

Constructing Knowledge for the Future Exploring Alternative Modes of Inquiry From a Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract:

Clothing and textiles research is examined within a futuring framework to discuss potential avenues for development of thought within the field. A philosophical perspective linking ontology, epistemology, and methodology is posited as important to exploring assumptions that guide the research process. The material culture studies perspective, the feminist social science perspective, and the critical science perspective are discussed as three potential ways of approaching the subject matter in need of mainstreaming as we look to the future of knowledge production within clothing and textiles. Based on this discussion, ideas and implications for scenario-building in the traditional futures sense are presented.

Keywords: futuring; inquiry approaches; philosophical perspective

Article:

The past gives us knowledge and experience, and the present gives the power to change things, together, the past and present allow us to envision—and shape—the future.

—Cornish (2001, p. 26)

Thinking about the future can be exciting and daunting at the same time. As a formal process, futuring has been employed in several academic fields, such as marketing, economics, and environmental studies, as well as clothing and textiles (Damhorst, 2005). Oftentimes, futuring is used to facilitate strategy, planning, and a general envisioning of where one wants to go. Edward Cornish (2004), one of the foremost scholars on the subject of futures, describes the aim of futuring as follows:

The goal of futuring is not to predict the future but to improve it. We want to anticipate possible or likely future conditions so that we can prepare for them. We especially want to know about opportunities and risks that we should be ready for. (p. 3)

From a philosophical perspective, futuring can be particularly helpful in isolating those factors that drive or perhaps even hinder the growth of knowledge within an academic field (Milojevic & Inayatullah, 1998). This perspective therefore requires reflection on how and why knowledge is produced in a given field. Who makes the knowledge? For whom is the knowledge created? To what end will the knowledge be put? In this article, we work both from and within the philo-

sophical perspective to explore futuring as a particular trajectory on which knowledge within clothing and textiles might be constructed.

As a field, clothing and textiles has at times been fragmented, perhaps as a reflection of the applicability of the subject matter across a wide range of issues and implications. This fragmentation is at the very core of the epistemological assumptions—such as knowledge for the sake of knowledge versus knowledge for application—that many of us embrace through the knowledge-making process. Clearly, our assumptions can and often will shape the end result of our research efforts. For example, the knowledge one produces may be inherently practical, in the sense of teaching individuals the craft of producing textiles and clothing or the “how” of socially responsible production and consumption. On the other hand, our knowledge is often conceptual, for example, when we determine and measure attitudes toward apparel or trace past purchase behavior to anticipate future trends in styles, fabrics, or colors. We are often compelled to question whether the knowledge we produce can ultimately be applied in the sense that it is created for a particular end user, such as industry, students, other scholars, or the community at large. The categories presently used to define the research tracks for the *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, as well as for research presentations at the yearly International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) meetings, clearly show the diversity inherent to the knowledge being produced, ranging from textile science to consumer behavior to industry analysis, with historical, aesthetic, cultural, and social considerations of the subject matter in between. Considering the multiplicity of assumptions driving our wide-ranging approaches to the topic, the array of possibilities for creating knowledge pertaining to clothing and textiles is truly limitless.

In this article, we address three objectives. The first objective is to situate knowledge of the clothing and textiles subject matter within a philosophical perspective.¹ Each of the authors has been a member of the Philosophical Missions Committee of the ITAA and has been working on this topic through conference sessions of this organization during the past 4 years.² Each author represents an area of interest as defined by the organization. The second objective is to analyze select approaches to inquiry within a temporal framework. This framework is a traditional futures-based framework, highlighting the need to acknowledge the past and maximize the present while working toward the future (Cornish, 2004). We do so through an analysis that is philosophical in orientation, reflecting primarily on specific approaches to inquiry as useful to the future of knowledge production within the field. The third and final objective of the article is to consciously explore how we come to know within the context of academic scholarship and to do so in a manner that is philosophical in purpose. To explore the link between the reality or realities of the present with those of the future is necessary as a starting point for a discussion of what is to come within any academic discipline, but acutely important for one that encompasses as many possible interpretations as ours.

In doing a collaboration such as this, the intent is not to single out or prioritize one type of approach to inquiry over another. Indeed, that would be contrary to the implied mission of the field. Instead, much like looking through the lens of a kaleidoscope, the intent is to provide an example of how a singular focus leads to the multifaceted, big picture that is the clothing and textiles field of today and, likely, of tomorrow. Guided by our objectives, we begin with a discussion of the multiple realities dealt with regularly by knowledge production in the clothing

and textiles field. This allows us to frame the problem as fundamental to the futuring process and to link this process to the production of knowledge. We also provide a brief discussion of the gaps inherent in the knowledge produced regarding the multiple realities relevant to the subject matter. This leads to a discussion of the potential for more frequent use of alternative approaches to inquiry, specifically those of material culture studies, feminist social science, and critical science, and the impact that their particular assumptions might have on the field. Although by no means exhaustive, each section touches on how such approaches, while not necessarily new to the field, could become more central to research on clothing and textiles as we move into the future. At the conclusion of the paper we present ideas for moving forward with scenario building and issues for consideration important to linking the creation of knowledge with futuring in the context of clothing and textiles.

The Philosophical Perspective: Defining Terms

Why approach the question of the future from a philosophical perspective? What can this really tell us about the future of the discipline? Several terms become important to the discussion of a philosophical perspective and the directions in which research may go. Roger Trigg (2002), in *Philosophy Matters* provides clear definitions to work from, starting with ontology, defined as “the philosophical theorizing about what there is” (p. 150) or the nature of reality itself. Epistemology is critical to the present discussion herein and is defined as the “philosophical study and assessment of the basis of our knowledge” (p. 146). Epistemology includes the critique of why and for whom knowledge within a given field is created (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The notion of knowledge being produced for someone other than the producer or the producer’s peer group has been implicit in our scholarly mission and is critical for discussion of the future within a professional field such as ours.

The philosophical perspective delineates a reflexive relationship between ontology and epistemology, in the sense that reality is necessarily interpreted as such via our epistemological locations. As Berger and Luckman (1966) posit, reality is largely a social construction. Reality, therefore, can be known by individuals who have a hand in shaping it. For example, the reality of a field derives from the knowledge currently being produced, which necessarily builds on the knowledge produced in the past. The process that links reality to knowledge-making is reflexive. However, realities can be multiple and their meanings ambiguous (Kaiser, 2005). Multiple realities include more than those of ourselves as scholars, in that there are also the realities of those we serve. These “others” include our constituents, such as our students, industry, society at large, as well as our research participants. There is also the systemic reality of the university and the concomitant expectations that stem from this reality. Quite often, this is the most immediate reality that each of us deals with on a regular basis regardless of whether one is working in the United States, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Australia, or elsewhere. We might also consider the realities of those disciplines that have had a hand in shaping our own, those that we have looked to for some of the substantial theoretical frameworks currently used, and to the history of science as a whole, wherein our knowledge is often situated in relation to the natural or social sciences and typically within the positivist tradition (Lennon & Burns, 1993; Lennon, Burns, & Rowold, 1995; Lennon, Johnson, & Park, 2001). Last, ours is a discipline rich in history; as scholars looking toward the future, we must consider the reality that has been handed down to us, the reality we continue to aid in the construction of, and the reality of where we are going. We often talk about “standing on the shoulders of those who came before” as we conduct

research and therefore produce knowledge. But what does the relationship between knowledge produced in the past and knowledge produced in the present mean for that of the future?³

Methodology in the popular sense is often used to discuss the doing of knowledge creation or the how of research (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). Its importance is often linked to methods, or the specific tools employed within the research process (Neuman, 2006). To distinguish between methodology and methods, we can look to the philosophical sense of the term methodology, defined as “the theory of the aims and procedures of a discipline” (Trigg, 2002, p. 149), or more commonly, the study of methods. Its relationship to ontology and epistemology, however, is often overlooked. Within the philosophical perspective, methodology is considered alongside ontology and epistemology to constitute the third leg of the stool, thereby giving balance to the structure as a whole (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Methodology in this sense embodies the aims of the knowledge production process and reflects the ontological and epistemological assumptions within it (Jax, 1989; Kvale, 1996).

Thinking of methods more broadly than just as tools for knowledge production allows for a global understanding of the notion that how we do something (i.e., research) may often reinforce why we do it. For example, working within the interpretivist theoretical paradigm,⁴ it is posited that one’s reality is largely shaped by one’s understanding of the world. Knowledge is embedded in one’s experiences of the world; therefore, one can use the research process to seek out and reveal what those experiences are (van Manen, 1990). This big picture is imperative, particularly given the diverse realities that our discipline confronts and must embrace, as this diversity also lends itself to gaps that exist within the knowledge base. Alternative approaches are needed to help us deal with these gaps. Accepting alternative approaches will require critical reflection on not only what we know but also how we come to know it and why we feel it is important to know (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kinchloe & McLaren, 2000). Lennon and Burns (2000) clearly establish the reflexive link between knowledge production and the specific tools, or methods, that have often been used to produce knowledge and illustrate this link via a focus on methods used in clothing and textiles research. Working from the foundation they created, we can begin to more fully explore the why behind the how and how this why is important to the future of knowledge production in the field.

In this article, approaches falling under the broad umbrella descriptor of qualitative research are discussed (Merriam, 1998). For qualitative researchers, there often exists at the very least an implied acknowledgement of the interrelationships between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) outline in their introduction to the Handbook of Qualitative Research, titled the “Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,”

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry ... They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p. 8)

Although qualitative research is becoming more commonplace across academic disciplines, it still remains on the outside, often misunderstood as overly subjective because of its inherent acknowledgement of the role the researcher plays in shaping knowledge and as providing results too specific (i.e., not generalizable) to be of value to the larger body of theoretical knowledge (Bryman, 1999; Hultgren, 1989; Kvale, 1996).

Hultgren (1989) points to the need for alternative modes of inquiry that are situated within the investigation of social experience. For example, one qualitative research strategy that could be used to get at the why of the subject matter of clothing and textiles is phenomenology, or the study of lived experience.⁵ Lived experience is defined as “a subjective awareness, often purporting to relate to something beyond itself, and normally the product of our senses” (Trigg, 2002, p. 147). We experience the subject matter, our participants experience the subject matter, we have collective experiences as a field, and therefore we can use lived experience as the basis of our knowledge production. Alternative modes of inquiry require alternative modes of questioning and approaching the subject matter, resulting in new knowledge that does not necessarily replace the old, but adds to it in building- block fashion, ultimately broadening our worldview and epistemological repertoire (Schwandt, 2000). As Gubrium and Holstein (1999) point out,

Seeing people as active agents of their affairs, [forms of] qualitative inquiry [have] traditionally focused on how purposeful actors participate in, construct, deeply experience, or imagine their lives. (p. 129)

The goals of understanding and interpretation common within qualitative approaches to research lead to knowledge grounded in meaning and action, thereby providing balance to the predictive aims of the quantitative realm (Daines, 1989; Nelson & Williams, 2000; van Manen, 1990).

Clothing and Textiles: Making Knowledge that Makes a Difference

According to Trigg (2002), a phenomenon, or that which is phenomenal, is defined as “what is accessible through the human senses” (p. 150). In the most literal sense, the subject matter of clothing and textiles is accessible through the human senses. It is therefore phenomenal in nature. Speaking literally, the study of clothing and textiles links lived experience with that which is phenomenal on a daily basis, and this link is experienced by everyone, from ourselves as researchers, to the participants of our research, to every one of our constituents. As Marilyn DeLong and Jane Hegland illustrate in their discussion of material culture studies, the notion of experience is reflexively linked to the phenomenal, in that there is always a relationship between object, subject, and context (Attfield, 2000). As the authors point out, how we come to know the reality of the object, subject, and context is flexible and is in part defined by our own reality as subjects ourselves—researchers and scholars of the subject matter. Through their discussion of material culture studies, and the artifact analysis method in particular, the two authors discuss how this approach to inquiry reveals the implications of such a relationship for knowledge-making.

To develop a complete understanding of the varied realities affected by our knowledge production, a true ideological shift is needed. Such a shift has already occurred within and across some disciplines, providing a basis from which to prepare for and initiate the shift within clothing and textiles. Ideology is defined as a “system of ideas normally seen as justifying the interests of their holders, but sometimes merely referring to any collective definition of reality” (Trigg, 2002, p. 147). A shift in our collective definition of reality would bring us into the future ready to create change. Similar to the discussion of material culture studies, Mary Thompson addresses the development of the concept of gender within feminist thought in the social sciences and how this concept has been applied to clothing and textiles subject matter. In particular, she illustrates how gender as a category of analysis has served to reposition our understanding of social experience and revealed the complex network of meanings working to define this

experience. Thompson illustrates the changes brought about by researchers in the clothing and textiles field who have been theorizing about gender and who have shed light on the role of ideology in defining those ontological and epistemological assumptions that are deemed more acceptable than others. Gloria Williams, in her essay, approaches this discussion from the angle of a critical science approach to inquiry and suggests that the perspective be used more often in clothing and textiles research. She suggests that researchers perhaps take for granted that we are a field defined by our subject matter and therefore embrace multiple realities. Given what we know, she encourages us to question: Who are we? Why do we create knowledge? And in terms of the future of the field: How can we have an impact through our knowledge-making?

As all of the authors point out, to achieve impact through our scholarship is not a possibility working solely within the dominant ideology of logical positivism, because this perspective forces too many alternative approaches to inquiry, and thus ways of knowing, into the margins. In so doing, we cannot address the gaps between our reality and that of those we serve. Addressing problems that have previously been dismissed, marginalized, or simply overlooked will ensure the visibility of the body of knowledge within the future. The three approaches to inquiry outlined below are not entirely new to our field, and in fact, there are many scholars currently using them to create knowledge. We argue here that what is needed at this point is to mainstream the approaches. The development of thought in the clothing and textiles field has been underestimated and at times ignored by other disciplines that intersect with ours via the subject matter. Mainstreaming approaches currently considered to be “alternative” in part helps to ensure a future wherein consideration of the nature of clothing and textiles knowledge is central to the focus. It is our hope that the following discussion illustrates some of the ways that our knowledge-making can continue to make a difference—not just for today, but for well into the future.

Discussion: Three Approaches to Inquiry

Material Culture Studies: Marilyn DeLong and Jane Hegland

Material culture is the term used for artifacts or objects made, distributed, and used by individuals or groups within a particular society at a given time and place. Artifact analysis has emerged as one process for studying material culture across such academic disciplines as art history, archaeology, cultural history, and more recently, the study of dress history. As a means for organizing the study of material culture, various and sometimes conflicting models for artifact analysis were developed by Fleming (1974), DeLong (1998), the New Brunswick Group (1985), Prown (2000), and Zimmerman (1981). Despite their differences in approach, scholars of material culture studies concur that artifact analysis is a singular process of cultural investigation that uses objects as primary data to study the ideas, attitudes, beliefs, and values of a particular society at a given time. The underlying premise is that objects reflect those who made and used them, and by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged.

A series of steps are followed in an artifact analysis that begin with a description of the artifact based on close scrutiny and then proceed to interpretation of the artifact by examining its relationships to cultural norms and values. Writers have each described the procedure as a series of steps, though the steps vary. For example, Prown (1982) outlined three steps that build from description to deduction and speculation; four steps were outlined by Fleming (1974) from identification, evaluation, cultural analysis, to interpretation; or the four steps of DeLong (1998)

from observation, analysis, interpretation, to evaluation. Whichever framework is followed leads to somewhat different results; however, within any such procedure, the researcher moves from an objective examination of a specific artifact to a more subjective assessment and consideration of the artifact within its cultural context.

The study of material culture is necessarily object-based and relates in this discussion to dress as artifact. In *The Study of Dress History*, Taylor (2002) outlines a number of approaches to study the history of dress, including the use of literary sources, visual analysis, oral history, social and economic history, artifact-based methods, and cultural studies. Taylor's book serves as an overview of these various approaches and contributes to our expanding body of knowledge by recognizing the many and valuable means to examine dress as a rich source of history. One of Taylor's key points relates to the notion of linkages, referring to the development of expertise about product relationships that require the researcher to move beyond simple descriptive information to interpretation and evaluation. In the process, the researcher can link to various disciplines, such as aesthetics, history, economics, or sociology. In this way, the study of material culture propels the researcher to question, through the artifact, its myriad relationships within a society.

Why Is the Study of Material Culture Important?

Rexford, Cunningham, Kaufman, and Trautman (1988) classify dress scholars into those who study the object for its own sake and those who use the object as evidence to respond to larger questions. Although these authors champion the need to study material culture, their classification system provides no suggestions for integration or further inquiry from other disciplines. However, the broad range of research of the past 10 years focuses on the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in the use of object-based analysis of dress.

The study of history through the central point of dress, out of which other contexts (i.e., social, cultural, and political) develop, is relatively new. Indeed, simply finding collections of dress in museums is a 20th-century phenomenon (Taylor, 1998); the Metropolitan Museum in New York City included dress in its collections in 1944 and the Museum of Costume in Bath, England, opened in 1963. If we seek to relate dress to its historical, artistic, social, and economic contexts, the future will include study that involves a synthesis of these views.

According to Palmer (1997), the greatest concentration of fashion-related and history-related courses of study tend to be situated within departments in universities scattered across North America. In these programs, artifacts are used for teaching and research. However, Palmer writes that such programs often focus on teaching a scientific method that tends to concentrate on quantitative analysis without incorporating a broader cultural framework. We recognize that the scientific method includes both quantitative and qualitative research. Although material culture, specifically artifact analysis, is a scientific method in the sense that it involves a system, at issue is a tendency at first to concentrate on procedure and not outcome. The method requires in-depth analysis of the artifact alongside an understanding of the broader context. A meaningful outcome will be achieved only when the researcher makes sophisticated connections in the final steps, involving interpretations and results. Our research could be improved with a means to focus deeply but then broadened to make connections. Dress is a complex topic for study that includes

making connections to cultural meaning and fine distinctions among diverse topics such as production, consumption, and taste.

Applications of Material Culture Analysis

Scholars of dress and textiles have employed this approach to creating knowledge in a variety of settings and using slightly different methods (Andrade, 2004; DeLong & Hegland 2002a, 2002b; Field, 2004; Gordon, 1992; Meyer & Wilson, 1998; Severa & Horswill, 1989; Welters, 2002). Researchers have carefully examined and questioned what can be learned through the comparative analysis of artifacts. The approach may be used to study one artifact or to compare several artifacts. For example, studying a corset from 1899 brings to the forefront the relationship of the artifact to other items of dress and to the societal values of an era. It can be measured, described, and documented through its social and cultural milieu. Describing the details of a corset is not the same as holding it and examining it to discern its social impact and how it influenced the body as well as the other clothing worn. However, that artifact can also be compared with other artifacts of the time period or one of a different and distant time period. Comparison of a corset from 1899 and a bustier 100 years later is illustrative of basic differences in how the two are used, interpreted, and valued. Consider what it meant for a woman of the Victorian Era to lace into her corset and then add the appropriate layers of apparel that were expected for the sake of modesty and propriety; then contrast that with the cultural response to Madonna's efforts of bringing back the corset as outerwear in the late 1980s (DeLong & Hegland, 2002b). Although the form was similar, its use and end results were remarkably different. As another example, Braaten (2005) applied such an approach to examine shawls brought to the United States by immigrant Germans from Russia and found evidence of common origins and contexts in their resulting structures and forms.

Palmer (1997) has successfully applied the material-cultural approach to the style, manufacture, retailing, and consumption of couture clothes worn in Toronto between 1945 and 1963. She explored a series of assumptions, for example, that British Canadian couture consumers in the 1950s assumed that their expensive dresses were long-term investments rather than passing luxuries (p. 354). DeLong and Petersen (2004) demonstrated a process involving artifact analysis to characterize a segment of a university collection from an object-base using an existing aesthetic framework. A collection consisting of 160 evening dresses from the 1930s were analyzed for their repetitive and defining features and their dispersion throughout the decade. Dresses were selected as examples of specific defining features and were analyzed using the concept of structuring to demonstrate how an aesthetic framework can be applied to a characterization of the gowns in terms of the integration of layout, surface, and light and shadow.

The purpose of artifact analysis is to draw object-based research into a wider social context. Taylor (1998) believes that the main criticism of an object-based study of dress has centered on the past tendency to descriptive minutiae, at the expense of grounding in cultural context. Taylor believes that researchers who examine the individual versus collective nature of consumption must be sensitive to differences in the way objects are produced, distributed, and consumed. The object-based approach is useful in studying consumption, social movements, fashion trends, and aesthetics; that is, how dress relates to what is valued by individuals and cultures. She concludes that it is time to address one of the special features of modern Western societies—the capacity to create and sustain a consumer economy and the consumers that go with it. While we do not

suggest that artifact analysis fully accomplishes all of this, the process does provide us with an abundance of useful information. For example, in a comparative study of artifact holdings of two university costume collections, Hegland and DeLong (2003) were able to establish a sense of consumption patterns, trends, and to a lesser extent, social movements that affected two regions of the Midwestern United States. In this respect, artifact analysis could be appropriate as part of a larger study of such topics, as it requires the researcher to study the material culture of a time and place (Holstein, 2000; L. S. Miller, 2000) or the movement of products from one culture to another (DeLong & Petersen, 2004; DeLong, Koh, Nelson, & Ingvoldstad, 1998; Lutz, 1994).

Like any approach to inquiry, material culture study has its strengths and weaknesses. Researchers who engage in the study of material culture (including artifact analysis) must (a) be educated viewers, (b) commit to following the procedure within the selected framework, (c) have an intense curiosity that leads them through the process, (d) remain focused with all findings emerging from the artifact, and (e) be imaginative and creative in applications from other disciplines. Essentially, as is true for all methods of inquiry, the research is only as good as the researcher.

How Will Material Culture Analysis Remain Relevant in the Future?

Recent important scholarly developments and escalating interest in dress from other disciplines demonstrate that it is imperative for us to use more critical, theoretical, and analytical tools in our research. A focus on material culture studies includes works by Attfield (2000), Buchli (2002), K uchler and Miller (2005), and D. Miller (2000). The fusion of multiple methods will encourage a finer appreciation of dress as the complication of social life is made visible.

A multimethod material culture studies approach enables scholars to document information in a complex and intricate manner and thereby create a context for the artifact. When possible, the study of material culture can draw from the personal biographies embedded in the clothes and be supplemented with oral histories of those who designed, produced, constructed, sold, and purchased or wore them (Kahn, 2001). Those histories can be amplified by archival research, both documentary and visual, as well as by contemporary reports in newspapers and magazines and current academic scholarship from a number of fields, including design history, social or cultural history, economic history, and gender studies. Employing multimethods is particularly appropriate for investigating the modern period, which is often recorded by numerous and varied kinds of media. By integrating multiple facets from a range of sources, a researcher can overcome prejudices imposed by the limits of evidence in research using a singular method.

In material culture studies, a researcher who subjects an artifact to formal analysis may be expected to reveal indications of attitudes, belief systems, and assumptions about a culture. But why is this rarely done? To do so requires moving beyond the object and inquiring into its social and cultural setting and function. This demands a willingness to adopt and use a transdisciplinary perspective. It is quickly apparent that the primary challenge of using such an approach is the development of an awareness of specific areas of research to draw from, as the range of sources can be overwhelming. Also, analysis of an artifact does not necessarily lead directly or obviously into other research areas. Graduate courses that include cultural/historical theory and method may introduce students to the process and possibilities of artifact analysis early in their academic careers.

Material objects matter because they are complex and symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused into something we can touch, see, and possess. A cursory glance at scholarly articles published in such journals as *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* (Meyer & Wilson, 1998), *Dress* (Gordon, 1992), *Textile History* (Andrade, 2004), and *Fashion Theory* (Steele, 1998) provides us with evidence that a new generation of research is emerging, using high levels of linkages and applications across disciplines with object-based research as a starting point. Analysis through material culture has the potential for sophisticated, complex, and thought-provoking results. Although scholars in a wide range of disciplines engage in analysis of material culture, scholars of dress are unique because the process allows for an exploration of nuances and personal or cultural perspectives of production, consumption, and taste that make fashion and dress such a complex and engrossing study. In our scholarship, material culture studies, including artifact analysis, become a significant path for research in our field, as they can influence our understanding of designers, manufacturers, retailers, purchasers, and wearers of the objects. The possibilities for application are limited only by our imaginations.

Gender and the Feminist Social Science Perspective: Mary Thompson

Similar to the material culture studies perspective, a feminist social science perspective can provide the starting point for developing a deep understanding of the phenomenal nature of the clothing and textiles

subject matter. Moreover, a feminist perspective can, much like material culture studies, position clothing and textiles as a critical link between people and social meaning. Both are approaches to inquiry forged by and through the use of multiple methods. Finally, feminist social science is a necessary component of some types of material culture analysis, particularly those that seek to approach the interpretation of material objects within a framework of social critique.

Feminist thought has been at the forefront of investigating the why of social issues traditionally ignored by the dominant paradigm. Gender as a focal point of research has developed within a feminist social science perspective to encompass a myriad of approaches to questions regarding the cultural construction of gender. Yet approaching gender as a specific category of analysis also allows for the use of multiple methods to address questions pertaining to the individual, the group, and society as a whole. Gender, for the purposes of this essay, is seen as a concept which is assigned specific meaning through psychological, social, and cultural associations with biological sex (Geertz, 1975; M. Mead, 1935). The state-of-the-art analysis presented here focuses on its link to specific expectations with regard to roles and behavior, illustrating how the feminist social science perspective and particularly the manner in which gender is handled within this perspective leads to discovery of the complexities of dress and social organization.

Gender Role Research

Clothing has often been used as the starting point to explore the binary ways gender is framed within a society, as well as to address the effects of social and personal appearances as they relate to sex-role socialization. For example, Kaiser and Phinney (1983) found that young children associated gender-specific behavior with girls' and boys' clothing styles, reflecting the dualism inherent in society's definition of roles through ascribed traits of femaleness (i.e., communal goals of affiliation to encourage harmonious relations) or maleness (i.e., agonic goals of power reflecting dominance and control). Moreover, Rosencranz (1962) found that women

perceived inconsistencies in clothing styles, situations, and traditional ascribed roles. Gender as a cultural category helped to more clearly define ambiguous meanings within dress rather than specific clothing styles. Research on roles has also been used to examine the impact that dress and clothing symbols have as forms of nonverbal communication when considered relative to social context (Damhorst, 1985; Kaiser, 1985). For instance, Kaiser, Rudy, and Byfield (1985) illustrated that binary concepts of gender as interpreted through dress symbols are recognized in early childhood, suggesting that the distinction between perceptions of the self and others with respect to gender needs further analysis. Even within the late postmodern context of the 21st century dualistic, sex-based roles continue to be treated as gendered binary frameworks that are still, to a great extent, dominant in meanings assigned to dress. Hunn and Kaiser (2001) found this to be the case in that the traditional white baptismal dress, worn as appropriate clothing by both girls and boys until the mid-1930s, is no longer viewed as acceptable within a framework of sex-specific clothing. Their research suggests that binary gender roles assumed to be communicated by dress continue to require reevaluation and deconstruction today.

As scholars have pointed out, the application of role theory to gender and dress poses problems in that roles mask issues of power and inequality, issues that become obvious when gender is used as its own category of analysis (Lorber, 1994; Scott, 1988). In the early 1990s, Kaiser (1991) asked ITAA members to entertain the idea of developing a gender-based perspective in research based on work in feminist thought and theory, believing that the knowledge base was in need of further development. A feminist social science approach to textiles and clothing would encompass the perspective that sex is biological and gender is culturally, socially, and psychologically defined. This perspective on gender coincides with the development of the notion of social roles as fluid (Thompson, 1999) rather than as a set of ascribed expectations (Znaniecki, 1965). Instead of being seen as rigid and uncompromising, as was the case within the patriarchal conception, roles can be framed as the implication of relationships between individuals and situations and as always existing within a cultural framework. This conception of roles becomes a vehicle for clothing and textiles scholars who seek to use gender as a term referring to a state of femaleness or maleness, or a combination of both in relation to dress and its respective symbolisms. Furthermore, gender, like society, is seen as ever-changing and ever-evolving, such that roles can and will be renegotiated within one's environment (Blumer, 1962; G. H. Mead, 1934).

Gender and Dress: The Impact of Feminism

An approach to the study of clothing and social roles grounded in feminist thought allows for meanings of appearance to be understood as evolving within a changing social, cultural, and historical milieu. This kinetic point of view is well-established in the works of Kaiser (1983, 1990), who has often sought to integrate the symbolic interaction perspective with the cognitive perspective in the development of a contextual framework in which to understand and interpret the significance of gender for dress and appearance. Jacob and Cerny (2004) have affirmed that a dualistic paradigm will not and cannot explain dress for marginal groups—in their case, drag queens—because it can neither acknowledge nor explain clothing symbols used within nontraditional and marginalized communities. This sentiment points to the overlap between feminist and queer theory, exemplified in the writings of Garber (1992) and Butler (1990), and articulated relative to the clothing and textiles field in Jacob (2000). When viewed through a similar lens, research on cross-dressing (Hegland & Nelson, 2002; Nelson & Hegland, 2004)

deepens the exploration of a cultural group that challenges mainstream norms and expectations of dress and power and is best approached from a feminist perspective. Hegland (1999) uses a combination of both gender-based analysis and visual analysis (DeLong, 1998) to examine the cross-dressing of males (drag queens, transsexuals, and transvestites). This combination aids Hegland in revealing emerging identities that are outside of the norm—a norm that is controlled by a patriarchy wary of anything that threatens the status quo. Moreover, an additional application of DeLong's (1998) visual analysis allows Lynch, Michelman, and Hegland (1998) to study three divergent groups: American Hmongs, Nigerians, and cross-dressers to ascertain the cultural constructs of dress through gender. DeLong's framework, grounded in the material culture studies approach, permits the researchers to organize and interpret dress symbols that relate to gender cues beyond the traditional role framework.

In the special issue of the *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* titled "Feminist Issues in Textiles and Clothing: Working Through/With Contradictions," Michelman and Kaiser (2000) put forth a call for further exploration of the concept of gender and the value of a feminist-oriented grounding of the subject matter. In 1991, Michelman suggested that this "[would] allow us to better examine gender inequalities, power relationships, and ethical and moral questions related to appearance" (p. 203). In the focused issue of 2000, a variety of scholars use a feminist social science perspective to reveal that gendered meanings established by and through dress are fluid and shaped by such factors as time and space, social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. Ultimately, Michelman and Kaiser (2000) encourage a feminist approach to dress and appearance as a way to examine power structures and the objectification of women in tandem with appearance issues.

Several articles within the feminist-focused issue illustrate how one might approach gender as a category of analysis from multiple points of departure—ranging from the personal to the shared cultural. Thompson (2000) discovered that clothing and appearance advertisements still encouraged dualistic meanings, but that gender-specific roles were becoming fluid and blurred according to the situation. Through the reflexivity between gender and sexuality, this blurring of boundaries is articulated through Hammidi's (2000) and Jacob's (2000) perspectives heard against the backdrop of the clothing and textiles subject matter. For both, a feminist analysis of reality within the discipline grounded in the concept of gender allows their voices to be valued, and perhaps even better understood, in that feminism works in resistance to socially constructed categories of sex and sexuality that facilitate and encourage oppression (Scott, 1988; Sollie & Leslie, 1994). Nelson's (2000) analysis of a 19th-century women's magazine editor's writings reveals how the social meanings of dress became a vehicle by which to improve and promote a change in women's positions within a past time period. This special issue of the *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* not only provided visibility and credibility to the importance of gender and feminism to the discipline but also initiated a transdisciplinary dialogue among feminist scholars on the importance of dress and appearance within the everyday lives of women and men.

Relevance for the Future

Clothing and textiles scholars who work within the feminist social science perspective will continue to illustrate the diverse ways that the meanings assigned to clothing and appearance—much like gender and society—evolve over time. Exploring the implications of gender as a

category of analysis will serve to enhance our understanding of the impact dress has on such notions as objectification, marginalization, power relationships, and emergent identities, as well as the moral and ethical questions associated with appearance symbols (Michelman, 2005). A philosophical perspective that embraces the importance of feminist thought to the exploration of dress is critical for the knowledge base and particularly necessary to articulate the ways that social change is predicated on all voices being heard, valued, and embraced as part of the phenomenal picture that is dress and appearance in everyday life.

A feminist perspective allows for new and different kinds of knowledge to be created, which will help fill gaps in the ontological picture that currently exists within the field. The resulting picture will be more inclusive than exclusive and egalitarian as opposed to authoritarian. As the feminist social science perspective brings to the fore the consideration of areas previously overshadowed by more mainstream approaches to inquiry, squaring our epistemological assumptions within the feminist perspective and focusing on gender as a category of analysis threatens to unravel some of the stitches long entrenched within the ideological fabric of the discipline. Seeing the subject matter through the lens of gender is critical because it will facilitate a more complete picture of the realities found in everyday life. Revealing and exploring our epistemological assumptions via gender and the feminist social science perspective will bring to the surface critical social issues influenced and affected by dress. Moreover, a feminist perspective will help to create a future that is woven by a warp of diverse research perspectives combined with a weft of mutual respect and admiration for the various communities represented by the discipline. Ultimately, such knowledge is only one facet in the kaleidoscope of the field as a whole. But if the goals of our field are to inspire, embrace, and advance knowledge, then we must necessarily create a future wherein all voices are recognized.

A Critical Science Perspective: Gloria Williams

Critical science is one of three metascientific perspectives in contemporary thought; the other two points of view are positivism and interpretivism (Radnitsky, 1973). Each viewpoint has its own underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions.

The history of a critical view emanates from philosophy and the German Frankfurt School of Social Research. Jurgen Habermas was its strongest and most recent advocate. Reflecting on critical theory, his work resulted in an approach for the social sciences and the applied/professional fields of education, home economics, and social work. Fay (1975) defines critical social science as

an attempt to understand in a rationally and understandable manner the oppressive features of a society such that the understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves. (p. 4)

Knowledge created from a critical social science perspective unites with feminist epistemology and methodology to produce an approach that is a force for change. In reflecting on this point of view for the social science aspect of clothing and textiles, a focus should be taken on the future with a consideration of what is and has been a foundation for what might be. It is in this spirit that this essay was conceived—to explore what a critical social science perspective might be for clothing and textiles.

In the first part of this essay, I briefly discuss the three metascientific approaches to scientific thought. Each is associated with (a) different views of reality, (b) different thoughts about theory and the relation between theory and practice, (c) different ways of knowing, and (d) different methods and techniques to create knowledge. The second part of this essay reflects my effort to see, through the lens of critical social science, clothing and textiles knowledge in the future.

Metascientific Approaches

Positivist science. The intent of a positivistic science, whether oriented to a natural or a social science or as a way of knowing embraced by an applied or professional field, is to enable researchers to predict and control their environment. From this view, knowledge created from an explanatory theory is considered objective, hence value-free and constituted to explain cause and effect or functional relationships. Pertinent theoretical knowledge would be applied to practical problems. The emphasis in research is on quantification, the language of variables, and statistical relationships. The investigator would interpret the results of theoretical knowledge and its application (support for or improvement of the status quo) and not necessarily seek to effect change in human lives or society. According to Neuman (2006), positivism “looks at how external forces, pressures, and structures that operate on individuals, groups, and organizations, or societies produce outcomes (e.g. behaviors, attitudes, and so forth)” (p. 80).

Interpretive science. The interpretive view is,

the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings to arrive at understanding and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Neuman, 2006, p. 88)

In other words, this approach seeks to comprehend the meanings of everyday life experiences of individuals. An individual’s intent, purpose, or motive guides his or her actions. Reality is subjective. Research involves making explicit the meaning and significance of an action to specific persons. Theory and practice have a reciprocal relation. “Practical deliberation is informed not only by the ideas but also the practical exigencies of the situation” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 93).

Critical science. A critical science seeks to initiate change, to “interpret the human situation,” and to determine “what actions are possible and the consequence of those possible actions” (Brown, 1979, p. 47). A critical scientist works to integrate human values and goals with appropriate action. Neuman (2000) wrote that the intent of a critical science is “to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (p. 86). Research would be directed toward human emancipation or empowerment, toward explicating social inequities, and towards transformation or change. Carr and Kemmis (1986) write,

This emancipative interest requires going beyond any narrow concern with subjective meanings in order to acquire an emancipatory knowledge of the objective framework within which communication and social action occur. (p. 126)

Emancipatory knowledge is the focus of a critical social science. The relation between theory and practice is close. To effect change, a critical science must engage in (a) identifying the

theoretical elements in the situation, their structure, and the ways these theories will be tested; (b) processes of reflection or enlightenment; and (c) the selection and organization of strategies for action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, pp. 144-150).

Towards a Critical Social Science for Clothing and Textiles Studies

Ontological perspectives. The question, What is the reality of the clothing and textiles field? can best be answered by examining the statements of purpose or mission and the conceptual models proposed.

Throughout the more than 100 years of history in an academic setting, textiles and clothing subject matter has been embedded in different intellectual contexts, as part of home economics and of family and consumer sciences. In addition, scholars have taken perspective on the subject matter as part of a human ecological framework. As a specialization in home economics, the concern was for “strengthening family life,” for “improving the lives of individuals and families and individuals,” and “for helping families shape both the parts and whole of the patterns of daily living” (Committee on Philosophy and Objectives of Home Economics, 1959, p. 680). Practitioners in the field sought to accomplish these goals through study of “the design, selection, construction, and care of clothing, and its psychological and social significance” and “textiles for clothing and for the home” (p. 680).

When members of the home economics professional organization reflected on their field of study in the late 20th century, they adopted a new name for the profession (Family and Consumer Sciences). In addition, they defined the profession’s body of knowledge and organization and stated a new mission for the field. Baugher et al. (2000) continued to view clothing as a “specialization thread” within this framework (p. 3).

In 1993, Bailey, Firebaugh, Haley, and Nickols provided an ecological perspective and new mission statement for their home economics and human ecology programs in higher education. They wrote,

An ecological perspective is contextual and focuses on reciprocal relations between people and their environments, the development of human potential, and the formation of social goals. Education, research, and outreach in human ecology programs are designed to enhance human health and well-being, impact the quality of goods and services in responding to human needs across the life course, and provide information for public policy formation. (p. 4)

This framework resonated with many textiles and clothing scholars, and they began to engage in intellectual dialogue about the role of clothing and textiles. Bubolz, Eicher, and Sontag (1979) and Bubolz and Sontag (1988) viewed clothing and textiles as elements within the human constructed environment as part of this perspective. Pedersen (1984) suggested that one purpose that the study of clothing and textiles serves is as a “tool used by family members” to promote the “optimum development and adjustment of each individual” (p. 23). Buckley (1988) adds to this conception. She stated that knowledge created within this point of view should be “applied to problems in the real world to facilitate the enhancement of the well-being of individuals and households” (p. 23). More recently, Beach, Kincaide, and SchofieldTomschin (2005) created a “multidimensional theoretical framework” (p. 29) for the textiles and clothing field, which “expands the concepts of human ecology” (p. 40). According to them, their investigation and

theoretical formulation focused on “human complexity” as a way to take into account “human needs and to fulfill the mission of improving human quality of life” (p. 41).

Kaiser and Damhorst (1991) present a model for conceptualization of the clothing and textiles field independent of a larger context. “Three thematic areas that seem to summarize and represent our subject matter” are presented (p. 3). Presented as interlocking circles, each area is described in the following statements:

The textile product evaluation theme represents the relationships among physical properties of the product (e.g., fiber, textile, apparel, etc.) and human responses to those properties. The appearance and social realities theme area relates to how people use textile products to bring meaning to self, others and everyday life. The third theme—textile and apparel production/ distribution systems—focuses on the processes of manufacturing, merchandising, and exchange that influence how (and when) textile and apparel products emerge in the global economy. (p. 3)

None of these statements answers the ontological question, What is the nature of the world, of society and the people who inhabit this world? From the above statement, it does appear that there are two realities to be considered: (a) a physical reality of the textile and apparel object, and (b) a social reality for the person in everyday life. Each of these ideas needs further exploration, however.

Epistemological positions. “A different ontology (that is, a different view of reality) necessarily gives rise to different knowledge about this reality” (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997, p. 74). To discover what is known about clothing and textiles, major studies about the kinds of problems selected for study, the organization of the results of these studies, delineation of the significant concepts and theories (either borrowed or created), and so forth is needed. In the history of thought in clothing and textiles, scholars and researchers have used the names of other disciplines to do the following:

- a. label curriculum areas (American Home Economics Association, 1941);
- b. identify research approaches (e.g., economics, sociology, and social psychology; Brasie, Brew, Fitzsimmons, Rankin, & Smart, 1947);
- c. create a conceptual model composed of different theories (e.g., cognitive theory, symbolic interaction theory, and culture; Kaiser, 1990); and to
- d. label subareas of subject matter (e.g., physics and chemistry; Horn, 1968), anthropology (Gurel & Beeson, 1979), and cultural anthropology.

To take all of these disciplines as part of our subject matter areas means that there are multiple realities, as each defines its own view, but we still do not know the epistemological positions. Reviewing titles of articles and research reports from many sources—pertinent journals, The Clothing and Textile Arts Index (Hutton, 1980, 1985), and the ITAA Newsletters (ITAA, 2003, 2004, 2005), the literature is overwhelmingly oriented to positivism. We already know the view of reality for positivism.

There are few articles representing the interpretive epistemological position. Nelson, Labat, and Williams (2002) is one in which comprehension of the meanings was sought of textile art to Irish women textile artists. Insight was gained into “the ways that textiles... help to shape and define notions of gender and creative expression in a socio-cultural context” (p. 15). Through this

research, conceptual categories are constructed from the common-sense meanings or practical interests of the textile artists. We come to understand the interpretations they attach to their everyday life experiences.

Nowhere among the work of textiles and clothing scholars examined was there evidence of a critical science perspective. How do we come to know through this epistemological view?

Methodological dimensions. If the epistemological position is overwhelmingly positivistic, it stands to reason that the methodology is primarily quantitative with little emphasis on the qualitative or interpretive mode of inquiry. Unfortunately, there has been no recent review of the nature of methodology in the field. It requires extensive study to answer the question, How is knowledge in the field created?

Future Directions

There is interest in and a need for a critical social science approach in clothing and textiles studies. Interest has been shown in several ways. One of these is the formation of an interest group in the ITAA, named Educators for Socially Responsible Apparel Business. They have conferred with Nike Corporation officials and have invited speakers from the Fair Labor Association and Worker's Rights Symposium to stimulate their interests.

A second step toward a critical science perspective has been the book by Littrell and Dickson (1999) that focuses on fair trade practices as an alternative for producers, retailers, and customers to consider. Then, there is the work of multiple advocacy organizations such as Women Working Worldwide and the National Labor Committee. The former has produced interview data from women working in Asian countries. The latter, through its director Charles Kernalegan, has produced films and interviews of working and living conditions of textiles and apparel workers in Central American countries. Sociologists and feminists have also conducted research on the subject. Needless to say, there has been consciousness-raising for a long time.

For textiles and clothing scholars and researchers to develop a critical social science view, there first is the need to adopt an "activist conception of human beings" (Fay, 1975, p. 47). This means a view of humans as actively creating their own conceptions of themselves.

Fay writes,

Fully active beings are what they are because of the self-understandings they have, and communities of such beings would therefore be constituted by their shared self-understandings. Their institutions, their hierarchies of authority, their methods of adjudicating claims and disputes, their status system, their mores and laws and customs—these and all other elements that comprise their society would be dependent upon their shared values, beliefs, and preferences. (pp. 51-52)

This is not the passive view of the human being from the positivist position. Once conception of human being as activist is clear, our mission statement can be written—that is, the mission statement for the field, not the organization of the ITAA.

Second, we need to develop a methodology for purposes of study. Comstock (1982) provided a method for critical research. In it, he began by developing interpretive categories of meanings of

the people or groups for whom change is needed. He then took into account the history and currency of social and cultural conditions and social structures over which individuals and groups have no control and which affect their actions and understandings. He then interrelated theoretical and practical activities and aims to change those practices through helping individuals change themselves and/or their conditions or through communicating the need for change to those institutions seeking to manipulate and control the lives of people. From these efforts, knowledge will be created which is useful in resolving practical problems of everyday living.

Other authors provide additional methods for study. There is critical action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Schon, 1983). There are five different methods presented by Carroll (2004). Neuman (2006) explained a reflexive-dialectic orientation and a transformative perspective as research methods for critical social science. Morrow (1994) talked about reflexive procedures. Some of these methods would be useful for research by clothing and textiles scholars as they focus on oppressed groups—children and adolescents in a consumer society, textile and apparel workers in developing countries, or the depiction of race, ethnicity, and minority groups' appearance in the mass media.

How do we take “the practical turn”? How can we “rethink our theories from the ground up” (Stern, 2003, p. 185)? How do we attend to textiles and clothing practices and the unique situations in which they are located? As we consider the practical problems of textiles and clothing of the layperson, can we expand our research approaches to include the critical science approach (completely understanding the realities and epistemology of our field) with the possibilities for change in the lives of individuals, families, and action in communities? An exploration of these ideas seems essential to the future of clothing and textiles. There is much to be done and a great deal we can contribute that will have a positive impact on everyday life.

Reflection and Speculation: Scenario Planning for the Future

Presenting three alternative approaches to knowledge-making in clothing and textiles is just that—presenting only three possible approaches. What we have sought to illustrate through this essay is that impact and implications are critical, whether one approaches the topic through the multimethod and contextual synthesis provided by material culture studies; through feminist analyses that direct attention to the dominant ideologies that are so often kept invisible via the objectivity-driven ontology of positivism; or by dialogue, reflection, and action, called for by critical science. The three alternative approaches are positioned here as ways of seeing, which although different and in some cases perhaps mutually exclusive, provide examples of interconnectivity when each is discussed within the philosophical perspective. We therefore feel it fitting, if not necessary, to approach the conclusion of the article from this perspective and with a reflective orientation, yet one that is speculative in nature in that it is mindful of the future.

We propose three potential types of scenarios that will be important in the coming years and ways to think about planning for them (Chermack & Lynham, 2004). In the interest of space, we do not have the luxury of providing extensively elaborated scenarios, only thoughts as to what a few important scenarios for the future might look like, consist of, and accomplish, given the approaches to inquiry we have presented. We also acknowledge that what is presented here as a conclusion is in essence only a starting point on the path to the future. Corporate and consumer responsibility, education for social problem-solving, and transdisciplinarity are three areas

around which we begin planning for scenario-building, based on alternative approaches to inquiry. These scenarios are just three out of a number that is perhaps infinite. They are, however, the three that we feel strongly are critical to the future, not just as knowledge produced within the clothing and textiles field but of ourselves as humans regularly engaged in understanding our lived experience with the subject matter.

One potential view of the future stems from the rapid momentum by which societies have embraced consumer culture (Zukin & Maguire, 2004). In the early 21st century, we are becoming a planet of consumers. More and more societies have succumbed to the lure of the products we make and use on a daily basis. Indeed, this reality has been and continues to be a byproduct of the capitalist system—but where does it lead? Will we simply continue to consume more and more, exponentially and ad infinitum? If so, what about the availability of resources? Human, natural, or otherwise, resources are not without limit. What about waste caused by the rapid and constant turnover of products discarded not because they do not function but because they are no longer new? This leads to a real concern not just about consumer responsibility but about corporate responsibility as well. Is a quick profit today worth the social and ecological problems we know we will face tomorrow? How can we create knowledge that addresses the long-term effects of today's profit-driven economic system?

Studying problems that arise from our hyperconsumption culture necessitates a perspective that focuses on the synergy of social and cultural knowledge—such as the kind of synergy that comes in part through material culture studies. Material culture studies brings together the search for understanding people and the products we make and use within a framework that embraces the importance of the past for understanding the present and for planning for the future. The study might begin with the question: How does the consumption of today reflect that of the past? Followed by, What are the ways that the consumption of today may affect tomorrow? Concomitantly, within the feminist social science perspective, the impact of consumption on people becomes clear. Issues of gender, race, and class all intersect within the making, using, and disposing of products. Questions regarding labor practices, including compensation, fair treatment, and lived experience within the consumption cycle are vital to developing a true understanding of the implications of global consumer culture. Who makes the products versus the profits? Who consumes the products, and why? Such questions framed by a critical science approach to analysis could point to the ways that the field itself might challenge existing frameworks (i.e., asking, What is gained?) to work toward a future wherein respect for human and natural resources is a starting point instead of an afterthought.

In thinking about ways to approach planning for tomorrow, the commitment of educators to the shaping of the future should not be underestimated. Namely, educators can and often do initiate the problem-solving process with respect to clothing and textiles—whether we are talking about their production, consumption, or sales—regularly within the classroom and within knowledge-making practices. Educating for problem-solving necessarily involves thinking about tomorrow and could easily work toward solutions that will make a difference to the future of the industry, society, and of our field. Developing products for growing populations and the growing diversity of consumers is one such potential area, particularly when keeping the aforementioned social responsibility component in mind. Material culture studies as an inquiry approach can be used to deconstruct the point where our creation, use, and disposal of products interface. It can also help

us understand how material objects are results of production and distribution—both dependent on labor, which itself is the axis on which issues of gender, ethnicity, class, and national origin all intersect. It can also help us understand the dynamics between material production and knowledge production. To fully understand these interconnections, we must look to the margins, at those social, intellectual, and cultural groups that eschew the dominant ideologies for their own paths to knowledge creation (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000). Feminist thought and theory has already brought forth a future that acknowledges difference, diversity, and multiplicity. It has revealed to us the oppression, repression, and suppression operating within our ontological standpoints and ultimately our epistemological assumptions. The exploration of gender as a category of analysis called for by feminist thought in particular necessitated social critique on a grand scale, acquainting us with alternative ways of seeing the present. When such an exploration is guided by a critical science approach to knowledge production, we clearly see how the future is not something preprogrammed into our consciousness but something we must work toward shaping ourselves.

Working within and across the dividing lines of academic disciplines is another way to shape the future. At the level of epistemological analysis, Brown (1993) calls this process transdisciplinarity—defining it as a process of boundary-crossing that affects knowledge production at the very root. Conceptually speaking, as a field, clothing and textiles is naturally inclined toward the transdisciplinarity of knowledge production. But certain questions must be addressed, lest the field lose its uniqueness as its identity is subsumed within that of other, more vocal or visible disciplinary areas. First, we must share what we already know with other disciplines, as part of the give-and-take of being openly transdisciplinary and actively participating within the larger dialogue (Horlick-Jones & Sime, 2004; Lawrence, 2004). Then, who, what, and how we know must be thought of in the context of “why and what for?” This entails asking the essential epistemological so what question: What is it that we do that truly makes a difference? Finally, this requires critically reflecting on the ways that we are a field as much influenced by human science (van Manen, 1990) as social science, and one with a long history of investigating issues and problems of importance to human beings (Hartmann, 1949).

Our hopes in writing this collaborative article is to show how as a field, our efforts have and will continue to make a difference when diverse perspectives are recognized—particularly, diverse approaches to knowledge-making. We hope that by illustrating how the futuring framework can be used to situate a discussion of select approaches to inquiry, we have provided a necessary forum for continued dialogue on the importance of the philosophical perspective within knowledge production. Moreover, we hope to have illustrated how in the clothing and textiles field, the knowledge created in the present—as that of the past—has relevance for addressing many of the challenges that define the future of our world as we know it today. In the future, it is likely that we will look on the late 20th and early 21st centuries as an uncertain and somewhat volatile period in the history of our field, characterized by restructuring within university communities that threatened the very future of the field itself. However, given our rich history of focus on a subject matter deeply entrenched within the lives of people, we can be certain that the production of knowledge within clothing and textiles will continue well into the future. Cultivating an awareness of how our underlying assumptions shape the manner in which this knowledge is produced ensures that it is a future both rich in dimension and strong in vision.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, the term *philosophical perspective* is used to clearly identify the link between ontology and epistemology in the approach to knowledge creation and provides a framework for understanding assumptions that both underlie and shape the research process.

2. The charge of the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Philosophical Mission committee is to increase awareness of the underlying assumptions of actions within their research, curriculum, and outreach efforts. The committee was formed as a means to critically and philosophically reflect on the teaching, scholarship, and service goals of the organization as a whole. Recently, members have used the Special Topics Session format as a mechanism to foster dialogue about the goals of the ITAA community that are believed to be critical to the future of the field.

3. We will return to this question throughout the article, as it not only surfaces throughout the discussion of alternative modes of inquiry but is also fundamental to the future scenarios we propose at the end of the article.

4. Here, we are using the term *theoretical paradigm* in accordance with Denzin and Lincoln (2000), wherein the authors define four primary paradigms structuring research: postivist/postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (i.e., emancipatory), and feminist-poststructural (pp. 19-20).

5. Phenomenology is described as a research strategy, in accordance with Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 20). However, others, such as van Manen (1990) and Kvale (1996), position phenomenology as both an approach to inquiry as well as an inquiry paradigm.

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