



Attachment to Clothing and Implications for Sustainability within a Cultural Context

Marilyn DeLong¹⁾, Seoha Min²⁾, Yoonkyung Lee¹⁾, and Mary Alice Casto¹⁾,

¹⁾University of Minnesota, USA,

²⁾The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

Keywords: culture, favorite, attachment, sustainability

Introduction Extending the life span of clothing through better quality and increased usability can result in fewer resources used in the overall clothing consumption system (Fletcher, 2008). If people experience emotional attachment toward clothing they own, they are likely to manage their clothing with more care, for an increased life span of their clothing (Schifferstein & Zwartkuis-Pelgrim, 2008). In this regard, it is worthwhile to explore people's attachment to clothing from a sustainable perspective. The research explored how American and Korean consumers in their twenties report attachment to their clothing. The research gives perspective to apparel designers and companies who want to design clothing to be worn for an extended time.

Literature Review 1) Emotional Attachment to Clothing and Sustainability Clothing acts as a protective layer between a wearer and the world, so that a wearer has an intimate relationship with clothing (Collin & Aumonier, 2002). In particular, if a person is deeply attached to clothing, he or she is more likely to handle the clothing with care, to repair it, and to postpone its replacement. In such circumstances it is unlikely for the person to dispose of the clothing, so its life is expanded. In particular, people attach to their favorite clothing significantly and keep it longer because favorites serve as storehouses of personal meanings, gender, age, and an owner's culture (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988).

2) Attachment to Clothing and Cultural Context Kim (1999) explained that a user perceives clothing based on his or her cultural background associated with clothing. In this regard, approved and preferred design attributes of clothing may be different depending on a user's cultural background. Thus the way users attach to clothing is different depending on their culture (Overby, Gardial, & Woodruff, 2004).

Method As a pilot study, 5 participants (1 male and 4 females) were interviewed about their favorite and long-used clothing. Based on the findings, survey questions were developed. In this research, 89 American (age; $m=22.61$, $SD=2.49$, range 19-29) and 91 Korean university students, consumers in their twenties (age; $m=21.46$, $SD=1.45$, range 18-25), participated in the survey and were asked to answer 8 open-ended questions in the following categories: (1) demographic questions; (2) open-ended questions regarding clothing they were most and least attached to (3) open-ended question regarding sustainable design constraints in their clothing. To facilitate participants' understanding, we introduced a brief definition of apparel sustainability at the beginning of the survey and we used the words 'favorite and long-used clothing' instead of 'clothing attachment' to facilitate responses to the survey.

Results and Discussion We explored how Americans and Korean participants living in metropolitan cities in their respective countries describe favorite and long used clothing. There is no significant difference between participants from America and Korea in terms of average time of use (3.93 average years reported). Prevailing clothing colors that were similar were black for Americans (31.46%) and Koreans (32.96%) and brown (AP: 11.23%, KP: 12.08%). However other colors reported were different: blue (AP: 26.96%, KP: 12.08%); grey (AP: 17.97%, KP: 8.79%). Other differences were reported: almost half of Koreans (49.45%) but only 10 American participants (10.10%) named either a coat or a jacket as their long-used favorite clothing. In interpreting such a result, a coat as outer clothing could be important to the wearer's overall fashion image (Lee & Kim, 2004). Since public transportation systems offer a convenient way of exploring metropolitan cities in Korea, Korean people may have more opportunities to reveal their outerwear as part of their fashionable image than those in nonpublic transportation such as riding in a car. Attributes of comfort were listed by 53 Americans (59.55%) and only 27 Korean participants (29.67%) as an attribute of their favorite and long-used clothing, such as stretchable denim pants and a trench coat with comfortable fit.

Conclusion In this research, how American and Korean participants are attached to clothing in terms of favorite and long used clothing was explored. One of the main findings is the connection between participants' attachment to clothing and their cultural background. For example, American participants frequently mentioned comfortable clothing (59.55%), clothing with good fit (55.05%) and functional clothing (38.20%). This result may be related to American's pursuing of practicality. The research implies that to achieve sustainability, fashion designers and companies need to consider cultural contexts in the design of clothing. In future research, it would be beneficial to conduct in-depth research to explore users' cultural philosophy regarding attachment to clothing via favorite and long-used clothing.

Reference

- Collins, M., & Aumônier, S. (2002). Streamlined life cycle assessment of two Marks & Spencer plc apparel products. *Marks & Spencer plc*.
- Fletcher, K. (2008). *Sustainable fashion and textiles: design journey*. London, VA: Earthscan.
- Kim, S.I., (1999). *Hyperspace and Korean Culture*. Seoul: Kuhakyungusa.
- Lee, H. & Kim, J. (2004). Study on type classification and design characteristics of coats. *The Research Journal of the Costume Culture*, 12 (3), 339- 353.
- Overby, J., Gardial, S., & Woodruff, R. (2004). French versus American consumers' attachment of value to a product in a common consumption context: a cross-national comparison. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 32 (4). 437-460.
- Schifferstein, H. N. J., & Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, E. P. H. (2008). Consumer-product attachment: Measurement and design implications. *International Journal of Design*, 2(3), 1-14.
- Wallendorf, M. & Arnould, E. (1988). "My favorite things": a cross-cultural inquiry into object attachment, possessiveness, and social linkage. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (4), 531-547.