

# Clothing, Mood, and Emotions: Perspectives from Pan-Hellenic Fraternities

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## Introduction

### Background

Mood, any short-lived emotional state, has been shown to be an influential factor in academic and social performance of university/college level students; with some moods being associated more with harmful behaviors than others (Anderson et al., 2009; APA, n.d.; Dalton & Hammen, 2018). Mutually, Black individuals are more susceptible to experiencing negative mood states due to the systemic impacts of gender norms, stigmas, discrimination, bias, and more that occur across campuses (Srivastava et al., 2009; O'Hara et al., 2015).

Encloded cognition (ENC) is a theory that recognizes the relationship between clothing and psychological process; more specifically, emotions and moods can be triggered by the symbolic meaning one holds toward their clothing along with the physical experience of wearing clothes (Moody et al., 2009; Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

Clothing, as a means for supplementing the body for any reasons, has a cultural value in Black communities that dates back from times of enslavement (Alburo, 2002). This value has transcended time and has made an imprint in the lives of many Black populations, including people in the National Pan-Hellenic Council and related Greek organizations. These organizations provide a space for Black students enrolled in higher education to develop professionally and socially amongst others with similar ethnic backgrounds; and to address civil issues related to the organization's agenda.

### Aims of the Research

The purpose of our qualitative study was to explore the ways clothing is associated with mood and emotions through the perspectives of National Pan-Hellenic fraternity members at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and a Predominantly White Institution (PWI).

We sought to fill a gap in the literature by providing a rich descriptive and subjective data that represents how people in the Black community perceive the association between the clothes they wear and their emotions and mood and how this works to influence self-expression in their milieus.

### Research Questions

Our research questions were:

- What do the student members of the Pan-Hellenic fraternities typically wear on a day-to-day basis?
- How might socialization play a role in the clothing preferences of these student members?
- How might elements of encloded cognition be manifested in the answers of these student members?
- How is affect ( expression of feelings, emotions, and mood) associated with the clothing worn by these student members?

## Method

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative design method; more specifically a phenomenological approach. A one-on-one, semi structured interview was conducted via Zoom and collected was data pertaining to the phenomenon of interest. Recruitment methods utilized were online using snowball sampling.

The interview questions addressed what the participant typically wore, examined the influences of socialization on clothing preferences, whether elements of encloded cognition were referenced in their responses and narratives, and how mood affect might be associated with the clothing worn.

Once the interview was completed, a research team of three master's level coders utilized Thematic Analysis to identify and describe any relevant themes, or codes, found in the transcribed interview.

## Participant

The participant was a current student member of the Beta Nu chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, a National Pan-Hellenic fraternity at a HBCU located in Florida. The participant was a 23-year-old heterosexual, African American male. He was a full-time graduate student studying Architecture, and was in a committed, long-term partnership.

## Findings

**Research question 1: What do the student members of the Pan-Hellenic fraternities typically wear on a day-to-day basis?**

Codes/Themes	Quotes
<i>Comfort, Color, and Style</i>	"So, if I'm going to the library, I'm definitely pulling up in something cozy; like definitely a hoodie, some sweatpants, probably catch me in some long socks on and some slippers. I never wear slippers, never wear slides to class or anything, I tend to dress more appropriate. I'll put on something a little more professional to go to class, probably a collared shirt, if not just a regular T-shirt, you know jeans; look up to par and look presentation ready every day just in case you may have a presentation or something."
<i>Environmental Influences (e.g., sports, location, weather)</i>	"I probably dress up the most when it comes to hanging out and going to parties. When it comes to tailgate, I'm definitely, I'm always in some school paraphernalia or something of that nature to represent. If I'm not representing myself, I'm definitely representing the brand you know, the school."

**Research Question 2: How might socialization play a role in the clothing preferences of these student members?**

Code/Theme	Quote
<i>Transmission of social cultural values (e.g., parents, friends, society)</i>	"I honestly could say my mom is probably my biggest influence when it comes to fashion because obviously when I was in my younger, my younger ages she was definitely the one who was dressing me. And I could honestly say my mom has a pretty good taste in fashion, I guess. It's pretty similar to the way I think when it comes to fashion, heavily influenced by the hip-hop culture, things of that nature."

**Research Question 3: How might elements of encloded cognition be manifested in the answers of these student members?**

Codes/Themes	Quotes
<i>Comfort and Style</i>	"I'm always yeah, if I'm outside, I'm definitely wearing something comfortable like; even if it's, I want to be fresh. I'm going to be fresh and comfortable."
<i>Culturally relevant values-community as culture</i>	"Black-owned, I'm a big black-owned or minority, minority brand type of guy. Local, I always shop local. Small, small owned, black-owned, just the stuff I'm into. Support the people around me, I'd rather support someone locally, someone that I know rather than a complete stranger you know."
<i>Identity and self-expression</i>	"That's a part of fashion too, the way you actually carry yourself."

**Research Question 4: How is affect (expression of feelings, emotions, and mood) associated with the clothing worn by these student members?**

Codes/Themes	Quotes
<i>Reciprocal relationship between affect and clothes</i>	"...and growing up I always heard 'if you look good, you feel good.' So, I always try and make sure I look good so I can feel good you know. I always feel good but it's definitely like a boost of confidence to know you, you're walking in the room pretty fresh you know, things of that nature. That's more of what I go for you know. When you're feeling good yeah, you do a lot better. You also perform a lot better when you when you're feeling good, and one, one easy way to better, feel better is to look better."
<i>Cultural Empowerment/Cultural Adages and Empowerment</i>	"Okay well of course you know the joke is always like: 'alright get from by me, you look like me.'"  "Put it on.' That's a pretty that's a pretty popular saying right now you know. Putting it on, putting it on it's like you really looking good man, you're really fresh. You're 'duggie.' Duggie is like fresh, swaggish. Like I said earlier, when you look good you feel good. You walk in somewhere, and to have someone, 'you look good,' you know, you know you look good because you put it on thinking you look good and to see you step outside and hear someone else say it, definitely; you definitely put that on you know."

## Discussion

The execution of this research has helped develop further insight on the relationship between clothing, mood, and emotions, within the context of the fraternity member interviewed. Some valuable insights learned include the following:

- Further knowledge on motivations behind the clothing worn daily by Black male students;
- The specific impacts that socialization has on clothing decisions, and how culture supports the circulation of value-laden body supplementing;
- The relevancy of encloded cognition when considering the impact clothes have on psychological well-being.

### Implications for Counseling:

- Advocating for clients across settings who may be ignorant of the impacts clothing has on their well-being;
- Strengthening and supporting use of relevant culturally tailored theoretical approaches;
- Enhancing knowledge of diverse perspectives in the interplay between the emotional system and clothes.

### Limitations and Future Research:

- Limited generalizability because of sample size
- Interview relied on self-reported data
- Future research should be geared towards elaborating on the cross-cultural perspectives of the relationship between clothing and the emotional system.
- Future research should be mindful of the various ways people, cultures, and genders express emotions and mood in their contexts.

## Key References

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# PURPOSE

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