

Creative thinking and problem solving in the textiles and clothing discipline

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Abstract:

Research connecting creative thinking and problem solving in the textiles and clothing discipline is explored in this focused issue of the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal (CTRJ)*. The impetus for this issue derived from a perceived lack of research in this important, yet growing field of interest. In Ha-Brookshire and Hawley's (2014) article "Trends of research published by *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* (1993-2012) and outlook for future research," within the category of clothing and textiles supply chain functions, creative problem solving was the least commonly occurring published research. The authors state that "one of the key ways to satisfy humans' clothing needs and wants is through creative new product designs, materials, displays, and/or coordination. Yet there is relatively little research that identifies new problems and offers creative solutions" (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2014, p. 262). This issue helps fill the gap of creative-thinking and problem-solving research published in *CTRJ*.

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Article:

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Developing This Focused Issue

The call for papers was issued in August 2013, and the submission deadline was January 31, 2014. In the call for papers, scholars were encouraged to submit manuscripts on a wide variety of

topics focused on creative thinking and problem solving including, but not limited to, fashion issues related to concepts of the creative process, the creative person, the creative product, and/or the creative environment. Papers could take design, business and industry, entrepreneurship, consumer behavior, marketing, historical, economic, sociological, psychological, or pedagogical and professional development perspectives. Papers from an interdisciplinary perspective were encouraged.

Research Presented in This Issue

The articles submitted for the special issue represented a broad perspective on creative thinking and problem solving in the textiles and apparel discipline and included both empirical and conceptual scholarly work. In this special issue, the authors of two articles focus on creative thinking and problem solving using the lens of promoting sustainable consumption. According to Schor (2010), one of the most pressing contemporary problems is promoting greater sustainability in textiles and apparel by reducing its excessive production, consumption, and disposal. Addressing this complex issue necessitates creative solutions, which are impossible without generating new and original perspectives on the problem. These authors offer fresh approaches by emphasizing the importance of the very critical link in any apparel supply chain—the consumer.

Authors Mary Ruppert-Stroescu, Melody L. A. LeHew, Kim Y. Hiller, and Cosette M. Armstrong combine perspectives of both creativity and sustainability in “Creativity and sustainable fashion apparel consumption: The fashion detox.” The researchers addressed sustainable fashion apparel consumption by asking participants to refrain from adding to their wardrobes for 10 weeks and to reflect on that abstinence. The authors used content analysis of participant blog entries. Through the framework of the propulsion model of kinds of creative contributions and sustainable consumption manifested by voluntary simplicity, the authors found expression of creativity as a prominent theme. Blog postings revealed expressions of creativity that were new or novel to the participant, intentional, and that embodied value by fulfilling needs related to novelty and change while fostering sustainable apparel consumption. The research results suggest that an economically viable fashion apparel industry based on sustainable apparel consumption can be initiated not by eliminating the concept of fashion altogether, but by shifting profit-based systems within which the fashion apparel industry operates. The researchers both reported on and used creative methods for analysis of the intersections of sustainability and creativity. The study certainly inspires us to consider explorations of voluntary simplicity not only in terms of further research and pedagogy in the classroom but also with respect to experimenting with our own apparel consumption practices and habits.

Although the authors of the “The fashion detox” in the issue addressed one of the ways textiles and apparel consumption can be reduced at the beginning of the supply chain by decreasing demand for new apparel, the authors of the second paper explored opportunities for consumers to extend the lives of their clothes at the end of the consumption cycle. In the article “Using co-creation to engage everyday creativity in reusing and repairing apparel,” written by Kendra Louise Lapolla and Elizabeth B. N. Sanders, the authors consider one way to discourage textiles waste may be to encourage apparel reuse and repair through personal creativity. By adopting co-creative research methods, the researchers explored how creativity is applied to reusing and

repairing clothing, and aspirations women have to reuse and repair their clothing. They explain that co-creative research methods engage people in activities that generate tangible artifacts as a means to encourage discussion, reflection, and valuable insights on a topic. The findings revealed three main themes, namely, (a) current creative repair and reuse activities, (b) aspirational creative repair and reuse ideas, and (c) supporting creativity in repair and reuse of apparel. The researchers provide several future research-related and practical implications for encouraging creative thinking for the use and reuse of apparel, which will have potential impact for both industry and education.

Even though the authors of the third manuscript in the issue, “Types of apparel mass-customization and levels of modularity and variety: Application of the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving,” do not directly discuss the matter of sustainable textiles and apparel consumption, the underlying principle of mass customization is inherently connected to and has a potential to eventually alter the current paradigm of clothes selection, acquisition, and usage. The idea of a consumer satisfying all of his or her innermost clothing needs and wants, which is the ultimate goal of the industry (Ha-Brookshire & Hawley, 2014), is possible through creation of a completely customized product. Yet, the mass customization business model has not been very popular or successful in the apparel industry, even with the latest advances in technology such as three-dimensional (3D) body scanning and various specialized design and product development software. The authors Jung-ha Yang, Doris H. Kincade, and Jessie H. Chen-Yu apply a widely used theory in the design and product development area to revisit the conceptual underpinnings of the phenomenon with the goal of developing specific strategies for apparel companies adopting mass customization. The premises and levels of the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving, initially proposed as a scientific product development tool by the Russian scholar Altshuller (1999), were used to systematically examine the process of mass customization within the apparel industry. As a result of the structured examination, the researchers proposed a systematic positioning tool for identifying optimal levels and types of apparel mass customization. The tool, in the form of a chart, incorporates different levels of modularity and variety for design and fit customization and can aid apparel businesses in determining effective and efficient business strategies depending on target market’s needs and wants.

The authors of the fourth article considered creative use of inspirational sources within the process of designing textiles artifacts. In “Inspired and inspiring textile designers: Understanding creativity through influence and inspiration,” authors Megan Kemper Strickfaden, Lesley Stafiniak, and Tom Terzin study the role of influence and inspiration in the design process. They examine how inspirational sources are adapted in the process of generating design ideas, sketching them, and developing an artifact and whether the creative process changes when the inspiration is an actual 3D object or a two-dimensional (2D) photographic rendering of the same object. The researchers employed an ethnographic research method that involved an unobtrusive observation of the designers in the process of creating textile artifacts starting from selection of inspirational sources. This article is a reminder of the complexity of creative thinking as related to the design process and the rich interplay between our backgrounds, memories, and environments with specific inspirations. We may extrapolate the importance of the use of artifacts—both 3D and 2D as well as traditional and nontraditional—for teaching students, in addition to the importance of the design process and encouraging a deeper appreciation for and

recognition of how a designer's personal life experiences manifest in influencing and inspiring his or her creative work. This may hint at the value of incorporating collections of textiles and clothing into the curriculum.

As you read these articles, we encourage you to consider the ways in which you can incorporate creative thinking and problem solving in your research (including identifying original research questions and applying diverse research methods), teaching, and service, as well as creativity in your personal life, whether being a more creative and sustainable consumer, or new approaches to balancing ever increasing daily demands. There remains an extraordinary number of problems throughout the supply chain in our apparel industry. There is absolutely no way that we will be able to find solutions to these complicated problems in life or industry without creative thinking and problem solving. We hope this issue sparks your own creativity. Enjoy!

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