Exploring Social Justice Issues Through Design in an Apparel Design Studio Course

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New Approach/Purpose of Strategy. "Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising, and valued (Boden, 2004, p. 1). Boden (2004) explained that one way to be creative is to make "unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas" (p. 2). One familiar concept at a public institution set in an urban environment in the United States is social justice. At this institution, ideas related to addressing social justices issues are infused throughout the curriculum across campus in both general education and major-only courses. These courses cover issues of hierarchy, privilege, empowerment, and community resistance. Instructors are challenged to address these social constructions on a variety of topics related to the human condition including age, gender, race, ethnicity, nation, location, sexuality, religion, class, and immigration status. Most courses incorporating topics related to social justice are in the social sciences, humanities, education, or health disciplines. There is a lack of art, design, or practice-based courses that include social justice into the curriculum based upon the approved course listing on the university website. One of the student learning outcomes for the apparel design studio course is to utilize different design processes and to experiment with unique inspiration sources. The goal of this project was to engage students with social justice issues throughout the design process in an apparel design studio setting. This project was designed to meet this student learning outcome and to infuse and encourage engagement with an important topic in a non-traditional fashion.

Implementation of Strategy/Practice. Students were required to create an original design that covered both the upper and lower portions of the body using the draping process. First, students identified a target market and communicated the demographics and psychographics on a presentation board. Then, the instructor presented a brief lecture on social justice. The instructor defined social justice and equity, and then provided several examples of inequalities present in our society. This was highlighted in a variety of ways including short videos highlighting experiences of discrimination or oppression. Following this lecture, students were required to identify a social injustice present in our society and research the topic by examining news, journals, or other outlets. Students were allowed to interview individuals that they may personally know in a particular group that may experience discrimination or oppression in order to better understand the injustice. Next, a summary of their findings was written, and then a moodboard with written and/or visual elements displayed their social injustice inspiration source. Designers were instructed to utilize imagery representing the social injustice or utilize emotional components in an abstract form related to the topics. Students were then presented with Eckert and Stacey's (2003) "types of transformations," which explains different ways to transform elements of inspiration into a design (p. 368). Types included: literal adaptation, conscious simplification, abstraction, modification to source, association, and deviation. Students were

encouraged to utilize visual representation in the design or utilize emotions associated with the injustice in the construction and elements throughout the design process and execution.

Following the development of the inspiration source, initial design ideas were developed and fabric stories and color pallets were chosen. A student-driven design critique occurred before execution of designs began. Following this exercise, students identified their strongest design and wrote a short paragraph describing how their inspiration was incorporated into the design. Students then executed their designs, and re-worked their moodboard and target market boards. A formal presentation by each student completed the exercise.

Description of Effectiveness. Students utilized a variety of social justice inspiration sources such as racial inequity, sexism, colorism, classism, and abelism. During presentations, students exhibited strong emotion and connection to their results. Following the turn-in of the project, students submitted their designs to the school fashion show along with their moodboards in order to highlight their work as a collective group. The designs were displayed as a collection in the show while their moodboards displayed on a screen (see Figure 1).

The presentation will include visual examples of student work, and how the project will be modified for the future based on student feedback provided at the conclusion of the course.

Figure 1. Example of student project by Uzoamaka Ofoegbu. Moodboard on left depicts inspiration from Ferguson, and the image on right illustrates the design on runway with model gesturing the "hands up, don't shoot" symbol utilized by protestors bringing awareness to Michael Brown's death (Photos courtesy of Uzoamaka Ofoegbu).

Boden, M. A. (2004). Creativity in a nutshell. In M.A. Boden (Ed.), *The creative mind: Myths and mechanisms* (pp. 1-10). London, England: Routledge.

Eckert, C. & Stacey, M. (2000). Sources of inspiration: A language of design. Design Studies, 21(5), 523-538.