in physical appearance, not the least of which involves significant modifications to the wardrobe, thereby making the sorority look, an often-idealized image, one of the most frequently cited attributes associated with Greek life. Pearls, sweater sets and t-shirts with Greek letters are among the many staple items that contribute to a sorority look.

Sorority membership seems to play a more prominent role among campuses in southern regions and is accordingly highly pursued. The desirability of sorority membership therefore makes acceptance into these groups highly competitive. Thus, examining the components of sororities' acceptance criteria is imperative to understanding this competitive process. Although no empirical studies exist to support the importance of clothing and physical appearance in the sorority member selection process, we started with the proposition that appearance plays a role in said environment and sought to determine personal characteristics of sorority members that may predict their tendency to select new sorority members based on clothing and appearance. In particular, because recruitment decisions are often made based on information gleaned from relatively brief moments in time, it seems likely that clothing and appearance might significantly impact initial impressions.

In an attempt to determine the significance of appropriate clothing during the sorority recruitment process, we examined how certain personal characteristics of a sorority member are related to her use of a potential member's clothing and appearance as non-verbal cues during the member selection process. The characteristics identified through the literature review were materialism, fashion clothing involvement, and proximity of clothing to self.

II. Literature Review

1. Sorority Recruitment

One week before fall semester begins, hundreds of female freshmen begin a process which could determine the next four years of their lives. Sorority recruitment, also known as rush, allows for sorority members to meet prospective young women to become members of their sorority(McLean, 2003). Recruitment provides

an opportunity to familiarize one's self with sorority life and to join a sorority through carefully planned and scheduled activities. The National Panhellnic Conference, an umbrella organization of member sororities, regulates that the recruitment period should be held in chapter houses whenever possible(National Panhellenic Conference, 2005). This is beneficial to prospective sorority members because they are able to gain insight into the personalities and lifestyle of the different sororities in a short period of time.

The formal recruitment process takes place on consecutive days, allowing both active and potential members to narrow their choices gradually. The first round of meeting, Round One, is brief and essentially a 'meet and greet'(Thornton & Thornton, 1999). Round Two consists of fewer parties of longer time intervals attended only by those prospective members who have been invited. These parties allow for more in-depth conversations between active and potential members. Entertainment describing a house's sisterhood, philanthropies, and social events is often provided(McLean, 2003; Thornton & Thornton, 1999). Round Three is again invitation only and consists of longer parties with fewer potential members returning. Relationships between active and potential members typically develop at this stage. Preference Round is the final step in the member selection process, where those invited back are being considered for membership(McLean, 2003). During these parties, sororities often share segments of their ritual with potential new members. After the Preference Round, potential members indicate their choices by ranking and signing the Membership Recruitment Acceptance Binding Agreement. This agreement explains that a woman must be willing to accept a bid from any sorority that she lists on the agreement and that a sorority should be willing to issue an invitation for membership to any woman who is invited and attends its preference event. By signing this agreement, a prospective member who declines membership into the sorority to which she was matched, is not permitted to join another sorority for one year. The culmination of the entire recruitment process is Bid Day when an applicant becomes a new member and is welcomed into the Greek community(National Panhellenic Conference, 2005).

After each round, sororities engage in member selection sessions. During this time, sorority members review each potential member that attended their house that day. Most houses use a ranking system and compose notes about each prospective member. This is beneficial and often a necessity when assessing the positive and negative characteristics of a potential new member. Block cutting is often used in earlier rounds(Thornton & Thornton, 1999). Block cuts are often comprised of low evaluations and inadequate scholarship. However, as the recruitment process progresses, the selection and evaluation of potential members become more critical. Potential new members are assessed on a number of attributes. Typically traits considered important are personality, extracurricular activities, honors and awards, and scholarship(McLean, 2003). Although physical appearance is not a trait proclaimed to be used as an evaluation criterion it is often understood that appearance affects selection decisions for sorority members.

2. Materialism

According to Richins and Dawson(1992), materialism relates to an individual's belief that possessions symbolize one's identity and to the importance attached to possessions as objects. Hunt et al.(1996) and Richins(1994) also find that materialists perceive people in terms of their possessions rather than internal qualities or accomplishments and categorize others largely on their external appearances and what they have. Hence, judgments are based on observations, not personal interactions(Hunt et al., 1996). Accordingly, this research proposed that those who were highly materialistic would be more likely to use clothing to form impressions, which would in turn affect their selection decisions.

3. Fashion Clothing Involvement

Fashion clothing involvement is defined as the extent to which the consumer views clothing as a central part of his or her life, a meaningful and engaging activity in their life(O'Cass, 2004). Those who are highly involved in fashion clothing may believe that cloth-

ing provides an outlet for expressing one's personality and even his or her social aspirations, thereby forming impressions of others based on their clothing. Previous studies have also found that social participation and social approval motives are strongly related to fashion clothing involvement(Workman & Johnson, 1993). Furthermore, because clothing styles change at such a fast pace, those who are highly involved in fashion clothing emphasize maintaining and keeping up with these trends. They may also believe that the selection and exhibition of appropriate clothing could help to ensure social acceptance. Hence, the measurement of the sorority members' levels of fashion clothing involvement may be relevant to identifying those who make judgments and impressions of potential new members based on clothing.

4. Proximity of Clothing to Self

Those who score high on proximity of clothing to self believe that clothing is a way to maintain and enhance consistency between desired and actual projection of self-images. These individuals consciously select clothing to achieve self-defining goals and send messages about themselves through clothing. The images conveyed by these messages can pertain to age, gender, or occupation. Sontag et al.(1997) determined that adolescents who have high proximity of clothing to the self may anticipate that their clothing should help them gain a sense of personal competence or make them feel good about themselves. While the majority of past research focused on the adolescent population, this study examined young adults, specifically collegiate females. Kwon (1994) found that when college students felt good about their clothing, they felt more competent in work, more sociable, and more positive. Additionally, for women, clothing facilitates their creativity and expressiveness, their ability to have fun, their perceptions of beauty and attractiveness, as well as meeting some of their social and emotional needs(Sontag & Lee, 2004). During the sorority selection process, because of their tendency to believe in the closeness between clothing and the self, individuals who have high proximity of clothing to self may be more sus-

ceptible to judging others based on their clothing and appearance.

5. Impression Formation

When people meet, they immediately begin forming opinions of each other. Often times, the easiest and most available evaluations of a person begin with his or her clothing. First impressions are referred to as initial judgments made about another person based upon observable characteristics and behaviors, as well as inferences made about the person's personality, behavior, and characteristics(Johnson et al., 2002). When difficulty assessing an individual arises, one often looks to other outlets for judgments, such as clothing. Hence, clothing inevitably and often unconsciously impacts first impressions made of that person. Davis(1984) found that clothing cues have the greatest impact on impressions in first impression situations. Belk et al.(1981) found that college students tend to make stereotypes of people based on consumption-based cues more often than older subjects.

The National Panhellenic Conference urges its members not to base their selection decisions on the appearance of its prospective members; however this study hypothesizes that the aforementioned personal characteristics of college students will directly or indirectly affect the selection of sorority members based on clothing and personal appearance.

III. Methods

A questionnaire was distributed to 163 members of two sorority houses at a southeastern university in the United States. The surveys were hand delivered by the researchers to two sorority houses before their chapter meetings and picked up after completion. A total of 146 surveys were returned resulting in a 89.6% response rate. Of the 146 surveys returned, 140 were deemed usable and the remaining six were discarded due to missing data. Almost 98 percent of the respondents were Caucasians. The sorority members' ages ranged between 18 and 22, with a mean age of 20. All of the respondents were undergraduates: 25 percent were freshmen(n = 35), 31 percent

sophomores(n = 44), 25 percent juniors(n = 35), and 19 percent seniors(n = 26).

Materialistic characteristics were measured via the Material Values Scale(Richins & Dawson, 1992). Even though Richins and Dawson's original scale incorporated three dimensions of materialism, we have chosen only items measuring posession defining success. The items included: "I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes" and "The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life"(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .81 reflecting high internal reliability.

Participants responded to 11 items regarding their involvement in fashion clothing. Fashion clothing was defined as clothing that is in the current mode or is the current style of dress. The scale was adapted from O'Cass's(2004) study. Examples of the scale items included: "Fashion clothing is a significant part of my life" and "I am very interested in fashion clothing" (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The reliability coefficient for the scale was .97.

The proximity of clothing to self scale was developed by Sontag and Lee(2004). Factor analysis of the 17-item scale revealed it to be a two-dimensional concept: *clothing reflecting personality* and *clothing for acceptance*(Table 1). Factor loadings for the *clothing reflecting personality* factor items ranged from .60 to .81 with a reliability coefficient of .91. Questions loaded on the *clothing for acceptance* factor represented clothing as it related to social acceptance. Factor loadings ranged from .74 to .82 with a reliability of .85. Total variance explained by the two factors equaled 61.64%. Three questions were dropped either because they did not load strongly on either factor or because they loaded almost equally on both factors.

Participants' overall tendencies to form impressions of others based on clothing and appearance(hereafter called clothing-based impression formation) were determined by a scale modified from a study by Johnson et al.(2002). This six-item scale, originally presented as an open-ended interview questionnaire, was adapted to a Likert format to maintain uniformity throughout the survey. Examples of the scale items are "I can tell things about other people based on their appearance"

Table 1. Factor analysis of proximity of clothing to self

Factors	Factor loadings
Clothing reflecting personality	
What I wear is consistent with who I am.	.67
My clothing is part of me, not just a simple possession.	.60
My clothing reflects how I feel about myself.	.78
I am a certain type of person, and my clothes reflect that.	.81
My clothing gives others an idea about my interest or activities.	.75
My clothing shows others how I think and feel about myself.	.77
I try to project a certain image of myself to others through my clothing.	.66
What I wear and the way I wear it shows others my attitudes.	.69
Clothing for acceptance	
How I look in my clothing is important because I want others to accept me.	.74
It matters to me that people make judgments about the type of person I am by the way I dress.	.81
I care about what other people think of how I look in my clothes.	.74
I'm careful in wearing certain styles or brands of clothing because they affect how people respect me.	.82

and "People can tell things about me based on my appearance". The reliability coefficient for this scale was .86.

Components of sorority member selection based on clothing and appearrance(hereafter called clothing-based member selection) were measured on a four-item scale. This scale, developed by the researchers, more specifically focused on choosing candidates based on their personal appearance. Examples of the scale included: "When I interview candidates for my sorority, I pay attention to how they are dressed" and "During member selection, I choose candidates who are physically attracive"(1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). The reliability coefficient was .93.

The final section of the questionnaire contained four demographic questions(age, ethnicity, year in the chapter, and year in school) and three questions pertaining to a sorority member's evaluation of her chapter and her own participation in the chapter. Sorority chapter evaluations("I am proud of my sorority".) were highly positive among the participants with a mean score of 4.66(SD=.60) on a five-point scale. The members' perceptions of fitting in with the chapter indicated a mean score of 4.52(SD=.75) and their level of participation in the life of the chapter was 4.31(SD=.89).

IV. Results

1. Member Selection and Chapter-Related Variables

The mean score of clothing-based member selection (M=3.08, SD=.94) indicated that the participants were overall neutral with respect to whether or not they based their selection decisions on the clothing and appearance of the prospective members. Pearson's correlation analyses(Table 2) were performed to examine whether clothing-based member selection was related to the member's evaluation and participation level. No significant correlation at the p-level of .05 was observed among the variables, indicating that a member's satisfaction with her chapter and her level of participation had no relation with her tendency to base her member selection on clothing and appearance. Analysis of variance was then conducted to examine the relationship between clothing-based member selection and the member's length of membership in the chapter. The relationship was not significant [F=2.67(3, 136), p=.40]. The finding indicated that the number of years a member has been with her chapter has no bearing to her clothing-based member selection.

Table 2. Correlations analyses

	M (SD)	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
V1: Materialism	2.81 (.92)	1.00				
V2: Fashion clothing involvement	3.43 (.99)	.43***	1.00			
V3: Clothing reflecting personality	3.70 (.81)	.47***	.64***	1.00		
V4: Clothing for acceptuance	3.26 (1.02)	.57***	.45***	.58***	1.00	
V5: Impression formation	3.54 (.79)	.45***	.57***	.64***	.52***	1.00
V6: Member selection	3.07 (.94)	.49***	.54***	.46***	.53***	.55***

***$p \leq .001$
All variables were measured on a scale of 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree).

2. Correlations

Relationships among the variables were examined using Pearson's correlation analyses. As predicted, all of the selected variables(fashion clothing involvement, materialism, proximity of clothing to self) were significantly correlated with clothing-based impression formation as well as with clothing-based member selection. The two most significant correlations were between the first factor of proximity of clothing to self(*clothing reflecting personality*) and fashion clothing involvement($r = .64$, $p < .001$) and the second factor of proximity of clothing to self(*clothing for acceptance*) and clothing-based impression formation ($r = .64$, $p < .001$). Results also indicated that fashion clothing involvement was strongly related to clothing-based impression formation($r = .57$, $p < .001$) and to clothing-based member selection($r = .54$, $p < .001$). Materialism was also significantly correlated with both clothing-based impression formation($r = .45$, $p < .001$) and clothing-based member selection($r = .49$, $p < .001$) but the second factor of proximity of clothing to self(*clothing for acceptance*) exhibited stronger correlations with both variables($r = .52$, $p < .001$ for clothing-based impression formation; $r = .53$, $p < .001$ for clothing-based member selection). There was a strong correlation between clothing-based impression formation and clothing-based member selection($r = .55$, $p < .001$).

3. Partial Correlations

Partial correlation coefficients were produced to examine whether significant relations existed between clothing-based member selection and other variables when clothing-based impression formation was partialed out. The correlation between clothing-based member selection and *clothing reflecting personality* became only marginally significant(partial $r = .17$, $p < .05$), suggesting that the significant relationship between the two variables was due in part to the association of each variable with clothing-based impression formation. Materialism(partial $r = .32$, $p < .001$) and fashion clothing involvement(partial $r = .34$, $p < .001$) were still significantly correlated with clothing-based member selection although the strength of the relationships weakened.

V. Discussion

This study examined the importance of individual attributes as they related to developing first impressions and managing group acceptance, particularly in the context of sorority recruitment process. The findings reported that sorority members' use of clothing and appearance in guiding their member selection decisions were not related to their evaluation of the chapter or their level of participation in the chapter life but to other personal characteristics that tend to drive people to form impressions based on others' clothing and appearance.

Correlation analyses indicated that fashion clothing involvement and proximity of clothing to self(*clothing for acceptance*) were most significantly related to clothing-based member selection. The more a sorority member is involved with fashion clothing and the more she uses clothing as a means to seek social acceptance, the more likely she is to base her selection decision on a prospective member's clothing and

appearance. Participants' materialistic tendencies and emphasis on using clothing as a tool to reflect her personality were also significantly related to clothing-based member selection. These findings were consistent with those of Richins and Dawson(1992) and of Richins(1994) who found that people with strong materialistic tendencies use clothing for impression management and, consequently, formation.

As expected, sorority members who generally form impressions based on clothing and appearance were more likely to make member selections based on the candidates' clothing and appearance. Given the strong association between clothing-based impression formation and clothing-based member selection, partial correlations were examined between clothing-based member selection and other variables after controlling for clothing-based impression formation. Clothing-based impression formation appeared to explain to a varying degree the association that the selected personal attributes had with clothing-based member selection. The partial correlation between *clothing reflecting personality* and clothing-based member selection was only marginally significant, indicating that the initial strong zero-order correlation between the two variables was in part due to their associations with clothing-based impression formation. Interestingly, the associations of clothing-based member selection with fashion clothing involvement, materialism, and *clothing for acceptance* remained strong even after clothing-based impression formation was partialed out. In other words, fashion clothing involvement, materialism, and *clothing for acceptance* tended to increase the likelihood of a sorority member's making selection decisions based on clothing but not necessarily because those personal attributes tend to drive them to form impressions based on others' clothing and appearance. Perhaps some of those who exhibit a greater interest in fashion clothing and who place more importance on material possessions are more interested in recruiting members who fit the image their chapter seeks to represent, even though they may not generally form impressions of others based on clothing and appearance. Likewise those who care about what other people think of their clothing and appearance would also wish to recruit members who can maintain the image of their chapter.

Accordingly, the findings of this study strongly confirm the relationships between clothing-based impression formation and the personal characteristics included in the study in the context of sorority recruitment process. In need are future studies that examine the differences that can be observed in the recruitment and selection process among different student groups. A positive group social status is important for most student groups, yet the social dominance orientation, 'the desire to have one's own in-group considered superior to out-groups' is especially evident among college sororities. For many sororities, group attractiveness is an easy way to ensure this type of superiority and attain instant, high levels of social status. Accordingly, sororities encourage their members to project an image of pretty, happy women(Arthur, 1999) and to evaluate potential new members based on their clothing and appearance. The strength of the correlation between selected personal attributes and clothing-based member selection may not be as pronounced in some student groups as in sororities. It seems possible that relationships may vary not only according to the nature of the groups but also according to the recruitment and selection process used by those organizations. Future studies may also want to compare cross-cultural differences in the importance of the clothing and appearance of prospective members of student groups. A recent study by Jung and Lee(2006) found that Korean female college students considered appearance to be of greater importance and were even more critical of their bodies than their American counterparts. It should prove worthwhile to examine whether the degree of importance placed on appearance by Korean female college students might also be reflected in the role that clothing and appearance play in group-membership selection. In Korea where college sororities are non-existent, researchers may need to look into comparable types of student organizations in which members are accepted through a formal selection process. Due to changing social conditions, gender dynamics, and expansive consumer culture, young Korean females are dealing with a growing pressure to beautify themselves in order to

achieve a physical beauty ideal and to consume for the sake of proving one's own identity and status (Kong, 2003). Given that clothes and appearance have grown in importance amongst Korean girls as vehicles for expression of personal identity it would be interesting to examine to what extent group membership is affected by clothing and appearance among this population and how this situation compares to that of American society. Of even greater significance would be studies designed to determine the influence of any changes in the group membership selection process on young females' self-esteem. Additional research identifying personal and situational variables that may inhibit a member from basing his or her selection decision on a potential member's clothing and appearance may be of interest.

It should be noted that this study was limited to two college sororities at one southern college campus. Findings therefore may not be generalizable to other female groups and their member selection and acceptance. In addition, this study was limited to Panhellenic sororities. Hence, the findings may not be generalizable to non-Panhellenic sororities(African American sororities).

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요   약

본 연구는 미국여대생 클럽의 신입회원 선택시 정규회원들의 개인특성이 어떻게 지원자들에 대한 첫 인상형성과 선택결정에 관련되는지를 조사하는데 있다. 문헌조사를 통해서 여대생 클럽회원의 첫인상형 성과 선택결정에 관련될 것으로 기대되는 개인특성 변수로는 물질주의성향, 패션의복관여도와 의복의 자 아 근접성이 선정되었다. 이외에 회원들의 클럽소속기간, 클럽활동 참여수준, 그리고 클럽만족도가 부가 변수로 조사되었다. 연구대상은 미국여대생 클럽에 소속된 회원 140명이었고 설문지를 이용해 자료를 수 집하였다. 자료는 요인분석, 상관관계, 부분상관관계와 ANOVA를 이용해 분석하였다. 의복의 자아근접 성은 요인분석결과 의복의 개인성격 반영성향과 타인의식과 사회수용을 위한 의복사용성향의 두 요인으 로 나눠졌다. 지원자의 의복과 외모를 근거로 선택평가를 하는 경향은 회원들의 클럽소속기간, 클럽활동 참여수준, 그리고 클럽만족도와는 유의한 상관이 나타나지 않았다. 그러나 지원자들의 의복과 외모를 근 거로 한 선택경향은 참여자들의 개인특성과 유의한 상관관계를 보였다. 물질주의성향과 패션의복관여도 가 높을수록 참여자들은 회원지원자들의 선택여부를 그들의 의복과 외모에 따라서 결정을 하는 경향이 있었다. 또한 회원지원자들의 의복과 외모를 기준으로 한 선택경향은 참여자들의 의복의 자아근접성이 높을수록 두드러지게 나타났다. 즉, 의복이 본인의 개인성격을 반영한다고 믿는 참여자들과 타인의식과 사회수용을 위해서 의복을 선택하는 경향이 있는 참여자들은 클럽회원 지원자들의 선택여부를 그들의 의 복과 외모에 따라서 결정을 하는 경향이 높은 것으로 판정되었다. 일반적으로 타인의 의복과 외모를 근거 로 첫인상을 형성하는 경향이 높은 참여자들은 클럽의 신입회원 선택시에도 지원자들의 의복과 외모를 중요시하는 것으로 나타났다. 부분상관관계를 통해 다른 변수의 역할도 조사하였다.