

CLOTHING RESEARCH: OUTPUT AND FEEDBACK

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In the research process, we select theoretical concepts which we want to test empirically by executing a series of basic research steps. Frequently, as academics, we emphasize the process of and the findings of the research, but in a field like ours, application of the research also is important. Using computer language which is so common today, the findings can be called the output, and use and application can be called the feedback.

My topic today involves a discussion of application (or feedback) and some examples of clothing research output and feedback in which I have participated. Research output may have three kinds of usefulness or feedback: (1) the results can be of interest and value to other researchers and sometimes we refer to this use of research as knowledge for the sake of knowledge; (2) the results can be of value to professional workers and community leaders in public policy; and (3) the results can be of value to the public or layman,¹ and I would include the commercial world in this category. Frequently the distinction is made between the first example of research use (knowledge for the sake of knowledge) and examples two and three as a distinction between basic and applied research. I personally believe this is a false dichotomy, a distinction that is not always possible to make, as sometimes so-called basic research is found to be very useful and have immediate application and sometimes applied research is not found to be useful at all.

I will discuss two major clothing research thrusts of my own in terms of output and feedback. In each case, the major objective of the research was probably knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but the output has been utilized in other ways also.

The two research areas are (1) a longitudinal study of teenage girls' friendships and opinions about acceptance and clothing and (2) research on African dress and textiles.

High School Girls' Friendships, Acceptance and Clothing

The first research area, the study of one class of high school girls from the freshman through the senior year, may be familiar to you through the articles published in the JOURNAL OF HOME ECONOMICS and the Experiment Station Research Report 222 published in February 1974, which has been mailed to many of you recently. The study can be summarized by the sub-title, "Birds of a Feather." We found that four peer groups developed in the freshman year along lines of parental social class rank and continued over the four-year period. Both

change and stability occurred in the membership of each of these four groups, but basically each group differed from the other over the four years to have an identity of its own. Within the group, members held opinions about acceptance and clothing which were basically similar to each other and frequently different from the members of other groups. In addition, some girls were excluded from friendship groups either by chance, choice or rejection; and although their opinions as an aggregate were not similar to each other, their opinions on acceptance and clothing did differ from group members.

What was the output of this research study? An annotated bibliography², seven M.A. theses and problems, one Ph.D. dissertation, nine published articles and one final report.³

What was the feedback of this output? First, the articles were beamed toward different audiences. Several emphasized the straight research results, and were published in periodicals aimed at professional colleagues. Two (one in FORUM published by J. C. Penney Co. and the other in MICHIGAN JOURNAL OF SECONDARY EDUCATION) emphasized the implications for educators, parents, social workers. Therefore, the articles themselves differentiated between knowledge for the sake of knowledge and the utilization of knowledge by adults working with teenage girls.

Second, the research results provided feedback for the theoretical concepts and propositions outlined by Gregory P. Stone in his article, "Appearance and the Self."⁴ As we designed the research instruments and analyzed the resulting data, we had chosen Stone's theoretical concepts of "program" (the way we present ourselves to others) and "review" (the assessment by the viewer of the "program"), the role of appearance in the identification of others and in the identification with others. Our data generally supported his ideas that appearance is influential in establishing or discouraging discourse.

A third type of feedback was the training of the graduate students who participated in the research for their own degree programs or as graduate research assistants. Fourth, there has been feedback into classroom teaching by using the research findings in teaching. Fifth, lectures have been presented to other professional groups (such as the extension home economists in Ohio). A sixth possibility of feedback has not materialized specifically from this study to date, however, it is an idea which has intrigued me: an action program with teenage girls who want help in clothing selection in a particular high school setting. Using the information generated from the research, home economics teachers, counselors, or social workers could aid teenagers who do not understand the clothing norms in a particular setting or could aid teenagers who understand the norms but do not have the knowledge or skill to manipulate their wardrobes to suit those expectations.

African Dress and Textiles

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but instead, of many allied projects. My initial area of interest while living in Africa was to establish a working bibliography of African dress for myself in order to find out what published material already existed. At the same time, I perceived the variety and number of handcrafted textiles which existed in Nigeria and began to collect examples of as many as possible. As I collected the textiles, I tried to find out what research existed concerning them. I was engaging primarily in secondary research in contrast to the primary research thrust of the high school study.

Upon my return to the United States I encouraged graduate students also to do secondary research on beads and textiles. Our first field research study is now underway in Nigeria.

The output of the African research thrust includes a bibliography of African dress,⁵ an article on African dress as an art form,⁶ an article on Nigerian handcrafted textiles⁷, a forthcoming book on Nigerian textiles, four M.A. problems and theses (one of which has been published)⁸, and two or three more which are in progress, and also a Ph.D. dissertation in progress on the analysis (through photographs) of the dress of five generations in one Yoruba family in Nigeria.

The feedback from the African research output is much more varied than the feedback from the more unified research study reported earlier. First, photographs and African cross-cultural examples of dress were incorporated into an introductory textbook on dress titled *THE VISIBLE SELF: PERSPECTIVES ON DRESS*.⁹ Second, lecture materials have been incorporated into two undergraduate courses at Michigan State, "Survey of World Dress," and "Culture, Society and Dress." Third, Nigerian fabrics and slides of the fabrics have been used in the beginning textile course and a textile design course taught at Michigan State University. Fourth, lectures have been given on Nigerian dress and textiles in other universities. Fifth, a yearly graduate seminar on African Dress has been taught at Michigan State which has introduced Africa through the study of dress to students generally ignorant of that continent. Sixth, graduate students have been stimulated to visit Africa on specially focussed tours to study African dress and textiles. Seventh, specific Nigerian textiles have been on loan to the Smithsonian Museum for their African Hall and the the Museum of Modern Art's traveling exhibit, "African Textiles and Decorative Arts." Eighth, two exhibits of Nigerian textiles have been organized in the past year. One at Michigan State had 5,000 viewers in three weeks and a repeat of the exhibit was held at Hampton Institute. Ninth, feedback into the commercial world was given by consulting with Time-Life Books writers and researchers who are currently publishing a book titled "Exotic Dress" which has materials on a Yoruba form of dress called the Dansiki and on batiks designed in Europe for the African market as well as on indigenous African starch resist batiks. Tenth, there has been feedback into Africa and Nigeria with a stimulation of interest in an area of life taken for granted. Publication of the African dress bibliography and African textiles outline plus personal contact and correspondence with Africans about African dress and textiles has made some Africans more aware of the beauty of their handcrafted cloth and their distinctive ways of dress. Such contact has also stimulated further research by Africans themselves.

Finally, the most current feedback example is my cooperative effort with the Urban 4-H Youth Programs in Michigan on a project titled "Ethnic Heritage Series" in which we are developing multi-media modules for testing in five urban areas. (A module usually contains 20 slides and has an accompanying tape-recorded or written commentary plus supplementary written materials.) "Ethnic Heritage" is an inclusive title which purposely covers any ethnic group. We are utilizing the African materials first. The purpose is to teach black youngsters about their African heritage, but also to teach youngsters of other backgrounds to appreciate Africa. So far we have a set of slides which introduces as an example, the variety of terrain, housing, transportation in Africa which we call the General Cultural Series. In addition, we have a module on starch resist batiks from Nigeria, appliqué cloths from Dahomey, Adinkra cloth from Ghana, and hairstyles from Nigeria.

Except for the cultural series, each module has a project or series of projects for the 4-H'er to carry out with appropriate modification for the American setting. I will show you one of the modules as an example--that of hairstyling in Nigeria.

(Slides followed with accompanying commentary.)

NIGERIAN HAIRSTYLES (Commentary for Slides)

1. In every part of the world, people attempt to improve upon their personal appearance. One area of the body that is easy to modify is the hair and the women in Nigeria are like women everywhere in that they arrange their hair in many different ways. This elaborate style worn by a Yoruba (yoh' roo bah') woman is done with many tiny strands wrapped with shiny black thread.
2. We are talking about the Yoruba people who live in southwestern Nigeria. Most of the following pictures are of the Yoruba from the area in and around Lagos, the large coastal city. A few pictures of people from other parts of Nigeria are also included.
3. A woman who wants her hair done in Lagos in a Western style might go to a beauty salon such as "Sally's" where professional hairdressers work. She might also find a hairdresser in the market place. It is difficult to do one of these hairstyles on one's self but friends and relatives often fix each other's hair.
4. Several hair styles are distinctive of Yoruba land and are named after familiar objects, particular events, or special occasions. This style was called the "War Is Over," a style named to celebrate the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. Braids formed on each side of the head are joined together to give the appearance of a crown.
5. A woman who is "dressed-up" may cover her elaborate hair style with a head-tie called a gele (gay lay). It used to be in

poor taste to appear in public with the head uncovered but this custom is changing. The rest of this woman's dress which is typical of the Yoruba includes a blouse and a fabric wrapped around the body like a skirt that is called a wrapper.

6. Before the hair is arranged it must be clean and fully dry. The ends are all separated and combed out into a "bush." The hairstyle chosen depends upon a person's head shape as well as the length and thickness of the hair. This young woman is one of the Ibo (ee-bow) people from the East Central State.
7. The hair is sectioned into the desired divisions and a conditioner such as pomade or vaseline is applied. Hair-tying that resembles wire sculpture is called irunkiko. It is done by separating strands of oiled hair and wrapping them with shiny thread.
8. Children begin to learn the techniques of arranging hair at an early age when they go everywhere with their mothers. Hairdoes last about one week and Saturday is the day when many women have their hair done in Nigeria.
9. The strong narrow combs used to separate the hair are either plastic or wooden.
10. Wooden combs develop a beautiful lustrous finish after they have been used many times. This woman is drawing out a thread to be wrapped around a strand of hair also called a plait (plat). It is a combed out, twisted section of hair. Only in the last 25 years has it become fashionable to wrap strands of thread around each plait to help the hair stand out from the head. Before that styles were done without thread and usually by braiding.
11. As many long thin braids as possible are desirable and the process of thread-wrapping allows more braids to be made. The thread can also be adjusted to put in kinks or curves or puffs. The little girl is having her hair done in a style called "half-moon."
12. This is a fairly simple style in which thread has been wrapped around the plaits of hair. When a Nigerian wears her hair in a "natural" style she means she is wearing one of these plaited styles. "Corn-rowing" is braiding the hair in patterns close to the head and is also typical of West Africa, but is the word we use in the USA.
13. Names such as star, laundry basket, rain-falls-on-the-ear, beret, and skyscraper are used to describe hairstyles that have some resemblance to familiar objects. One style with many thread-wrapped plaits pulled to one side of the face is called "I feel all right."
14. Men have a choice of several hairstyles too. A shop is located in the market place which has a sign showing different cuts that the barber will do.

15. These variations were fashionable during the 1960's.
16. It will take longer than an hour to plait a more complicated hairstyle. Price varies according to the length of the hair and the number of braids in the style. Hair-tying need not be limited to African hair. As long as the hair is long enough and has coarse body, it can be tied.
17. Most women go to beauty shops only on special occasions so an elaborate hairstyle done professionally might be an indication that there had been or was going to be an important occasion. Less complicated hairstyles are worn for everyday.
18. Differences between hairstyles of men and women in Nigeria have been obvious. Hairstyles are one way to tell the boys from the girls at an early age.
19. People from different regions also wear their hair differently. This hairstyle of many tiny braids is unique to women of the Kanuri people in the northeastern part of Nigeria.
20. Nigeria and America have exchanged some hairstyles. The wife of a Nigerian student in America is wearing the familiar "Afro" which was worn in this country before it appeared in Nigeria. Her daughters have their hair done in traditional Nigerian hairdoes similar to styles that are being worn by some Americans today.

(End of slides and commentary)

After the slide presentation a discussion follows including a demonstration on the hair of someone in the audience. Because cornrowing and plaiting of hair have become more popular and widespread in the United States recently, one or more members of the audience may participate as demonstrators. If the group is large, smaller numbers can cluster around one demonstrator. A handout sheet is available to take home which illustrates different examples of hairdo styles.

Conclusions

The topic assigned me was the application of research. What are the implications from these research output and feedback examples in which I have been personally involved? These specific examples illustrate several major points:

1. Output and feedback are not always easy to separate from each other as categories. For example, I listed the training of graduate students as feedback from research but this example could also be looked upon as output.
2. Application of research or research feedback is varied. The feedback may be in support of theory, in support of teaching, or in support of public or community programs (such as the 4-H example or the Nigerian textile exhibit). The potential

types of feedback should be made more visible as we write research proposals so that administrators and funding agencies (whether Agricultural Experiment Stations or other government or private foundations) can understand the potential application of our research as we make efforts to obtain support.

3. Research feedback in our field may need other than conventional delivery systems. We expect to publish articles in professional journals, present papers at professional meetings and incorporate research results in our teaching. However, to get support for more research we need to extend to audiences beyond our professional peers who can utilize the research results and in turn support funding for further research. To reach these audiences we may need to use more visual materials for example, and we may need to be willing to communicate our research results by using language lay audiences will understand.
4. Output and feedback both are not always quantifiable, especially in an area such as the socio-psycho-cultural aspects of clothing. We can easily be impressed with numbers or record-breaking examples (such as high yields of bushels of corn or wheat per acre) but what is impressive in regard to the research output from the study of high school girls and their opinions about clothing and acceptance or the study of African dress and textiles? I have quoted numbers in some cases--nine articles published and 5000 people attending one exhibit. But what do these numbers mean? Perhaps the numbers are meaningless. Instead we must ask a non-quantifiable question: What impact has the research had or what potential impact can it have?

We can tally one bibliography, for example, but the real question is, What use has been made of it and what research has been stimulated by its use?

In regard to feedback in the research location--in one case only one high school, in another case the African continent generally or Nigeria specifically--again we cannot quantify impact. I can best illustrate this by a story of a 12 year old boy, a nephew of a friend of mine, who asked his aunt after he saw an American woman photographing some of the local handwoven cloth, "Auntie, is it really beautiful? It is so common, I don't know whether it is beautiful or not."

Another aspect of our research which is not quantifiable relates to the subject matter, the content. My own belief is that clothing is one critical variable in the development of self-image and personal identity. My research referred to here as well as that of Lillian Matthews' presentation has specific implications in regard to (a) understanding the self-images and personal identities of teenage girls or men and women inmates and (b) in developing pride in the cultural heritage of black Americans by black Americans as well as enabling others to develop an appreciation of that pride. If only one individual has a different self-image as a result of our research, who can quantify that?

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⁹Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne B. Eicher, THE VISIBLE SELF: PERSPECTIVES ON DRESS (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973).