Intersections Connect:

Wearable Arts Working Collectively at the Local Level

AN ACADEMIC CAPSTONE PAPER SUBMITTED TO

THE COLLEGE OF CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

D J Gramann II

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Professional Studies:
Arts and Cultural Leadership
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
Capstone Advisor – Tom Borrup, Ph.D.

May 2018

Abstract

Entitled Intersections Connect, this project brings together garment making disciplines including, but not limited to home and industrial sewing, fashion, costuming, up-cycling and Cos-play under the umbrella term wearable art to assess the commonalities in the need for skill building, knowledge expansion, and access to resources for the purpose of increasing sustainability for individuals and groups. The project incorporates a needs assessment that included data collection from the following sources: a literature review, focus groups, a survey to Textile Center members and the professional experience of the researcher.

To gain access to members and data for this research, a partnership was established with Textile Center, a national nonprofit fiber arts organization that is looking to build programming that expands and engages its constituencies in the areas of fashion and wearable art.

The themes of art versus craft, educating the audience, self-expression, aura, and the conceptual framework of dress from the literature review are all echoed in the findings and bring insight to the challenges experienced at the practitioner level.

Introduction

Passion for clothes, their history, their construction, their value as art and the role they play based on cultural relevance is a driver for garment makers of all types. Whether it is the fashion runway in Paris, costumes that facilitate storytelling, culturally specific attire, or a stylistic mode of self-expression through dress, these disciplines are related in that they focus on covering the human body. When these disciplines produce handmade garments, the garments can be couched in the term wearable art. As an artist, practitioner, and enthusiast, it is the desire of the researcher to have greater access to and connectivity between individuals and groups in the Twin Cities metro area who make garments of all types. Increased connectivity and a tighter network can provide sustainability for individuals and groups through the sharing of knowledge, resources and a labor force that possesses the unique skills needed in garment making.

Entitled Intersections Connect, the goal of this project is to find intersections or commonalities in the need for skill building, knowledge expansion, and access to resources related to garment making disciplines including, but not were limited to home and industrial sewing, fashion, costuming, up-cycling and Cos-play. And then to explore how individuals and groups can be supported at these intersections to increase connectivity and facilitate collective working to benefit the wearable art community at the local level.

Therefore, this project seeks to answer the following question: What needs exist in the Twin Cities fashion and wearable arts community and how can barriers be overcome to include greater diversity in the definition of fashion, artist and practitioner networks, systems of support and existing programs and services at the local level?

To gain access to members and data for this research, a partnership was established with the Textile Center, a national fiber arts organization located in St Paul, Minnesota. The center

has offered programming related to fashion and wearable art since its incorporation in 1994. In their early years, an annual fashion show and boutique was the main source of revenue and it served to bring focus to the wearable arts. However, this model was labor intensive and generated little revenue. In recent years, they have shifted to an annual garage sale, a model that yields higher revenue with lower labor requirements. An unintended consequence of this change resulted in a lack of cohesion in wearable art programming even though Textile Center has strong ties to artists and designers in the wearable arts. Looking to rebuild programming that engages this portion of its constituency, the organization set out to find modern, relevant programmatic solutions that support the current needs of the wearable arts community.

Although diversity and inclusion were not a main focus of the Textile Center Strategic Plan 2016-2021, they play a role in its capacity to serve the community. Every nonprofit organization must define their community and the Textile Center has expanded their definition. Therefore, in an effort to expand their member base, this project set out to evaluate the needs of other creative, ethnic, and cultural groups with related interests in the wearable arts to foster an atmosphere of greater inclusion.

While reaching out to individuals and groups outside the Textile Center, a mechanism was needed to educate both groups, those who are members and those who are not. One aspect of this education was to redefine inclusion, shifting from a passive stance of "all are welcome here," in this case at Textile Center, to active outreach that connects the various disciplines of fashion, costuming, up-cycling, etcetera, to all creative, ethnic and cultural groups who make garments that fit under the umbrella term wearable art. Thus, this definition of inclusion considers all members of both groups as one. Redefining inclusion in this way facilitates the sharing of interests, ideas, skills and experiences and cultivates unity among garment makers

across ethnic and cultural boundaries. This is where the idea of Intersections Connect came into play. By locating the intersections in common needs and interests among center members as well as those outside the Textile Center participants can share the exploration of artistic self-expression within this discipline to foster connectivity.

Literature Review

This section focuses on aspects of fashion theory such as the socializing impulse, the differentiating impulse, the flow of fashion and the drivers of fashion that have changed over time in order to add context to the phenomenon that is twenty-first century fashion and the challenges this modern version of fashion create for wearable artists. In addition, the relevant aspect of self-expression and aura borrowed from art theory are incorporated to help connect the wearable artist-craftsperson to this modern fashion consumer and audience.

Fashion has become a "hybrid subject" according to Lise Skov and Marie Riegels Melchior (2008) because it expands the theory from cataloguing history to include economics, semiotics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, art history, cultural studies, design studies, and business and cultural studies to name a few. "Fashion is a term much loved and hated, with two rather distinct meanings – clothing and something that is popular (and usually short lived)" (p.4) making the concept of fashion both narrower and broader than the concepts of bodily covering. In the twenty-first century, fashion has "become an institution for launching novelty, an ally of the avant-garde" (p.5).

Fashion Defined

The term fashion has become a term that involves the introduction of something new, an "innovation" that becomes trend in many disciplines such as architecture, interior design and advertising. However, according to Luke Russell (2011) change that is considered fashion has

specific requirements. The change can be neither for reasons of utility, nor a matter of necessity. "Changes in fashion are changes that are driven by taste, which are freely chosen rather than forced" (p. 40). In light of these perimeters, he proposes this definition:

> Something is "fashionable" or "in fashion" in a particular society in a particular time if and only if it falls within the domain of regularly shifting attitudes and practices, and is approved and chosen, not out of necessity or for purely utilitarian reasons, by a large percentage of the people in that society at the time, or by a privileged sub group of people in that society at that time (pg. 40).

In specific reference to bodily covering, Skov and Melchior (2008) reference the debate among scholars over a "privileged term" that is inclusive. As a phenomenon, the practice of bodily covering is present in all cultures of humanity, however, bodily covering is practiced in different ways for different reasons. Therefore, which of these terms, 'clothes', 'costume' or 'dress,' best describe the practice of covering the body and how it should be defined?

The term 'clothes' has not been used as an analytical concept by any research tradition but is sometimes "the preferred term because it is a neutral and descriptive designation in contrast to fashion, which always involves an ideal" (Skov & Melchior, 2008, p. 4).

Although the term adds specificity, it must be handled very carefully according to Malcolm Barnard (2014); clothes are not simply adornment. He describes covering as a necessary "prosthetic" for understanding and experiencing the body in an existentialist approach. "The prosthetic cannot be an enhancing, augmentation or extension of the body; it is what makes the body possible in the first place. It is not that there is the body that is then decorated; strictly, it is the 'decoration' that makes the body possible" (pg. 39). Therefore, Barnard views clothing as just one of the ways in which humans express the self.

Thomas Carlyle has similar existentialist views of the term clothes; clothes cannot exist without cultural relevance. "Even the ostensibly natural need for, and response to, protection is already a cultural activity because there can never be a non-cultural response to that need" (as cited in Barnard, 2014, p. 43). Beyond the function of cover, clothes establish us as individuals, differentiating us from one another and establishing organized society in this view.

The expressive, cultural, and social aspects of covering the body throughout history are lacking in the study of 'costume,' the term which refers to object-based research done primarily in the curatorial work of museology. Derogatorily referred to as the "hem-line" approach in Research Approaches to the Study of Fashion and Dress (Skov & Melchior, 2008), its aim is to identify, "register and classify individual garments in terms of historical origin" and chronological order (pg. 10). The feeling among scholars is that the way in which the body is covered in a particular society is representative of cultural values and must be studied more holistically.

The most recent and comprehensive of conceptual frameworks that study bodily covering holistically is that of 'dress' developed by Joanne B. Eicher, an American anthropologist. Eicher's work expands the focus from covering the body to include "bodily practices, both grooming and hygienic practices, and the role dress plays in social interaction… Because it is neutral in terms of cultural hierarchies, this concept of dress facilitates cross-cultural research, and it has been adopted by scholars from many disciplines who study dress and fashion in a global context" (Skov & Melchior, 2008, p. 3).

The conceptual framework and definition of dress Eicher has formulated is a multi-layered phenomenon, encompassing cross-cultural inclusion. She takes the concept that clothes make the self possible from Barnard combined with the concept that clothes make society

possible from Carlyle further by framing them in practice. The practices of cleaning, covering, and modifying the body exist in every society and every culture. The framework of Eicher invites all Homo sapiens into the phenomenon of dress, regardless of their sex, culture, race, or sexual orientation.

Note to the reader, although dress is the preferred conceptual framework for this paper, due to the historical nature of this research in theoretical context, the term fashion will be used hence forth to refer specifically to the phenomenon of dress.

Theory of Fashion

Georg Simmel was a German sociologist, philosopher, and critic who contextualized fashion, or in this case fashionable clothing, as a phenomenon in his 1903 essay entitled *Fashion*. There are three key aspects of fashion theory advanced by Simmel that relate directly to this project.

First, he cites two social tendencies among humans, conformity or the "socializing impulse" and individuality or the "differentiating impulse." He argues that the presence of both are "essential to the establishment of fashion" (p. 546) in a given society and that the lack of the differentiating impulse will result in fashion not being formed. He explains the phenomenon of fashion in terms of individual societies and their level of complexity.

The socializing impulse is the impulse for humans to come together for survival, the simple or least complex form of society. Simmel shared his notion of the simple society with his contemporary Herbert Spencer. A fellow philosopher, sociologist and contributor to fashion theory, Spencer was an advocate of Darwinism and believed that societies are formed to insure survival (Sweet, n.d.). In the theory advanced by Simmel, the impetus to form a society strictly based on survival is the socializing impulse. Furthermore, the socializing impulse brings humans

together in a simple society, a society where bodily covering will have less variety and "be more

stable because the need of new impressions and forms of life, quite apart from their social effect,

is far less pressing" (Simmel, 1903/1957, p. 547). This simple society will cover the body out of

necessity, the utilitarian reasons cited by Russell in his definition above. This bodily covering

will take form in stylistic ways that express the cultural beliefs specific to that society; the

cultural relevance as described by Carlyle. Although covering the body is necessary for survival

within this society, the covering is merely clothes and not fashion.

In the view point of Simmel for fashion to be formed, a given society must become

complex enough for the differentiating impulse to override the socializing impulse. The

differentiating impulse is the "fear of absorption" that exists in tandem with the socializing

impulse once societies become complex. This impulse causes one to want to "stand out;" the

need for the new is stronger in complex societies than it is in the simple society. Simmel

observes the differentiating impulse as the driver for the change or trend in dress that he calls

fashion.

Herbert Spencer frames this in Darwinism as the "inclination in [human] beings to pursue

whatever would preserve their lives" (as cited in Sweet, n.d.). Therefore, survival of the fittest

plays out in the phenomenon of fashion. The idea being that fashion is a means for individuals to

compete and survive within a given society so as not to get lost in the crowd. In other words, in

the complex society there exists a "danger of absorption" and the differentiating impulse drives

the phenomenon of fashion or fashionable clothing as a means of survival (Simmel, 1903/1957,

p. 546).

Simmel also observed that complex societies experience time as a process in which

"things come and go," whereas simple societies have no need for "new impressions and forms of

life." Consequently, simple societies do not experience the temporal process in which something

becomes fashionable and almost immediately "goes to its doom." "Fashion always occupies the

dividing-line between the past and the future, and consequently conveys a stronger feeling of the

present, at least while it is at its height, than most other phenomena" (Simmel, 1903/1957, p.

547). As soon as something understood as fashionable it is "the beginning of the end" for that

thing as fashion. This accounts for the paradigm of trend.

The second relevant piece of fashion theory advanced by Simmel is "contagion." The

differentiating impulse causes a change in dress for the upper classes. This change in dress is

then adopted by the lower classes who emulate high society out of upwardly mobile desires

(Simmel, 1903/1957). People gain social acceptance from dressing similarly to others while

simultaneously finding self-expressive pleasure in dressing with individual distinction. The

process of adoption of changes in dress has movement, Simmel calls this movement contagion.

During the era in which Simmel lived, the social structure was class-based and

hierarchical. He observed a correlation between social structure and the movement or contagion

of trends in fashion and dress. This correlation is the third contribution to fashion theory that

relates to this project. In this case, both are top-down (Figure 1).

The Flow of Fashion

Hierarchical Social Structure   Fashion Movement Model
correlation

Social Structure   Movement Figure 1
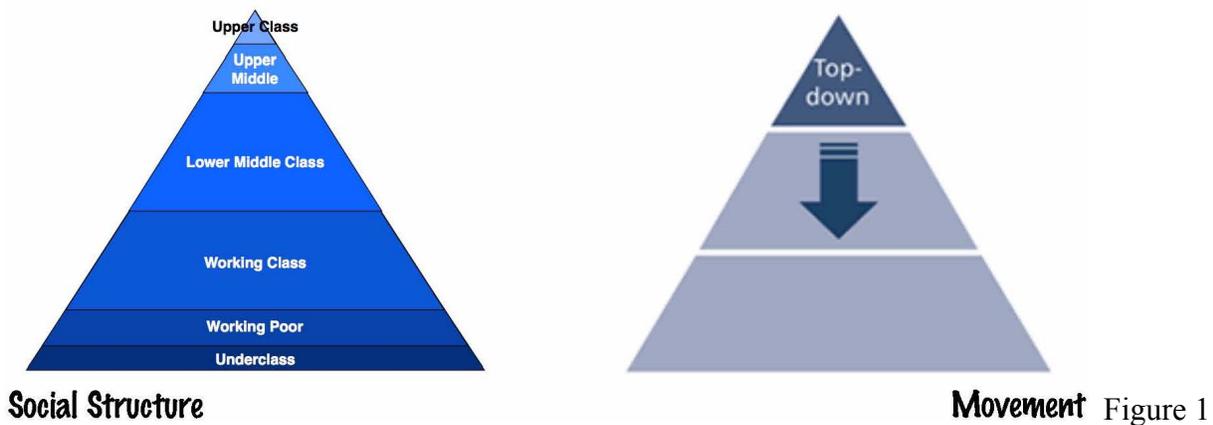
There are three main types of movement or contagion in which styles or types of dress disseminate throughout a population and or is accepted as trend that have grown out of the theory advanced by Simmel. They are top-down, side-to-side and bottom-up. The trend may start at the top with the social elite or at the bottom with the working class. However, contagion requires a new look or style (DeLong, 2005; Simmel, 1903/1957). "The leader seeks distinction and dares to be different by wearing what the innovator presents as new. By adopting the look, the leader influences the flow or distribution of fashion" (DeLong, p.7).

Top-Down

Top-down is the movement that correlates to the class-based social structure from the era in which Simmel lived. This vertical distribution model assumes a social hierarchy where the "elites have the power to set the terms through which tastes are assigned moral and social value" (Holt, 1997, p. 95). Those below them in the class structure try to emulate the fashions in an effort to elevate their social status. "Once the fashion is adopted by those below, the affluent reject that look for another" (DeLong, 2005, p. 2). "The high-status group [seeks] once again to differentiate themselves from their inferiors by adopting new fashions" (Crane, 2000, p.6).

Side-To-Side

According to Skov and Melchior (2008), "changes in the fashion production system after World War II led to consumer-driven fashion which has a horizontal or side-to-side movement between groups on similar social levels". This method of movement is referred to as "collective selection," by American sociologist Herbert Blumer (2010). In the side-to-side model, "there is little lag time between adoption from one group to another. Evidence for this theory occurs when designers show a look simultaneously at prices ranging from the high end to lower end ready-to-wear" (DeLong, 2005, p. 3). "King (1963) cited reasons for this pattern of distribution, such as rapid mass communications, promotional efforts of manufacturers and retailers, and exposure of a look to all fashion leaders" (as cited in DeLong, 2005, p. 3).

Bottom-Up

Bottom-up is the most recent method of movement to be recognized, however, Simmel observed movement in this direction. He recognized that in some cases the downward flow was sometimes disrupted when styles were driven by women of the working-class and was "criticized for emphasizing the role of superordinate groups in initiating the contagion process" (Crane, 2000, p. 7).

Also called street style, trends in fashion and dress are sometimes initiated from the "bottom" or lower income groups. The trend "eventually flows to upper-income groups; thus, the movement is from the bottom up" (DeLong, 2005, p. 3). "Subcultures such as Black Americans, Native Americans, or the Hell's Angles sometimes prove to be the source of a fashion for another group because lower concern for fashion risk" (Miller, McIntyre, and Mantrala, 1993, p. 145). "The T-shirt, initially worn by laborers as a functional and practical undergarment, has since been adopted universally as a casual outer garment and a message board" (Crane, 2000, p. 3).

The Fragmented Social Structure

Today, trends in fashion and dress move simultaneously in all three of these directions. This movement correlates with the modern social structure as Simmel (1903/1957) observed. The social structure of societies in Western countries has experienced changes in recent decades. Experts in the social sciences have observed an increasing fragmentation of cultural interests within social classes as opposed to the class-based structure. Crane (2000) observes, that the workplace and certain social circles tend to be hierarchical, status is more important than affiliation with lifestyle and expectations of dress are more regulated. Outside the workplace social distinctions vary "within as well as between social classes; special and individual "interests are multiple and overlapping" (pg. 22). According to Arthur Vidich, in such a highly fragmented social structure, "the number of special interest and individual interest is almost too staggering to imagine" (as cited in Crane, 2000, p.10). The result is "hyper segmentation," which isolate each lifestyle in its own niche. This suggests that class is becoming less important in the formation of self-image (Crane, 2000, p. 10). Christopher Miller, Shelby Mclntyre, and Murali Mantrala (1993) concur…

> Because each individual influences and is influenced by other individuals within the society, the society is characterized by interdependencies (Berg 1973). In Figure [2] these interdependencies are shown as arrows be- tween individuals. An individual learns the symbolic meaning(s) attached to a style for a given time and situation by referencing others (inbound arrows), places a value on the symbolic meaning(s), and selects a style to adopt. The individual's adopted style then communicates information to the other members of the social system (outbound arrows). Those members of the social system whom the individual influences may perceive the centers of appropriateness and/or

inappropriateness as having changed because of this information and they too will adopt

new styles. These style changes then influence others to change styles, including the first

individual, and the process continues. In this way, the fashion process is the dynamic,

interdependent adoption of items by individuals within the context of a society (p. 148-9).
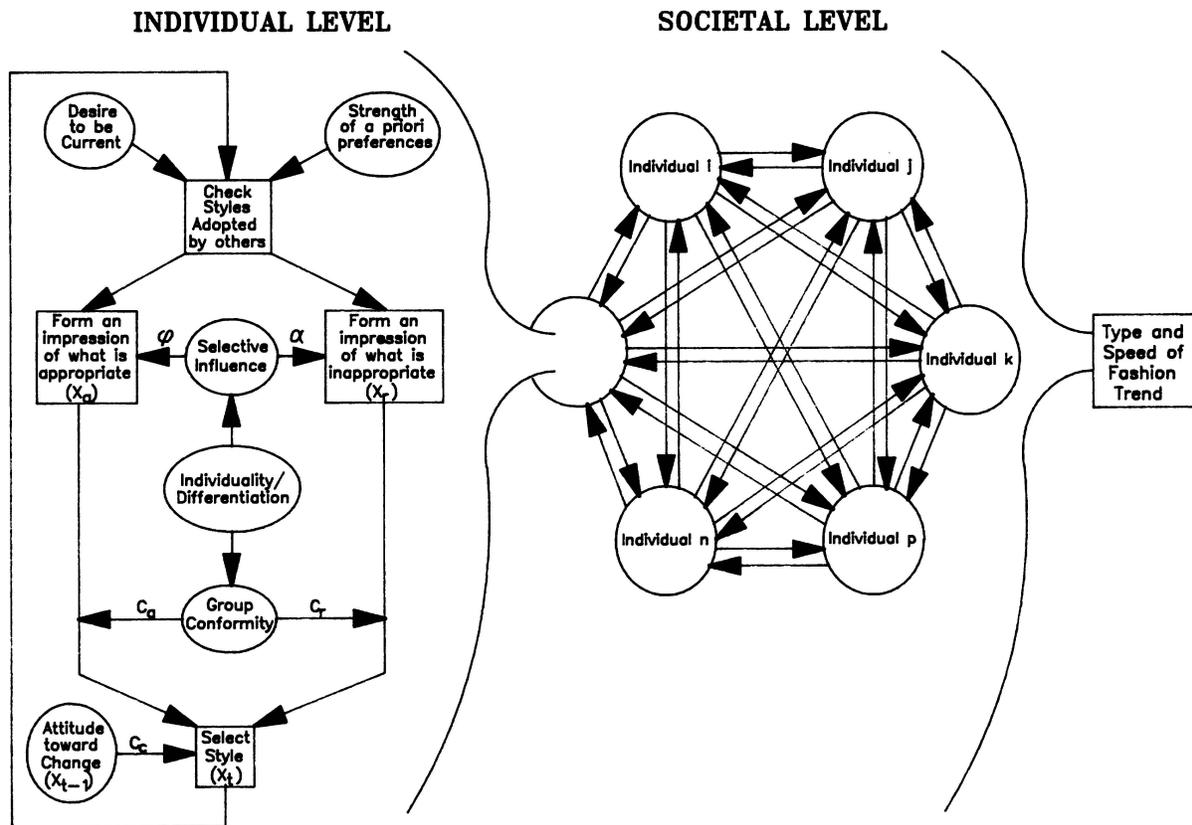

Figure 2 (Miller, McIntyre, & Mantrala, 1993, p.149)

Barnard states, "the stable values and beliefs held by a class or a culture, which will have

included aesthetic, as well as moral and political values, and in relation to which the world,

including the world of clothing and fashion, was rendered meaningful, are now unstable" (2014,

p. 153). The relations between clothes and the social values that assign them meaning are no

longer fixed. In this fragmented social structure, lifestyles, age cohorts, gender, sexual

orientation, and ethnicity are often more meaningful to the individual than social class in their

selection of fashion and dress as a means of self-expression.

The multiple and overlapping choices available in the modern fragmented social structure

"liberate the individual from tradition and enables her to make choices that create a meaningful

self-identity" (Crane, 2000, p. 10). This is supported in this account of the clothing revolution by

Delong (2005). "The clothing revolution that occurred in the twentieth century in the United

States was a double revolution. The first was the making of clothing, from the homemade and

custom-made to the ready-made or factory-made; the second was the wearing of clothing, from

clothing of class display where clothing was worn as a sign of social class and occupation, to the

clothing of democracy where all could dress alike" (p. 13).

Our choices in fashion and dress "represent the ideas, values and beliefs that we hold as

individual members of various cultural groups" (Barnard, 2014, p. 53): values, goals, gender

ideals, lifestyle tastes and social standing. Individuals are, "expected to create their own style of

dress, one that is uniquely appropriate for [themselves], assembling it from a variety of elements

rather than automatically purchasing and consuming a total work" (Crane, 2000, p. 164).

The result is fashion and dress have become a choice rather than a mandate. Driven by

the differentiating impulse of Simmel in this complex social structure the consumer is expected

to construct an individualized appearance based on their own identity and lifestyle. In the era in

which Simmel lived haute couture centered in Paris was the single driver of fashion in Europe

and the United States. In the twenty first century, "haute couture, has been replaced by three

major categories of style, each with its own genre: luxury fashion, industrial fashion, and street

styles" (Crane, 2000, p. 135). The luxury fashion genre sells *lifestyle* while industrial fashion

genre sells *image* and street styles are derived from the self-expression of commonplace

individuals. All three genres are working on a global level. The clothing itself is less important than the frames that are used to sell it due to enormous competition in global market environment.

Art Versus Craft

Identity and lifestyle also play a role on the designer side of the equation. In order to produce work that is unique, Crane points out two ways designers frame their work, "fashion as craft" and "fashion as art". The role of the modern designer varies based on their commitment to one or the other. Ability as an artist or skill as a craftsperson also have an effect. Zander Rhodes, the British designer, at one time attached the label to her garments that read: "this is one of my special dresses: I think of it as an art work that you will treasure forever" whereas American designer Bill Blass has said: "Fashion is a craft, and an expression of a period of time, but it is not art" (as cited in Crane, 2000, p. 153). The debate can be circular, but in either way the fashion designer walks a fine line between artist and craftsperson.

Englishman Charles Frederick Worth is known as the grandfather of haute couture (Krick, 2004). The term haute is French, the feminine of haut, and literally meaning "high, elevated, upper" (Haute, n.d.). Couture is also French, derived from the Latin *consuere*, "to sew together" (Couture, n.d.). Known today as "high fashion", the term haute couture has become its own "elite form of fashion production and business" (Kelly, 2017, n.p.); the highest quality and most expensive garments made entirely by hand, from start to finish and made to fit the measurements of the client as opposed to using standardized sizing.

Prior to arrival of Worth in Paris in 1858, "the tailor and dressmaker made clothing for the rich and the amateur made clothing for the average person" (DeLong, 2005, p. 14).

Regardless of skill level, these makers apply technical skills to garment cutting and construction in order to make the clothes they sell.

Worth stands out because he was more than a dressmaker, he was the driver of the aesthetics of his designs. He applied "the standards and principles of fine art to dress design…the history of art and the history of costume were the twin foundations" of his work (as cited in Crane, 2000, p. 151). "He was an autonomous creator who hired numerous artisans and assistants to assist in the realization of his ideas" (Crane, 1997, p. 395). "We are familiar with the idea of the artist as a named individual and art has operated since the Renaissance on the basis that the producer of the work, the artist, be identified and named" (Barnard, 2014, p. 32). It was not until Worth, that name association and recognition, as well as theories of fine art, were applied to the discipline of dressmaking.

In art theory, the artist assembles and arranges the constituent parts of any work in relationship to one another within the boundaries of the piece. This decision-making process is what defines an artist, whereas a craftsperson tends to follow the existing instructions of others. In art, the constituent parts are called elements of design such as line, shape, density and texture (Crane, 1900). The relationship between the constituent parts is referred to as composition; the principles of composition include proportion, contrast, rhythm, unity and movement to name a few (Lidwell, Holden, & Butler, 2010). In fashion, the term silhouette is used to refer to the boundaries or overall shape and outline of the piece (Seivewright, 2012).

"In England, the status of artist has been used by educators to justify training fashion designers in art school and by the designers themselves to explain the type of design they create and to rationalize their [successes and] failures in the marketplace" (Crane, 2000, p.161).

However, does utilizing fine art theory make fashionable clothing art? Or does the immense technical skill required for the disciples keep it rooted in craft?

Paul Greenhalgh (2002) points out the circular nature of the debate between art and craft, while poking fun at it.

Those of us have spent time in the field [of craft] are at a stage, I am sure, at which earnest definitions and descriptions of craft as something which is (or is not) art, is (or is not) design, asked technophobia, as an anthropological signifier, as a protector of apparent traditions, as old (or new) age lifestyle, as patriarchy, as airport trinket, as ethnic iconography, as communist utopia, as eco-protest, as redundant technology, as aromatherapy, and most emphatically as victim of an unloving world, have ground us all down. There have been so many worthy agendas and maundering laments that we barely know what [craft] is anymore and a lot of very sensible people no longer care. (p. 1)

Other defining elements can be found in Art Law in a Nutshell where Leonard Duboff and Christy King (2006) cite the language the United States customs service. When agents are assessing "duty free entry" into the country, they use the following definition.

The work must be the product of an artist rather than artisan…However, the customs service continues to differentiate between an artist who creates an original work and an artisan or craftsperson for the purpose of ascertaining originality. A work is the product of an artist rather than an artisan only when the creator leaves the path of his or her trade and as a result of a mental concept, construct something original that appeals to the artistic eye and mind. In other words, an artist works from inspiration and skill. Thus, whereas professional productions of an artist may include work done by assistance under

the artist supervision, the work must reflect the artist's exercise of his/her on anesthetic imagination and concepts. (p. 5)

Finally, the concept of aura is borrowed from the essay *The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* by Walter Benjamin a German philosopher, cultural critic and essayist. Aura is the "uniqueness" or "authenticity," the humanness if you will, left behind, within the work, by the artist. This spirit or essence is experienced and or felt by the others who come in contact with the work.

Barnard (2014) makes the following connection between the concept of aura and the phenomenon of fashion:

Aura is the sense of uniqueness and authenticity that is felt whenever one confronts a work of art – an oil painting or a sculpture, for example…[which] is destroyed by or 'withers' in the aid of mechanical reproduction. Therefore, mechanically produced and reproducible artworks are not, in fact, art because they do not possess aura…. Consequently, most of the things we wear and all fashion items are not art because Art consists of a one off, unique productions, which have a place in ritual and a tradition and which possesses aura as a result of that place, the mechanically (re)produced clothes that we wear are not art. (p. 31)

Summary

Today, the fear of absorption expressed by Simmel in 1903 may be more powerful than ever in our modern fragmented social structure. Lines between social classes and subcultures are vague. People are expected to express themselves through dress. Purchasing, owning and displaying one or other kind of art identifies one as a member of a certain socioeconomic class and as a member of the certain culture. (Barnard, 2014, p. 29). British cultural studies scholar

Elizabeth Wilson " in the mid 1980s presented an original framework for seeing fashion as an everyday art form" (Skov & Melchior, 2008, p.7). Art is a form of self-expression. Art making is a form of this self-expression. All these aspects of modern society make the fragmented social structure conducive to greater diversity in the definition of fashion, artist and practitioner networks, systems of support and existing programs and services.

Methodology

This project brings together garment making disciplines including, but not limited to home and industrial sewing, fashion, costuming, up-cycling and Cos-play under the umbrella term wearable art. To gain access to members and data for this research, a partnership was established with Textile Center, a national nonprofit fiber arts organization that is looking to build programming that expands and engages its constituencies in the areas of fashion and wearable art. As the project progressed, focus on their strategic plan goals and deadlines resulted in Textile Center assuming a passive role in the process. Therefore, these findings will be presented to them as timing permits.

The project incorporates a needs assessment that included data collection from the following sources: a literature review, focus groups, a survey to Textile Center members and the professional experience of the researcher. As an artist, practitioner, and enthusiast, it is the desire of the researcher to have greater access to and connectivity between individuals and groups in the Twin Cities metro area who make garments of all types under the umbrella term wearable arts. The goal of this connectivity is to increase sustainability for individuals and groups through the sharing of knowledge, resources and the labor force that possesses the skills needed in garment making.

For the purposes of this project, *the wearable arts* are defined as hand-made garments and accessories that are created to be worn and or adorn the human body. A participant can be anyone with interest in the wearable arts, including but not limited to designers, artists, practitioners, maker, learners, enthusiasts and or supporters. The metro area refers to the Hennepin and Ramsey counties of the Twin Cities.

Focus groups brought together artists, practitioners and enthusiasts to discuss connectivity, support and access to resources within the Twin Cities wearable arts community. These discussions lasted approximately ninety minutes for each group. Due to the limited contact, the ethnographic approach where groups are studied for longer lengths of time was not used. However, a common distinction of ethnographic research is the perspective and position of the researcher referred to as positionality (Anonymous, p.16). The concept of positionality played a significant role in this project.

The position of the researcher in the ethnographic approach uses a binary model of insider versus outsider positionality, placing the insider position in opposition to the outsider position (Anonymous, p. 20). In this project, the researcher role varied depending on the particular group, thus creating a duality of insider and outsider positionality. For example, utilizing insider experience and expertise in the field was valuable in facilitating the peer-to-peer conversation among members of Wearable Arts Midwest. Whereas, reflexivity and positionality as an outsider were key in facilitating the discussion with the Somali Women's Leadership group where sewing is the common ground. Race, nationality and gender are all social constructs that require a shift in approach.

This approach was not intended to minimize the relevant skills and expertise of the researcher as an insider touchstone to garment making. However, while this was helpful, the

ability to detach from the role of expert was necessary for relationship building in this group

without bias. At the same time, reflecting on White American, maleness was at the forefront of

the approach in all focus groups. Demonstrating transparency with regard to the reason for and

use of the information collected was important. In in this research, the White American,

maleness of the researcher could be viewed as "the man" intending to mine the community for

personal gain. Therefore, the larger intent to increase connectivity and access to support and

resources outside the community as a means to strengthen their initiatives was clearly

communicated.

The data was triangulated using the three collection method. In this project they were

field research, literature review and survey data. The field research includes interviews with

several individual artists and practitioners and six different focus groups involving a total of

thirty-seven individuals. The literature review includes relevant fashion theories, journal articles

based on recurring themes found in the field research. The third point of triangulation is data

from the Textile Center 2015 Strategic Planning survey and data from the 2018 Wearable Art

Survey each of which was sent to the Textile Center mailing list. Triangulation of these three

sources is rooted in the twenty years of professional experience of the researcher.

This project seeks to answer the following question: What needs exist in the Twin Cities

fashion and wearable arts community and how can barriers be overcome to include greater

diversity in the definition of fashion, artist and practitioner networks, systems of support and

existing programs and services at the local level?

Findings

Six focus groups were brought together for this research. The following five had

overarching themes that connected the data into a cohesive unit. The first was Collective Spaces,

a shared industrial sewing workspace for textile artists, industrial sewers, home sewers, students, costume designers and technicians. This focus group consisted of four female renters who use the workspace as well as the managing director of a neighboring company who produces garments for the Cos-play community. The second focus group consisted of twelve members of Wearable Arts Midwest, a guild working in all areas of fiber and textile related creative sewing and artistic expression including all aspects of creating one-of-a kind garments and accessories. The third ended up being an interview since Te'Lisa Twyman, founder and artistic director of Fashion With A Cause was the only attendee. Her afterschool program is designed to expose youth and community members to the benefits and opportunities as they relate to job and career readiness in the industry of fashion. Three female wearable artists who focus on Up-Cycling comprised the fourth group while the fifth was intended to focus on the male members of the Textile Center membership since they are an underrepresented subgroup of the larger membership. However, out of the six members planning to attend, only two were in attendance and one brought his female business partner.

The sixth focus group involved twelve members of the Somali Women's Leadership group who have developed a sewing initiative to educate themselves in machine sewing and effectively increase their impact within the Somali community. This group had its own unique thematic contribution to the research.

There were three other communications in the research effort. Outreach to Native peoples resulted in communications with a Sisseton-Wahpeton woman regarding ceremonial and culturally specific garment makers. Previous knowledge of Fresh Traditions, an annual fashion show produced by Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT) prompted outreach to the CHAT

executive director. And finally, contact was made with an internationally known avant-garde knitting artist that is based in the Twin Cities.

Legitimizing the Work

The Creative Spaces focus group reported struggling with the issues associated with entrepreneurship, being the create driving force while managing the business and generating sales in this niche industry. Based on researcher observation, their passion for the work was palpable, yet they struggle to make a living wage and to pay their employees a living wage. Survival and sustainability is a constant as they strive to "legitimize the work."

"If it's clothing people automatically see it as a consumer good," one participant observed.

One designer described her experience with pricing and consumer expectations with frustration. "I know I underprice based on the time that goes into a piece. At the same time, I don't, want it to sit in my house. Then again, contributing to the precedent that it's the consumer good is a lose-lose situation."

Some focus group participants described how there is a middle ground between selling one-of-a-kind wearables and large-scale mass production that some wearable artists embrace. They develop small production line items, handcrafted pieces that can be produced quickly and sold at a price point more closely related to retail expectations. These items yield a profit margin that can support their more involved work and sustain their livelihood.

Other artists described meeting market expectations by producing garments in a range of design aesthetics. At one end of the spectrum color pallets are kept tight and neutral to boost general sales. Among these items, the artist will exhibit more expressive work, items

unmistakably steeped in the mark of the artist. The general sales within this model support the artist in doing their more creatively fulfilling work.

One participant sells a line of hand-painted clothing. Her business model resolves the cost versus price point issue. She loves to paint and found her work is easier to sell on clothing than it is on canvas. She buys new and used clothing to paint on thus avoiding the labor-intensive costs of sewing her own garments. These two aspects of her business model allow her to keep prices in line with market expectations. Fed by the consumer mentality of the market, she has discovered this model is more sustainable, "because not everyone buys a painted canvas, but everyone buys clothes."

These are specific examples of cost-based models that are working for participants in response to the consumer expectation of cheap clothing. They find they have no choice but to respond if they want to generate income. To change the "consumer good" perception, some focus group participants would prefer to have their work live in the fine arts world for two reasons. First, the researched observed the passion for artisanal practice prevalent in the fine arts among focus group participants. Second, the price point associated with fine art is in keeping with realistic cost-based pricing. However, the cost-based method of pricing is only one of many existing business models. Another business model may be more beneficial to the wearable art community.

Expressing the Self

Participants from the Wearable Arts Midwest focus group reported doing the work for the passion and the self-fulfillment as opposed to the money. One participant reported, "When people are attracted to my work, they put it on, and it makes them feel more authentic." In this group wearable art is self-expression for the consumer as well as the artist.

The designer from the Up-Cycler focus group who learned that good shoes are an investment further observed:

There's a fulfillment that comes from having something that makes you happy to have purchase. You feel like it's part of you, an extension of you and sometimes it doesn't occur to people that clothing can be like that. The clothing can feel like dressing is an art form. You're representing yourself having your outside match your insides is a good feeling. But, again people have to decide they want that.

Other participants in the Wearable Arts Midwest focus group were in agreement. One stated, "Artwear makes people feel better about themselves and it is a means of self-expression." Another tells people she guarantees compliments… "I wear and sell hats. I tell people that if you are going to wear a hat you are going to get attention and you have to be *ok* with that." Her clients purchase her hats for this reason.

The self-expression associated with art making and art consumption has other benefits.

Fresh Traditions fashion show, produced by Center for Hmong Arts and Talent, promotes traditions of Hmong sewing and cultural attire blended with modern fashion. The executive director reported cultural awareness and community investment as drivers for the center and the artists involved. This drive of participants was evident in their high level of artistry and the execution of their work, confirmed by the researcher in attendance at the 2017 show. Additionally, the researcher experienced enthusiastic and energetic support by attendees at the sold-out event. They were eager to see and dressed to be seen.

Organizers report that the main challenges with this event are retention and reciprocity. Designers participate to invest in their community, but few return in subsequent years due to the

amount of work involved. Coupled with the fact that there is no mechanism in place for the artists to recoup expenses let alone generate income off of the fashions.

The original revenue model for Textile Center was an annual fashion show entitled *Artwear in Motion*. The main difference from *Fresh Traditions* was the added element of the "boutique" a juried wearable art sales expo. This gave exhibitors an outlet to sell their work and the organization kept a percentage of gross sales. *Artwear in Motion* had labor intensive logistics, setup and tear down. Even though the event was executed by volunteers, one long time member and exhibitor recalled, "we didn't make any money and it was meant to be a fundraiser."

This is partially due to the fact that fashion shows, and fundraising events in general, must have a level of sophistication. "When they are done cheaply, they look it and you lose the audience forever," was the observation of one designer interviewed. Another felt strongly that the Minneapolis and Saint Paul audiences were geared toward the entertainment value of fashion shows as opposed to the crowds experienced in other cities who were more likely to make purchases or commission work. A third stated, "So much work for no rewards. I still have every single piece that I've ever made for any fashion show over the last 15 years. I feel like there really isn't a market here for [non]commercial looking items." At this point in the focus group discussion the researcher observed knowing heads nodding in agreement.

Reflecting, one designer spoke her thoughts aloud, "the stuff about the fashion shows and fashion, it is a lot of work, but maybe we could change the way the fashion shows exist. I mean so they're more benefits for the artists." There may be a way to shift the structure of a fashion show similar to the idea of exhibiting wearable art as fine art to change the expectations of and accessibility to wearable art and fashion.

A shift in audience mindset may first require a shift in the mindset of the wearable arts community and or the individuals within it. In the first focus group one of the entrepreneurs posed the question, "Is money the only way to legitimize the work?" Legitimizing the work may very well be an inside job. It could be as simple as internal clarity for the individual arts, but that may require a paradigm shift.

Educating the Audience

Resolving price point is only one challenge in driving sales of wearable art. Participants reported difficulties in finding the market and or an audience. They struggle with the "how" because direct links to market are either vague or nonexistent.

Retail outlets drive sales through their own client base. The few retail outlets that exist are reportedly shifting away from one-of-a-kind wearables; sourcing consumes more time per item and the investment ties up capital if the item does not sell.

To build up a client base takes valuable creative and production time from the artist. Social media outlets like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are used by some participants. These platforms generate and expand "followers", but still require a time commitment. Similarly, participants who use web markets like *Etsy* reported brand building and driving sales was no less time consuming.

Collective client base building can be done through juried markets that specialize in hand-made goods like *Craftstravaganza* and *No Coast Craft-o-Rama*. These markets come with their own client base, expanded by the client base of individual participating artists. However, there are pros and cons to participation. The aforementioned painter reported this experience.

It all comes down to money. Everyone's their own small business. $90 at *No Coast* for a

booth is a lot of money to throw into market where you don't know if they have their own

crowd built or if you have to bring your own. *No Coast* has their own reputation you

know people are going to be there. It's iffy when you go to markets and they're leaning

on you heavily to market the whole thing. You are part of the whole thing to get people to

come. Markets that have their own built-in fan base help small makers a lot.

The challenges associated with building a client base are further complicated by the

wearable arts being perceived as clothing and therefore a "consumer good". Participants in five

of the six focus groups referred to the need for "educating the audience," to move the audience

away from consumerism toward an appreciation of artisanal goods. Framing wearable art as an

art form that is directly linked to local economy and livelihood threaded through many

discussions.

One artist observed, "clothing used to be thought of differently because it was harder to

make."

Is this true or has the American culture simply distanced itself from the realities of

manufacturing clothes?

"There is more talk about what fast fashion means these days. The zeitgeist is slowly

changing. People are more concerned about sweatshops. My purchasing habits changes after I

saw the documentary *True Cost*," was the observation of one participant. The film explores the

"true cost" of cheap clothing, which was referenced two different times during this research.

Out of frustration with multiple low cost, low quality purchases one designer learned this

lesson over buying expensive shoes. "They are heels I can stand for eight hours. They look

beautiful. I do not regret that money. I regret going to H&M, but I had to figure that out on my

own." She did admit the mental leap did not come easily, once the larger sum was amassed it

was difficult to justify the investment. Changing the 'quick fix' habits of fast fashion may be

difficult, but the low quality associated with low cost is having an effect on some consumers.

These are indicators that change is possible even though it may be difficult and even slow. The

question that emerged from the discussion is how can this shift be facilitated in the wearable art

audience?

 "Changing the mindset can have to do with changing purchasing experience." This

statement was cause for a contemplative pause during one focus group session.

Art Versus Craft

Many ideas around legitimizing the work were brought up in five of the six focus groups.

Monetary value was the main one as referenced above. The value of artisanal practice was a

close second and folded into this concept of practice were self-expression, creative outlet and the

tradition of making with the hands. There were also themes of barter that sometimes involved an

hour for hour trade of time when extra hands were needed and at other times the exchange of

unused materials. However, the most prevalent theme was centered around the art versus craft

debate.

One designer postulated on her experience. "I apply for artist grants. I feel like a lot of

times the jurors don't know what to do with me. [I think] they think serious fashion doesn't

really fit into an art category because you can sell that [as a consumer good]."

Co-owners of a yarn store, who are also professional machine knitters, had a similar

experience with the art versus craft construct. When submitting knitted items for a juried

exhibition, they encountered language that determines whether the entry can be categorized as art

or craft. "Art is defined as one-of-a-kind items that cannot easily be replicated, whereas craft

typically involves following a set of instructions or guidelines and is replicable." The distinguishing lines here are bright, however the distinctions varied as the art versus craft debate recurred in other focus group conversations.

The majority of focus group participants have a clear investment in the divide between the two. The need to categorize the work and or the maker was present every time the subject arose although the definitions and determining criteria varied greatly. The researcher observed discomfort among participants who consider themselves makers around owning the creative nature of wearable art making. Those who consider themselves artists demonstrated a certain territorial vibe when discussing their work that appeared to fuel the need to separate the two.

Focus on Education

The themes of passion for and self-fulfillment through wearable art from the Wearable Arts Midwest focus group were echoed in the discussion with Te'Lisa Twyman who "struggles with the concept of school [and life] without art." The need for art in her own life and the lives of those around her were drivers in founding *Fashion With A Cause* an after-school program at North High School with the mission "to expose youth and community members to the benefits and opportunities related to job and career readiness in the industry of fashion." Twyman reported, "The students tend to be surprised by the numerous steps, the skills and expertise, and the time involved the making the most basic garment. Yet, they are driven to learn and take great pride in their accomplishments."

Designed to build self-confidence and skills in fashion design, the program was originally offered at the high school level only. However, passion and self-fulfillment are not enough, the high school participants need to contribute to the household income and consequently were split between their creative interests and their livelihood. Therefore, founder Te'Lisa Twyman created

an entrepreneurial eco system by hiring the high school students to implement the *Fashion With A Cause* program in the K-6 and middle schools that feed North High School.

Even with the employment aspect of the current high school level, the afterschool program also competes with athletics. "Sports is big at North, scholarships [for athletes] are the ticket to college." The immediate need for income, getting paid through the after-school fashion program, and the future need for income has to be balanced with the creative interests and passions of these high school students.

Twyman has also created a summer program that employs students through Step-Up, a national program that propels girls from under-resourced communities to fulfill their potential, to work with the Textile Center, Target Headquarters and College of Design's apparel program at the University of Minnesota. "The main difference between the after-school program at North high and the Step-Up summer program is the latter is a job with a company, their commitment is different because the expectations are different."

The Step-Up summer program and Fashion With A Cause prepare participants for job readiness. Unfortunately, this system has fixed capacity. There will be a point when there will be more students seeking jobs than there are jobs within the system. And there are few employment opportunities for these youth in fashion and wearable art at the local level.

The Creative Collective focus group struggled with making and paying a living wage. Livelihood was an issue for other participants who reported there is more money in teaching their discipline than in practicing it. And teaching wearable art skills and techniques is a key revenue stream for Textile Center according to their current programming.

The programming of the Textile Center reflects a focus on education as a main source of revenue. Their K-12 program taught in schools and summer camps make programming available

to youth where as their main education programming comes at a cost. Five years ago, a thirty-something focus group participant had been keeping an eye out for classes on natural dying, but, at the time, she could not afford classes that cost $150 to $200. She added, "other programming seems to be targeted at a much older or much younger audience, like quilting and old lady things or children's summer camp." Participants in the Wearable Arts Midwest focus group, all over forty years of age, frequently take classes through the Textile Center. When asked if they would pay slightly more for a class so that a scholarship or reduced rate could be offered to those with low income, they were not receptive to the idea because they consider them expensive to begin with.

This data shows the white dominant character of the Textile Center membership and reinforces the stigma of this art form as female centric. By nature of its membership, the organization assumes a dominant mainstream culture, a type of power center that creates barriers to entry based on gender, race, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.

Dominant Culture

There is a dominant culture trend present in the research for this project.

In the field research, there were 37 focus group and interview participants in all. The majority, 21 participants (or 58%), were White/Caucasian and female. The 12 Somali females were the next largest group followed by 3 White males and 1 African American female.

A Wearable Art Survey specific to this project was sent to Textile Center mailing list in April of 2018. Out of the 439 respondents, 92% were female, 89% were White/Caucasian and 48% were between 40 and 65 years of age while 36% were between 65 and 80 years of age.

In 2015 Textile Center sent a survey to their membership, approximately 1,600 people to collect strategic planning data. Out of the 736 respondents, 93% were female, 90% were

White/Caucasian and 59% were between 40 and 65 years of age while 28% were between 65 and 80 years of age.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Findings from five of the six focus groups tell a story that is in alignment with the dominant culture trend. However, one goal of this research was outreach to other creative, ethnic and cultural groups with related interests. The Somali Women's Leadership cohort, where Somali women learn skills to effectively make an impact in their community, is one such group. They developed a sewing initiative to expand their skills. The theme of education is not unique to this group, but the challenges and barriers to skill acquisition were very different from those described in the other focus groups.

In the focus group, one participant reported, "each of us has a needle," meaning they all know how to sew by hand. During the discussion, it came to light that their initiative was started with the help of a bilingual liaison from the neighborhood association who organized meetings in the communal space of their apartment complex, gained access to sewing machines and provided training. Then the liaison moved out of state. Since that time, the group has struggled with gaining access to the communal space and the sewing machines.

This focus group met for three hours with an interpreter. The questions focused on skill sets the group wanted to learn and what they would make using these skills. All aspect of the education they desire are simplistic. The culturally specific garments, bed coverings and wall hangings they desire to make require beginner skills and basic equipment. Yet, the main barriers from their previous attempts to educate themselves were language, access to equipment and mobility, their cultural comfort zone is within their three-building complex of Horn Towers.

As the discussion progressed, the researcher observed frustration from the group when the topic got too far away from machine sewing skills. They had little patience for discussing the possibilities these skills might bring. Two-thirds of the way through the discussion, the researcher was still trying to understand the end goal and one of the participants broke in. "First, we wanted to get training then we can go all the way to the top, be the experts then we can think about what is next." Their plea to learn machine sewing skills was firm, direct and bordered on aggression at times; the message came back and back and back to, "we want to learn to sew on a sewing machine!" With all these resources available to the other groups in this project, this groups experiences what should be a few minor hurdles.

The researcher was also in conversation with two pockets of wearable artists that did not come together as focus groups, Native Peoples and the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent. Due to historical issues of appropriation and extraction by the dominant culture, the researcher was advice to hold off on including Native Peoples if this project was to be a "one-off" effort. Since the future of the project is unknown, the researcher chose to omit Native Peoples for the time being, out of respect.

Although the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent group did not come together as a focus group, the researcher met with the executive director and attended Fresh Traditions XI, the center's annual fashion show, which brings Hmong cultural dress together with modern fashion. This amazing event was rich in community and cultural ties.

In conversation after the show, between the researcher and the event chair, the place the Textile Center holds in the white dominant main stream was validated. When asked if there was any connection with the organization, the reply was, "Only in that my mom cleans their building and sometimes I help her."

Summary

The themes of self-expression through wearing and making wearable art, the debate over art versus craft and the need to educate the audience about the wearable arts overlap one another and are all related to legitimizing the work. The focus on education as a revenue stream creates barriers to diversity and inclusion when classes are expensive and employment opportunities are limited. Educating the audience may in turn help relieve the employment gap by helping to create a market, but educating the wearable artist is the first step. Furthermore, working outside the dominant culture to dissolve barriers to entry for other creative, ethnic, and cultural groups who wish to participate in the wearable arts expands the discipline to that of the conceptual framework of dress where all are welcome.

Conclusion

The themes of art versus craft, educating the audience, self-expression, aura and the concept of dress from the literature review are all echoed in the findings. These concepts and frameworks developed by leaders in the fields of fashion and art theory bring insight to the challenges experienced at the practitioner level, while the focus group and the survey data demonstrate challenges experienced by those outside the dominate culture. This section connects these insights.

Art Versus Craft

The art versus craft debate exists on the scholarly level as well as the level of practice, a debate that focuses on dividing the two. However, the best foundation for wearable art may be a framework where the two disciplines can coexist. Art has been described as the process of creating something unique that has a place in ritual and tradition and which possesses aura, the residual path of the self, whereas craft has been defined as the processes and methods of

technical execution. The two disciplines have an interdependence and relevance that needs to be considered.

Charles Fredrick Worth, Christian Dior, and Hubert de Givenchy applied the principles of art to the craft of dressmaking, transforming fashion into the art form known as haute couture. Haute couture utilizes the interdependent relationship between the art of fashion design and the craft of dressmaking in its success. In the field of theatrical costuming it is accepted that the art of costume design informs the craft of costume making and vice versa. In fashion design, theatrical costuming, and stylized dress the most successful designers utilize the principles of design and composition for aesthetic values found in art theory to create work that appeals to the artistic eye and mind as well as that of the consumer. From the consumer perspective, a trend in fashion is not merely "the new innovation." Fashion in dress is rooted in and or reflective of a specific place and a specific time; for clothing to be fashion, it must be relevant to some dominant aspect of the fragmented social structure and or the local culture.

The design principles and composition found in art theory need to be re-established as the foundation of wearable art and craft designated as the means or method of execution. Framing the two disciplines as equals allows one to support the other and vise versa. Without craft, there would be no wearable art. And without the fundamentals of art theory, the work would merely be technically executed clothing. It is the combination of the two that creates the phenomenon of wearable art and the differentiating impulse or the human need to stand out from fashion theory that makes wearable art fashion. Reframing wearable art within these concepts is a way of educating the artist and legitimizing the work, it is a matter of formalizing the relationship between the two disciplines at the practitioner level.

Educating the Audience

According to Lise Skov and Marie Riegels Melchoir (2008), designers today "emphasize the aesthetic value of their work and claim the status of artist or artist-craftsman" (p. 149). The latter frames the coexistence of art and craft in the title. Furthermore, the artist-craftsman has been known to create an environment, not unlike an art gallery, to underscore the artistic merit of the work and send a message of high culture; "the exchange of the commodity takes place through personal relationship in which the seller explains and interprets the clothes" (p. 163) as a way of educating the audience.

What we now call *brand building*, is in part, the practice of associating the name of the artist with the artwork, a practice dating back to the Renaissance, that was first used in fashion by Worth. In fashion, this practice changed the discipline from strictly the craft of dressmaking to the art form of haute couture. As referenced above, luxury fashion, industrial fashion, and street styles are the three major categories of fashion that have replaced haute couture. The luxury fashion genre sells *lifestyle* while industrial fashion genre sells *image* (Crane, 2000).

In the age of social media and branding, selecting a lifestyle, image or genre to 'sell' work associated with a personal brand aligns wearable arts and artists with the modern fashion system. The consumer is therefore assisted in understanding wearable art through the alignment of the system they already know even if they do not fully understand it. This is where the personal relationship with the seller from Skov and Melchoir comes in. Explaining and interpreting the clothes is a way of educating the audience. The democratization of technology allows individual wearable artists to promote themselves and their style, aesthetic, or genre as a personal brand, e.g. an Instagram Influencers. Changing the purchasing experience through branding, educating the audience by developing personal relationships, can change the mindset of the consumer.

Self-Expression

The wearable arts community can also leverage the fragmented social structure. Today, the fear of absorption described by Simmel may be more powerful than ever and wearable art can facilitate standing out, partially because the rules of fashion have changed.

The fashion system of the early twentieth century defined a specific style that evolved in a consistent manner from year-to-year with strict rules about hemlines and seasonal colors as well as how certain items such as hats and gloves were to be used. In certain social circles, being seen in the same dress twice was considered a faux pas. Crane (2000) describes how, "implicit in these rules were widely accepted norms about sexual identity, femininity, and behavior… fashion expressed social ideals of feminine attitudes and behavior… underlying acceptance of this type of fashion was fear of exclusion on the basis of nonconformity, signifying that a woman was not aware of the correct mode of behavior" (p. 134).

In the twenty-first century, fashion is presented as a choice rather than a mandate. The consumer is expected to "select styles on the basis of her perceptions of her own identity and lifestyle… to construct an individualized appearance from her variety of options" (Crane, 2000, p.15). This individualized appearance expresses the self and can be mixed and matched from any of the fashion genres of luxury fashion, industrial fashion, and street styles. The fragmented social structure of modern society, the changes in the rules of fashion and the multidirectional flow of fashion help diffuse any dominate influence on fashion. When subcultures become the drivers of fashion within street style for instance, the elite become followers of the trend. Therefore, in twenty-first century fashion there is not a dominate culture.

Sally Singer, Creative Digital Director of Vogue, talks about the 'new rules' of fashion that allow for repeating a look or outfit within the same week (2015). Pundits in the fashion

industry will don a favorite look as often as they like. Similarly, people in high power positions like Mark Zuckerberg reduce their daily decision making by wearing the same look every day (Pasricha, 2016, p.162). According to Simmel, his attire is not fashion because jeans and a grey t-shirt do not stand out, but due to his social status, his actions contribute to trend and the rules of what is acceptable. The fragmented social structure allows for personal choice of the consumer.

One artist from the focus groups observed, "clothing used to be thought of differently because it was harder to make." Although there have been technological advances in clothing production over time, they are not necessarily easier to make. In industrial fashion, there exist "a single material constraint, human hands are required to make garments" (Skov & Melchoir, 2008, p.13). Framing clothing consumption as an investment, a human resource investment in the form of a living wage for skill and expertise, and an investment in the economy at the local level, can help shift the 'cheap consume goods' mindset that came up in the focus groups. The rules of fashion have shifted to allow this investment to be utilized as often as desired. In this conceit, wearable art can be viewed as an investment in an item that can be worn until it is worn out as opposed to the conventional fashion rule investing in something to be worn only one time.

Wearable artists can also leverage their relationship with the consumer through self-expression. Art and art making are ways of expressing the self for the artist and fashion and dress are ways of expressing the self for the consumer. Dress offers the tools for creative self-expression, which are particularly important for those who have been excluded on account of gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity. It is this intersection, the human need for self-expression that can be the means for bringing consumer and wearable artist together.

Aura

Aura is the *authenticity* of the artist that is contained in the work of the artist; the human

essence left behind through the creative process of art making. In his concept Walter Benjamin

claims aura is destroyed by or "withers in the age of mechanical reproduction" (1935 p.3). Skov

and Melchoir (2008) point out a single material constraint in fashion and dress, human hands are

required to make garments, a reality even in the factory setting. On one hand, a person sewing

collars on to dress shirts one after another may involve human hands, but this process is

mechanical in nature and therefore destroys any potential for aura. On the other hand, wearable

art is a hand-made form of art and therefore has the potential of aura.

If art consists of a one-off, unique productions, which have a place in ritual and tradition

and which possess aura as a result of that place, then based on handmade artisanal practice

wearable art has aura. Aura can be leveraged to reframe the consumer relationship with the

wearable arts on the human level. Aura is the human spirit in our clothing.

The wearable arts connect the artist and consumer on the human level through self-

expression. This link combined with aura can change the mindset of the consumer, which can in

turn change the purchasing experience.

Dress – A Means of Inclusion

Connection on the human level supports equity, diversity, and inclusion. "The human

body and the self" are central in the practice-based approach to the study of dress advanced by

Joanne Eicher. Skov and Melchoir (2008) refer to her concept as "neutral in terms of cultural

hierarchies," (p.3) which makes it conducive to inter-cultural inclusion on a global level. In this

framework, "issues of tradition, ethnicity, gender, and age are often highlighted, but these are

never fixed, but constantly negotiated through practice. Its strength lies in its ability to document

and analyze the complexity of actual dress practices" (p. 11). Therefore, dress becomes an

inclusive approach in that it can document and analyze the complexities of dress practices within a subculture that become fashionable through a genre like street style.

The democratization of fashion is rooted in the Industrial Revolution where "technology simplified the production of clothing" (Skov & Melchoir, 2008, p. 94). By 1850, "the invention and distribution of a practical sewing machine [reached] the homes of the middle class" (DeLong, 2005, p. 14). The members of the Somali Women's Leadership sewing initiative experience barriers in access to and instruction in the use of the practical sewing machine. Therefore, the democratization of fashion has its limits. In the twenty-first century, this group struggles with access to an item that has been a part of the dominate culture for 168 years. By connecting dress practices and garment making traditions across cultural bounds, the wearable arts connect everyone at the human level and expands the democratization of fashion to all peoples.

"According to Elizabeth Wilson, fashion has become the connective tissue of the cultural organism and is essential to the world of mass communication, spectacle, and modernity" (DeLong, 2005, p.10). Malcolm Barnard states that clothes make the body and therefore the self possible. Thomas Carlyle states clothing makes society possible. The definition formulated by Joanne Eicher encompasses cross-cultural research that is inclusive by its nature. Structurally our society is fragmented based on the complexity of multiple and overlapping social associations and the mixture of traditions, ethnicities, cultures, races, gender fluidity, sexual orientation, etc. This fragmented complexity diffuses the dominate culture and therefore weakens barriers to entry. These concepts combined with a deeper understanding of the socializing impulse and the differentiating impulse from fashion theory invite people, Homo sapiens, to the table bringing everyone into the phenomenon of fashion and dress regardless of identity. Dress provides a

common connection among people of all cultural backgrounds, a place where all of these aspects of the human experience intersect, a means for universal connection. Dress is a phenomenon shared among all peoples, we are all Homo sapiens.

Recommendations

The insight from leaders in fashion and art theory can benefit practitioners in the following ways.

As a leader in the fiber arts it is important for the Textile Center not only to offer programming in the wearable arts but to serve as a guide for the art form. This can be achieved through a secondary mission that is specific to the wearable arts and that is built upon a clear definition of wearable art.

Using a framework that treats art and craft as equal supports members who consider themselves artists and members who consider themselves craftspeople more equitably. Without craft, there would be no wearable art. And without the fundamentals of art theory, the work would merely be technically executed clothing. Further, this framework is conducive to collaboration and connectivity among members.

In addition, using a framework that treats members of Textile Center, members of the wearable art community and other creative, ethnic, and cultural groups with related interests as equal builds networks, supports sustainability and promotes equity among individuals and groups. Working collectively within this larger community will expand and help diversify productivity within the wearable arts. This expansion will in turn help build support for and marketability of the wearable arts. Therefore, this framework is conducive to collaboration and connectivity among all members of our fragmented society.

To facilitate connections, this framework could be brought into practice as a yearlong guided program that culminates in an annual member fashion show focused on the wearable arts. Organizing design principles and composition of art theory as a foundation of wearable art and designating craft as an integral method of execution, frames the two disciplines as equals that feed one another within the mission. It is the combination of the two that create the phenomenon of wearable art and it is the differentiating impulse or the need to stand out from Simmel that makes wearable art fashion. Key components include building design skills, developing the artist-consumer relationship, and maintaining relevance to fashion at the international level. Due to the hand-made nature of wearable art, it has the potential of aura that can be leveraged to draw in the consumer.

Finally, to dissolve barriers like being 168 years behind in accessibility to the innovation of the sewing machine as experienced by the Somali Women's Leadership group, the Textile Center can create a mobile classroom for basic sewing that transcends language, race, gender and ethnic origin. This can be achieved by borrowing the model from immersion language education where participants are immersed in the subject and learning is supported through a variety of techniques to make the content accessible (Fortune & Tedick, 2003).

Limitations

The research for this project was limited to fashion and dress as it related to the Western Hemisphere and these United States. Other cultures were taking into consideration, but only through the lens of fashion as defined by the dominate culture. This limitation was set from the beginning of the project in an effort to make the research manageable. The researcher recognizes the value of other models that include fashion as a phenomenon viewed through other cultural lenses and culturally relevant definitions.

Minnesota Fashion Week takes place annually in venues around the Twin Cities during the third week of April. The proposal for this project was approved in August of 2017. The field research was completed by the end of the year. The academic research and execution of the project took place over the following four months and was presented on May 1, 2018. Therefore, neither the events nor the individual or group participants of Minnesota Fashion Week were accessible to include in the research.

Trust was initially established through the personal network of the researcher which was key to generating interest in forming focus groups for this project. Individuals and groups felt more comfortable knowing there was a common contact. Simply reaching out through cold contact did not yield a single interview. Therefore, the focus groups and interviews were limited to individuals and groups with whom the researcher had connections.

One of these connections was made with a Sisseton-Wahpeton woman who preferred not to have direct contact and suggested that Native peoples be left out of this project due to historical appropriation and extraction. The researcher chose to take this advice, reasoning that if the project has a second phase beyond May 2018, there would be a more appropriate time for inclusion.

Modeling respect in this way deepened awareness around positionality. In certain ways, this project started as one of *extraction*. With or without a common contact, respondents were reserved because the project was rooted in a one-sided need for data by the researcher, as opposed to mutual benefit. The project needed to shift to a model of reciprocity.

This shift occurred when requesting an audience with the Somali Women's Leadership group, the neighborhood representative insisted on a follow up meeting where the findings of the study would be reported. Reporting the findings of the study is an important way of creating

mutual benefit. The exchange of this information allows all participants to benefit by facilitating connectivity beyond the capacity of this project.

In addition, as the project progressed, focus on their strategic plan goals and deadlines resulted in Textile Center assuming a passive role in the process. Therefore, these findings will be presented to them as soon as time permits.

Furthermore, trust and relationship needed to be built. Making commitments and then following through began to build trust in a short time. Consistency with follow through on commitments and stated plans expanded the trust and resulted in a surge in interest.

References

Anonymous, (n.d.). Researcher positionality – a consideration of its influence and place in research. *Research Gate*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260421552_Researcher_positionality_-_a_consideration_of_its

Barnard, M. (2014). *Fashion theory: An introduction*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Benjamin, W. (1935). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.* Robert Spahr.com. Retrieved from: http://www.robertspahr.com/teaching/hnm/benjamin_the_work_of_art.pdf

Couture. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged. Retrieved May 12, 2018 from: Dictionary.com website http://www.dictionary.com/browse/couture

Crane, D. (2000). *Fashion and its social agendas: Class, gender, and identity in clothing.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Crane, D. (1997). Globalization, organizational size, and innovation in the French luxury fashion industry: Production of culture theory revisited. *Poetics, 24*(6), 393-414.

Crane, W. (1900). *Line and form: elements of art*. George Bell & Sons.

DeLong, M. R. (2005). Theories of fashion. *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion.* V. Steele (Ed.). Detroit: Thompson/Gale [in English].

DuBoff, L., & King, C. (2006). *Art law in a nutshell* (4th ed., Nutshell series). St. Paul, MN: Thomson/West.

Eicher, J. B., & Roach, M. E. H. (1992). *Definition and classification of dress: Implications for analysis of gender roles.* Berg Publishers, Inc.

Fortune, T. W., & Tedick, D. J. (2003). What parents want to know about foreign language immersion programs. *ERIC Digest*, EDO-FL 03:04.

Greenhalgh, P. (2003). *The persistence of craft: the applied arts today*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Haute. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged. Retrieved May 12, 2018 from: Dictionary.com website http://www.dictionary.com/browse/haute

Holt, D. B. (1997). Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu's theory of tastes from its critics. *Poetics*, *25*(2-3), 93-120.

Kelly, Lakenya. (February 4, 2017). What does couture mean- definition and french translation. *The Dapifier*, n.p. Retrieved from: https://www.thedapifer.com/blog/2017/02/04/what-is-couture-mean-fashion/

Krick, Jessa. (October 2004). Charles frederick worth (1825–1895) and the house of worth. *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. Retrieved from: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrth/hd_wrth.htm

Lidwell, W., Holden, K., & Butler, J. (2010). *Universal principles of design, revised and updated: 125 ways to enhance usability, influence perception, increase appeal, make better design decisions, and teach through design*. Rockport Pub.

Miller, C. M., McIntyre, S. H., & Mantrala, M. K. (1993). Toward formalizing fashion theory. *Journal of marketing research*, 142-157.

Pasricha, N. (2016). *The happiness equation: Want nothing + do anything = have everything*. New York. G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Russell, L. (2011). The aesthetics of design. *Fashion-philosophy for everyone: thinking with style*, 37-49.

Seivewright, S. (2012). *Basics fashion design 01: research and design (vol. 1)*. A&C Black.

Simmel, G. (1957). Fashion. *American journal of sociology*, *62*(6), 541-558.

Singer, S. (2015). Why fashion still matters [Recording]. *FORA.tv*.

Skov, L., & Melchior, M. R. (2008). Creativity at Work: Research Approaches to the Study of Dress and Fashion. *Creative Encounters*.

Sweet, W. (n.d.). Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Internet Encyclopedia Of Philosophy. University of Tennessee Martin. Retrieved March 17, 2018 from: https://www.iep.utm.edu/spencer/