The purpose of this study is to see how Korean American people use and negotiate appearance in the US. Clothing or styling the body is a basic part of constructing identities in everyday life. Clothes represent cultural ambivalences that resonate within and among identities, which means that playing out cultural ambivalences is less likely to fall into dichotomies. Immigrant consumers use their ethnicity individually depending on day-to-day context with the host culture. In this sense, interpretative approaches seem to be strong to discover postmodern clothing behavior of ethnic consumers. Interpretative perspectives assume multiple realities while positivist ontology applies stereotype paradigm for the ethnic variable. Interpretative paradigm would be useful to explain the consumer behavior of an ethnic group how to clear out cultural ambiguities between different cultures, to play cultural ambivalences visually with appearance, and finally to ease cultural tension.

In this study, 21 Korean and Korean American women at the age of 20s to 50s were interviewed and the verbatim texts from the interviews were interpreted. Interviews were initiated by questions of background that brought them to their current locale, then experiences of living in the hosting countries followed by discourses on clothing, styling, and consumption behavior. In addition, consumer stories such as new locale, daily routine, perceptions of locals, American vs. Korean culture, gender, race and class were recorded.

Whereas many studies assume differences among ethnic groups in terms of styling, the results of this study suggests that members of each ethnic or national group offers diverse interpretations about their appearance and styling to fit the condition of their everyday lives. Also, Korean immigrants do not simply assimilate dominant culture over time but maintain transcultural identities depending on day-to-day contexts. Cultural variables such as age, duration of the year, first vs. second generation, social class seem to affect the perception of the styling and the shopping behavior among the people. Also, husband ethnicity and the involvement with the Korean community have an impact on the clothing attitude and behavior as well as the attitude for the daily life. This study shows that researches dealing with cultural variables can have more insights about personal experiences and social meaning processes through interpretative approach rather than positivist paradigm with survey methods.