

Engaging in Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration to Enhance Knowledge of Late Victorian Clothing and Residential Building Design

Dina Smith-Glaviana, Virginia Tech

Eunju Hwang, Virginia Tech

Gregory, Galford, Virginia Tech

Keywords: Artifact Analysis, Clothing, Cross-Disciplinary, Dress, Material Culture, Residential Design

Mida and Kim's (2015) framework is a methodological tool for object-based research or material culture analysis on historic dress artifacts. The framework was developed as checklists to facilitate the systematic observation, reflection, and interpretation of clothing. Educators have adopted the checklists to facilitate object-based learning as a pedagogical approach derived from the research methodology (Baldwin, 2018; Banning & Gam, 2020; Marcketti & Gordon, 2022). Researchers have also drawn on Mida and Kim's (2015) approach to research and select artifacts for exhibition (McElvain & Oberg, 2022). However, despite its widespread use and acceptance, student experiences using the framework have not been widely reported. For this project, we, fashion and residential design (housing) educators, aimed to help students draw connections between clothing and building styles and help students understand why clothing and building styles evolve in tandem. Therefore, we needed a tool students could use to analyze the design characteristics of both historic clothing and buildings. We used Mida and Kim's (2015) checklists to analyze historic clothing and adapted them to analyze building design. The purpose of this research was two-fold: 1) To assess students' ability to identify connections in design between clothing and buildings by analyzing similar design characteristics of late Victorian clothing (the 1890s) and late Victorian buildings (interior or exterior) and 2) To examine students' experiences using Mida and Kim's (2015) framework for analyzing clothing and building design.

We employed a cross-disciplinary approach where principles of one discipline are used to explain questions from another discipline (Holly, 2009, p. 4). These principles include borrowing research methods and constructs from another field to better understand the shared topic or enhance data collection and analysis (Holly, 2009). In line with the cross-disciplinary approach, we designed a learning activity in which the methods associated with Mida and Kim's (2015) framework typically used to observe and analyze late Victorian clothing design was employed to observe and analyze that of buildings of the same period. This cross-disciplinary project is worth sharing with others as fashion educators have reported the benefits of engaging in interdisciplinary activities. These include an increased understanding of design, career preparedness, improved teamwork with students in other disciplines, and a holistic academic experience (Yang et al., 2016).

Method and Procedure

Data was collected through two iterations of the study. In the first iteration, junior and senior-level residential design students collaborated with sophomore-level fashion students to analyze a late Victorian home (c1897) currently serving as a museum. The residential design professor, an architect, lectured to students on components of the building that reflected its historical context before the students analyzed the building. The following week, the fashion instructor lectured all the students on how Victorian dress reflected its historical context. Following the lecture, the students analyzed several 1890s garments from the university fashion

collection. The second iteration differed by involving students in a junior-level American housing history course who analyzed a Victorian building of their choice. Students in both iterations completed a reflection assignment with open-ended questions about the experience. Their responses were analyzed using a transcendental phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2007). Responses were coded by hand by one professor and checked against an analysis provided by qualitative research software to increase reliability.

Results and Discussion

Data included reflection paper responses from six housing students (three in 2021 and three in 2022) and 13 fashion students in 2021. Three main themes related to the first research objective emerged: 1) Connections in design, 2) Sharing knowledge, and 3) Different perspectives. Students indicated they could draw connections between late Victorian clothing (1890s) and buildings (interior or exterior). They explained that the activities helped them “acknowledge the direct relationship to styles in fashion to design for home interiors,” pointing out that the dark colors and the curvilinear motifs in the 1890s were present in the interior (wallpaper) and exterior of the house and in the clothing they analyzed (Figure 1). Students noted that the opportunity to share specialized knowledge and exposure to different perspectives were



Figure 1. (a) Dark-colored wallpaper with curvilinear motifs. (b) Dark-colored paint on the exterior of the building. (c) Dark-colored 1890s two-piece day dress with curvilinear textile surface designs/motifs.

advantages of collaborative activities. For example, student F13 wrote, “Collaborating with other students was also extremely helpful. It gave a new perspective on the same project, which we would not have looked at otherwise.” As in previous research, the students enjoyed working and conversing with individuals from different fields and backgrounds (Yang et al., 2016), which moved them beyond their normal thought patterns (Kim et al., 2015).

Two main themes emerged relating to the second research objective, including that the checklists were 1) helpful tools for analyzing clothing and building design but 2) challenging to complete. Student F8 explained, “I feel like they did guide us for things to look for, but they did have a lot of information I did not know anything about.” As intended and reported in previous research (Baldwin, 2018), Mida and Kim’s (2015) checklist promotes “the slow approach to seeing,” confirming that “At its core, these checklists serve to slow down the process of looking and offer a systematic route to engaging with and documenting the artifact being observed” (Mida, 2017, p. 281). However, while the checklists were practical guides for students’ analysis of material culture, they were not “easy to use,” as Mida and Kim (2015, p. 27) claimed. Students found the checklist challenging because they required extensive knowledge and skills to identify the materials and construction of the textiles and buildings analyzed.

Conclusions

Fashion educators should design integrated cross-disciplinary activities with other fields when given the opportunity. In this cross-disciplinary project, we adapted Mida and Kim's (2015) artifact analysis framework to building design and examined apparel and housing

students' experiences using its associated checklists. We found that the framework was adaptable, and its use can be extended to analyzing the design of varying artifacts. However, the results revealed the need to modify the checklists to be less challenging in 2023 and 2024 project iterations. Using the two frameworks effectively enabled students to make connections between clothing and building design, understand how they exist contextually within culture, and help students understand why clothing and building styles evolve in tandem. In addition, students benefited from sharing knowledge and perspectives from both disciplines by having a more enjoyable and valuable learning experience. Thus, we plan to continue collaborations between fashion and housing students.

References

- Baldwin, S. (2018). An object-based research study of archive pieces incorporating digital technology. *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education Volume 17*(1), 25–32. doi: 10.1386/adch.17.1.25_1
- Banning, J., & Gam, H.J. (2020). Object-based learning in a world dress course. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 48(4), 343–358. doi:10.1111/fcsr.12362
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Holly, K. (2009). Understanding interdisciplinary challenges and opportunities in higher education. *ASHE Higher Education Report 35*(2), 1–31. https://www.academia.edu/5390376/Understanding_Interdisciplinary_Challenges_and_Opportunities_in_Higher_Education
- Kim, M. J., Ju, S. R., & Lee, L. (2015). A cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration in a joint design studio. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 34(1), 102-120.
- Marcketti, S. B., & Gordon, J. F. (2022). The fashion and textiles collection matrix: A proposed self-assessment tool. *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*, 13(1), 167–183. https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb_00042_1
- McElvain, J. E., & Oberg, C. S. (2022). Curating Dior to disco: Extrapolating complex narratives from existing objects. *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty* 13(1), 45–68. https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb_00037_1
- Mida, I. (2017). The curator's sketchbook: Reflections on learning to see. *Drawing: Research, Theory, Practice* 2(2), 275-285. doi: 10.1386/drtpr.2.2.275_1
- Mida, I., & Kim, A. (2015). *The dress detective: A practical guide to object-based research in fashion*. Bloomsbury.
- Yang, J., Jones, B., MacDonald, N.M., (2016). Student learning outcomes of an interdisciplinary fashion event. *Proceedings of the ITAA-KSCT Joint Symposium*. Vancouver, British Columbia. 1-2.