



Apparel Design Students' Use of Textiles and Clothing Museums as Sources of Inspiration

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Fashion and costume designers draw upon many different sources of inspiration during their creative process. Museums are one particular venue in which many designers can find inspiration for their future works. Specifically, textiles and clothing museums and museums with textiles and clothing collections have the potential to inspire fashion designers and apparel design students with their historic and contemporary textiles and clothing exhibits (Keiser & Garner, 2012). As up-and-coming fashion designers, apparel design students are exposed to a plethora of different inspiration sources, but museums offer additional background information and insight into their collection artifacts, which stimulate a deeper understanding of the social and political environments in which their artifacts were created. Specifically, textiles and clothing museums cater to patrons interested in fashion, both historic and contemporary. For apparel design students, textiles and clothing museums offer a means in which to find inspiration based upon past and contemporary fashion trends.

The Internet has afforded many users the ability to access multiple sources of information within seconds. Many public and university-based museums have used the Internet to their advantage in reaching patrons who cannot physically visit their institutions, whether because of distance or lack of time and/or funds (Bowen, Bennett, & Johnson, 1998). In as such, the current generation of apparel design students can have even greater access to textiles and clothing museums' collections in order to find inspiration for their class projects and extracurricular design work.

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which university apparel design students use exhibited artifacts at textiles and clothing museums (both in-person and online) as sources of inspiration for their designs and to gain insight into the students' opinions on the effectiveness of translating their textile-and-clothing museum inspirations in their final design work. For this study, several questions were posed regarding: 1) how often and for how long the students visited brick-and-mortar textiles and clothing museums and museums with textiles and clothing collections on display as well as online collections; 2) the reasons for visiting the museums and/or their websites; 3) how the viewed artifacts inspired their design work; and 4) students' opinions on how well the inspiration(s) translated into their designs.

A mixed-methods approach was used to understand the frequency with which apparel design students use textiles and clothing museums and their online collections as venues for sources of inspirations in addition to how the sources of inspirations are used in their design work. A link to an online Qualtrics survey that included both quantitative and qualitative questions was distributed to undergraduate and graduate apparel design students at a university in the southeastern United States. Data was collected over a period of one month and an analysis

of the collected data was performed using two methods. Descriptive statistics were performed on the quantitative data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 20 (SPSS) software. The thematic process using ATLAS.ti 7™ data analysis and research software was used in order to code the open-ended, qualitative data and to identify recurring themes among participants' answers.

A total of 34 usable responses were collected (44.7% of the contacted subjects). Almost two-thirds of the apparel design students surveyed visited textiles and clothing museums or museums with textiles and clothing collections on display during a calendar year. During visits to textiles and clothing museums or museums with textiles and clothing collections on exhibition, 53% of participants reported that they typically spent 30 minutes to one and one-half hours viewing the current exhibitions. Although visits to these types of museums were reported, just over three-quarters of the students admitted to never or only visiting the museums' online collections or exhibitions once or twice per year. Distance, busy schedules, and lack of knowledge of available exhibition venues were the most frequently named reasons that the students reported for not visiting textiles and clothing museums.

A general interest in viewing textiles and clothing exhibits was noted as the primary visit for 90% of the students. For the 70% of students who found inspiration in the exhibits for their design work, the artifacts' silhouettes, textile designs, details, and historical references were the most often noted means of inspiration that they used in their design work. Seventy-one percent of participants believed that Pinterest was not a credible historical fashion reference unless the pinned posts were linked to scholarly or institutional sources; however, 69% percent of the students admitted to often or frequently visiting the Pinterest website for fashion inspiration.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that textiles and clothing museums and museums with textiles and clothing exhibitions can be valuable inspiration resources for apparel design students. For those students who are limited in visiting these types of museums, they look to fashion blogs and websites such as Pinterest for design inspiration although they may not be credible sources of historical information. Future research should explore apparel design students' perspectives of ways in which textiles and clothing museums and museums with textiles and clothing exhibitions can modify their presentation and accessibility in order to draw these types of students to their physical and online locations more frequently.

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Keiser, S. J., & Garner, M. B. (2012). *Beyond design: The synergy of apparel product development*. New York, NY: Fairchild Books.