



Denim Risk: A Case Study by Five Fashion Designers with Nontraditional Seam Placement in a Creative Design Process Using Denim Fabric

Chanjuan Chen, Kent State University
Melanie Carrico, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Krissi Riewe, University of North Texas
Ashley Rougeaux-Burnes, Texas Tech University
Sheri Dragoo, Baylor University

This paper is intended to add to the conversation about scholarship and the creative process through the sharing of a case study by five designers. The study, focused on developing individual garment designs with nontraditional seam placement using an iconic American fabric, denim, builds on Bye's (2010) framework for clothing and textile design scholarship, showing case study scholarship as part creative practice, part research through practice. The creative practice framework incorporates problem identification as well as defining the way each designer works. By gathering, reflecting on, and analyzing the results, however, the overall project enters the framework of research through practice.

Five design educators came together to create original designs based on specific guidelines. By using 3 yards of denim as the primary fabric, they collaboratively established the main challenge to be avoiding traditional seam placement in an effort to spur creative pattern cuts. Additionally, allowance of trims and surface treatment or embellishment and incorporating technology into the designing and/or making of the garment were encouraged. As one of the most worn fabrics in the world, how the researchers realized new and creative designs that use the familiar fabric but avoid the traditional seam placement was the main goal for this project. Lastly, there was to be no discussion during the process but use of inspiration journals and process photos were required. The project guidelines echoed Carrico, et al., (2011) in that once guidelines were collaboratively established, communication about the individual garment designs ceased until the garments were completed. The prohibition of communication ensured that each designer created a unique garment without peer influence.

Denim is an ideal textile to serve as the medium for this project due to its high consumer demand and variety of applied technological advancements. Denim is one of the most widely used textiles in the fashion industry and has a well-documented history of innovation. The global denim market was calculated at over \$56 million in 2017 and is projected to continue growing in the coming years ("Denim Market," 2017). As a design challenge, nontraditional seam placement has been explored by fashion designers. For example, during the mid-1980s, Geoffrey Beene investigated on the use of curved seams to create designs whose lines were not interrupted by side seams (Beene, 2005). Similarly, in Ralph Rucci's work, traditional front, side or back seams are not usually seen as they often are integrated into different pieces that contour the body which marries his vision and functionality (Bissonnette, 2005).

One garment was developed and completed by each of the designers by the end of the project period. As an age- and location-diverse group of researchers, they explored various ways to work with nontraditional seam placement as well as incorporating the use of fashion technology in their design process. At the end of project, each of the researchers filled out a short survey created by the group to reflect on the process, challenges they encountered, and the effectiveness of the case study. Overall, the project encouraged each participant to experiment and work outside their comfort zone, taking risks that broaden creative knowledge and opportunity. The resulting garments and design process had some similarities. For example, all designers chose to make a dress as their final garment, and all five designers utilized some kind of fashion technology to support their design process and the challenge of working with nontraditional seams. For example, when asked how the researcher approached his/her solution to the challenge (draping, flat pattern, 3D, etc.) and why he/she worked that way, one designer said, “I skipped the original pattern making process. Instead, I laser cut my motifs and draped them into the garment afterwards (this was also one of my major risks).” On the other hand, there are also differences between the designers in terms of the approaches to pattern creation. Two designers abandoned their usual method of patternmaking and assembled components on the dress form. One designer purposefully committed to using 3D Visualization software to make their pattern in both an answer to the technology component of the project and “so that I was forcing myself to learn it more- go beyond the simple tasks I was doing with the students and really see how I would use it to figure out some of my problems.” Moreover, the decision of using denim as the primary fabric had also directed the designers’ creative decisions. One designer commented, “the natural tendency for denim fraying had to be addressed as either controlled or organically managed design elements.” And another designer said, “I went for a cowboy/western inspiration playing on some of denim’s popular associations.”

In conclusion, the overall project entered the framework of research through practice. By developing individual garment designs with nontraditional seam placement using denim, each designer worked outside their comfort zone with the established challenge on pattern making and took risks with technology that broaden creative knowledge and opportunity. Future study will include working with new challenges and guidelines within the group. The researchers could also bring the research into teaching and give similar assignments to students and compare the outcomes. The reflections from each designer will also contribute to the broader study of creativity and specifically how designers approach given challenges and how technology can impact creative outputs.

References

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