

Focus on the Future: Introduction to Part I

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Foresight has become a structural necessity ... any further progressive social development will necessarily employ it much more systematically than before. Simply put, the present cannot be properly understood without considering future extensions and implications available through foresight.

—Richard Slaughter (cited in Burton, 2005, p. 73)

As we move toward the second decade of the 21st century, the timing seems pertinent to take a focused look at the future. In the second issue of its second volume in 1984, the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (CTRJ) published a future-focused issue. More than 20 years later, another focus on the future is timely and long overdue. The purpose of this two-part issue is to feature research and creative scholarship focused on the study of the future of the apparel and textiles field and analysis of the effects that future trends may have on education, research, business, and creative arts and design.

Since 1984, this is the first forum in our field for sharing multiple papers that feature detailed and scholarly thinking about the future. A number of exercises in analyzing the future have occurred in the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) over the past 10 years. A 1997 conference special session, a 2001 preconference workshop, and the June 1998 Fort Collins retreat for strategic planning are a few examples.

The 2001 joint meeting of the ITAA with the Korean Society for Clothing and Textiles in Seoul included a session on the future of teaching. Both of the editors have served as ITAA vice presidents of planning; our experiences within this capacity spawned the call for this focused issue. We recognize the crucial need for ongoing dialogue about the future among scholars, educators, and practitioners of textiles and apparel.

Nine manuscripts were submitted by May 1, 2005, in response to the call for the focused issue on the future. Eight of those manuscripts were accepted for publication, and four invited papers were commissioned. Three of the invited papers originally had been presented at scholarly conferences in Asia and the United States over the past 2 years (2005 to 2006). One invited paper is from a past ITAA president and vice president of planning who has been involved in and spearheaded many efforts related to futuring for the organization.

Writing about the future has been a new endeavor for many of the authors. The reviewers and editors worked closely with the writers to develop their thinking and scholarship, making the review and editing process more extensive and papers more emergent than in most standard journal review processes. As a result, the efforts are highly interdisciplinary, quite varied, and extremely thought provoking. The two coeditors each took on the role of associate editor for half of the manuscripts and served as editor for the other half. When serving as editor, we were blind to who were the reviewers of the manuscripts. All manuscripts went through two blind reviews and further editing from the editors. Kudos to the authors who submitted such interesting papers and who were so willing to endure the editing process.

This first of the two-part CTRJ focused issue on the future includes articles that lend a broad view of the future of apparel and textile industries, educational systems, research agendas, and ethical issues. There is a strong research method focus within this first part: The manuscripts each present an example of a futures research technique or examine methodology for the future. The second issue focuses on forecasts of technology and of apparel design, production, and retailing in the future, with consideration of the future for educational programs and curricula in apparel, textiles, and retailing. Both issues include examination of factors related to consumer behavior; merchandising and retailing directions; design, retailing, and production technology; the education process; and globalization and its effect on the future. The second issue will be published as Issue Number 2 of Volume 26.

The Authors' Contributions

Eundeok Kim and Kim Johnson provide a helpful and multifaceted review of literature related to the future of textiles, apparel, and retailing. They also collected qualitative responses from students in apparel design and merchandising classes to find out what students think about the future. Free to be creative in their forecasts, the students focused strongly on the effects of technology on textiles, design, production, and retailing. The findings provide interesting insights about what students know and do not know and suggest that it would be beneficial for all programs to repeat this type of study as a resource for curriculum development.

Hye-Young Kim, Laura Jolly, and YounKyung Kim conducted an environmental scan using a broad array of literature related to apparel retailing. They provide, in a sense, a primer on environmental scanning methods that will be useful for researchers and students alike. From their scanning data, they concentrate on discussing three themes related to population trends that are likely to be major forces transforming apparel retailing in the United States over the next 25 years at least—increases in body weight, age, and proportion of Latino/Hispanic consumers in the U.S. population. These probably are not surprising trends to many of us, but the authors collected important facts about these trends and provide analysis of the potential effects of these trends on the apparel retailing industry. Recommendations for directions in retailing practices are provided.

A team of writers who have served on the ITAA Philosophical Missions Committee compiled an examination of three types of scholarship that are alternative approaches to inquiry to that found in research that is regularly published in CTRJ. Nancy Nelson Hodges, Marilyn DeLong, Jane Hegland, Mary Thompson, and Gloria Williams contend that we need to more commonly include these forms of scholarship in textiles and clothing research publications. The authors

suggest that the types of knowledge we create now will have a hand in shaping what the field will look like in the future. A philosophical perspective is used as the framework for revealing the link between ontology, epistemology, and methodology and for exploring the assumptions that underlie and guide the research. Integrating important issues and concepts from these alternative inquiry approaches into scenario building, the authors illustrate how critical these approaches are to knowledge production within textiles and clothing. Implications from the scenarios lead to the question at the root of all discovery: Where can our knowledge take us?

John Jacob created a scenario or, in essence, a history of the future (Accardo & Grim, 1994) to examine what teaching textiles and clothing might be like 50 years from now. He builds a basis for this plausible future on description of a wide array of factors defining apparel and textile production today, with a strong emphasis on globalization and environmental impacts. The scenario weaves together a substantial array of cultural factors—social, economic, political, organizational, and technological—to examine how they could interconnect to shape the world and our personal lives in the future. Jacob describes only one possible future, albeit one containing a number of characteristics that fit, in some ways, positively with his personal value system. The usefulness of this type of scholarship stems from its examination of consequences of choices and circumstances in the long view (cf. Schwartz, 1996). It can inspire research directions but also can be adopted as a teaching tool. Students could be asked to construct alternative scenarios that result in different consequences for the apparel industry and our educational systems. For example, what will the apparel industry be like if the revolution of workers and consumers described by Jacob does not occur? Critical thinking by students about this and alternative scenarios can greatly enhance learning about the present as well as possible futures.

An invited piece by Gwendolyn O’Neal prompts further reflection on the notion of a future shaped by our own hands. As we move into an era inevitably characterized by globalization, consumption, and communication, populations are more connected than separated by time and space. In her thought-provoking look at what it takes to be mindful of the future, O’Neal examines what futurists are doing and thinking as a framework for integration in textiles and clothing. She poses guiding questions for the process of studying the future for both educators and learners and, in particular, those interested in being active participants in the field of tomorrow.

The articles in the second focused issue on the future will help us ponder technological innovations, existing and on the horizon, and their potential to change the interfaces between designers, producers, retailers, and consumers. The forecasts raise further questions about how we shape our curricula and educational experiences to prepare students for careers related to apparel and textiles.

Consequences and Choice of Action: Can We Make Our Future?

Forecasts for the future are never appropriately used as final answers or truth about the future. The process of analyzing the future is the most valuable outcome. Consideration of alternative futures helps to make the individual and organization flexible in dealing with and proactively adapting to the future. And if we assess the consequences of certain futures and find a preferred

future, we may have the opportunity to make that future happen. Burton (2005) underscored the usefulness of studying the future: “Futurists learn from the past, examine probabilities and possibilities in the present, and build options for preferable futures” (p. 69).

The consequences of research methods we use and choices taken in industry and education are strong themes of this issue. Pondering the future and considering how we might shape the future by actions taken now is always a relevant and vital undertaking for any organization or professional field. The actions we take, or do not take, today have long-term consequences that will shape our future as a profession for years to come.

Many futurists now promote transdisciplinary models of study that move beyond thinking about the future toward development of foresight (i.e., Slaughter, 2004). Foresight enables understanding that allows for policy development and informed action. The papers in these two issues are hardly focused on a single topic or single method. Drawing from science and the arts, the authors take a transdisciplinary approach that may help us to choose how to move into the future. The authors do not have many specific answers but lend groundwork for many questions. This is a good start; as Toffler (1980) warned us many decades ago, “Asking the very largest of questions about our future is not merely a matter of intellectual curiosity. It is a matter of survival” (p. 6). Let us draw from the thinking presented in these issues, continue to study what may be tomorrow, and take a strong part in making the actual history of our future.

References

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