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Outerwear—inner musings: A theoretical framework application for creative scholarship

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Outerwear - inner musings: A theoretical framework application for creative scholarship

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Justification: Scholarship in design, namely clothing and textiles, is based in practice and research. Dire concerns and consequences face academics deciding to undertake creative production as a scholarship track, namely promotion and tenure. With a profession centered on creative practice, efforts to better define and document methodological rigor for creative scholarship must be made, in order to increase knowledge dissemination across the discipline. Studies in information systems design-science theory application indicate various guidelines for undertaking creative practice as design-science (Hevner et al., 2004). One guideline indicates research undertaken should provide clear verifiable contributions in artifact creation, design methodologies, and foundations. Another states the need to maintain rigor throughout creation and presentation of design artifacts. Many of these guidelines, while not specific to apparel design are represented in a creative scholarship framework presented by Bye (2010). The purpose of this project is to bring eight design educators together working synchronously on similar garment designs and document various creative processes through design journals.

Methodology: Through a mixed methods approach, this investigation (involving seven of the designers and an administrator) examines a quantified creativity assessment compared against mapped creative processes of personal design journals. A framework for clothing and textile design scholarship (Bye, 2010), with a focus on research through practice is used to guide the parameters of this project as well as analysis of design journals.

Eight design educators collaboratively established guidelines for a project, in which the objective is an individually created piece of outerwear. The guidelines are listed at the end of this document and include such directions as: the fiber content and fabric type remains identical among designers but each chose either oyster or aubergine for color. Inspiration for the design is the word, "Translate", with designers free to interpret the inspiration. Each designer received the same type of blank journal to keep all notes, thoughts, sketches, etc. relating to the project. A conscious effort to record as much personal creative processes and thoughts as possible was made for documentation and analysis purposes. Seven of the designers completed the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults© (ATTA) while the eighth designer administered and scored the ATTA. Project guidelines are as follows:

- 4 yards of either Oyster or Aubergine color medium weight wool 58/60" width.
- Outerwear category and inspiration source is the word *translate*.
- Surface treatments, embellishments are open to the designer's interpretation.
- Full body dying not permitted, spot dying for pattern or embellishment acceptable.
- Trims are not limited but other fabric should not be more than 10% of the garment.
- No sharing of the experience during the initial process.

Page 1 of 2

- Journals kept during the process are transferred to a digital format.

Results and Discussion: Preliminary analysis of design process journals indicates a commonality among several designers who approached the inspiration theme from a definition standpoint. Similar to “traditional” research processes, designers involved in this project define the target construct and related terms prior to developing a methodological approach to product development. Based on information gathering, key items or features are highlighted and expanded to develop an approach to idea creation and sketching. These findings support the first stage of Bye’s (2010) theoretical framework – contextual review, where designers complete a comprehensive review and critique of broad-based information sources to develop a methodology for idea creation. For example, one designer focused on a definition: “to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form or appearance to another”. From this, an emphasis on changing the fabric and silhouette leads to various fabric manipulations such as: felting, beading, appliqué, etc. Based on this research, an approach to the idea creation stage is developed. Content analysis of journal entries continues to reveal similarities between designers regarding methods, reflection periods, and scientific inquiries, related to this project.

Results of an empirical creativity assessment (ATTA) indicate overall scores range in creativity levels from average to substantial. In comparing ATTA data and individual design journal entries, certain creativity indicators coincided with information extracted from design journals. For example, individual criterion-referenced creativity indicators to figural responses show a resistance to premature closure and a richness or colorfulness of imagery for all participants. Design journal entries tend to support this information with designers examining multiple options for final design details, often reluctant to immediately settle on a single idea. Journal entries are either highlighted by photos representing ideas of the final product or highly descriptive text mapping out research ideas. In both instances, through verbal and figural means, designers create an image which is rich and colorful in its composition and/or description.

In combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to the application of a clothing and textile design scholarship theoretical framework, the project highlights areas of designer thinking and provides a track for future creative scholarship research. One of the major limitations of creative scholarship is the lack of methodological rigor, yet results from this study indicate participants follow a similar methodological rigor in comparison to scientific method research. From this study, further investigations into theoretical applications of creative scholarship as well as theory development derived from artifact creation will continue to provide support for the development of methodological rigor for the area of design practice as research.

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