Fashion designers’ decision-making process: The influence of cultural values and personal experience in the creative design process

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to understand the relationship of fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences and the process of creativity in their design process. This study also expands knowledge of South Korean fashion designer’s personal experiences in creating objects. A qualitative approach with semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one long interviews was used to gain understanding of complex meanings held by participants and their cultural values, personal experiences, and the process of creativity in their design process. Samples of 12 South Korean fashion designers (n=12), who had a minimum of three years of experience as designers, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling.

Each interview took approximately one to two hours. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to fill out demographic background questionnaires to provide data including demographic information, significant life experiences that lead them to the fashion industry, and importance of skills for designing clothes. Twelve South Korean fashion designers participated in this study; however, one designer declined to fill out the survey of demographic background information. Therefore, the demographic statistics are based on 11 participants. During the interview, participants were asked about the design process, creative process, inspirations, and personal optimal experience of flow. Constant comparison processes were used to analyze the data.

Eleven overarching themes emerged from the interview: (1) the uncertainty encountered by apparel designers vs. fashion designers; (2) the creative fashion design process; (3) the designer’s role in the system; (4) the designer’s skills; (5) fashion as communication; (6) the creative role as a source of inspiration; (7) the fashion system’s role; (8) merchandising as a vital
entity; (9) role of cultural values; (10) fashion as a global phenomenon; and, (11) individual designers vs. in-house designers.

The findings suggest that cultural values have an indirect influence in South Korean fashion designers’ creative design process. Particularly, Confucian philosophy creates an indirect influence on South Korean designer’s work environment and creativity in spite of some negative influence on the creative design process and creativity. Second, all fashion designers who participated in this study described the important influence of the fashion system in South Korea, (i.e., the consignment system) to become a successful designer domestically and internationally. Third, the overwhelming majority of participants are unaware that they were impacted by cultural values or their background. Fourth, this study indicates that designers’ personal experiences serve as sources of inspirations and may have a direct result of increase in creative design ideas and creativity. Fifth, designers experience flow during the creative design process, when designers have positive experiences from five categories including barrier, break time, balance, autotelic experience and happiness from recognition.

Few research studies have been conducted with respect to South Korean fashion designers’ creative design processes, the findings of this study will help extend knowledge of the relationship between cultural values and personal experience with the creative process. The framework or conceptual model of the creative design process suggested in this study adds to the existing literature and knowledge related to the relationship of how the fashion system, cultural values, and personal experience influence the creative fashion design process. Moreover, little research has been conducted on designers’ experience of flow during the creative design process. Therefore, the finding from this study will possibly broaden knowledge of design theory, the
global apparel industry, and design education. Its research will function as a foundation for others who are interested in studying South Korean fashion designers.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Although the practice of fashion design has a long history, research into the fashion/textile design process is recent. The fashion design process can be studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. For this study I examine the relationship of fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences and the process of creativity in their design process. This study expands knowledge of how cultural values, personal experiences and creativity of designers are related to the fashion designers’ creative practices and processes.

Some researchers refer to fashion as a hybrid subject because it “brings together different conceptual frameworks and disciplinary approaches, including those from anthropology, art history, cultural studies, design studies, economics, history, literature, semiotics, sociology, visual culture and business studies” (Skov & Melchior, 2008, p. 2). The design of fashion has varied over time and place, influenced by cultural, historical and social factors. Lawson (1997), who compared architecture and fashion design practice, concluded that fashion design seems more imaginative, unpredictable and spontaneous than other areas of design such as architecture or industrial design. Fashion designers are influenced by various cultural factors, including the fine arts, history, music, and performing arts. Kim and Ha (2010) stated that “fashion design is now more than an expression of culture that reflects the taste of the times or the appearances of individuals or the public, but has expanded to include value as culture that packages the industry as a whole, considering social environment, corporate environment and design environment” (p. 40).

The term “culture” has several meanings. From an anthropological point of view, culture can refer to “what people think, what people do, and what people produce” (Cho, 2009, p. 490).
Implicit cultural theory explains culture as structured and repeating patterns of daily life that represent a system of ideas including values and other mental processes (Jantzen, 2004). Culture is also a system of ideas and behaviors including habits and customs that are shared by groups and that determine the actions of an individual (Jantzen, 2004). People with similar backgrounds share comparable attitudes, values, goals and experiences based on such factors as ethnicity, race, gender, and religion (Westwood & Low, 2003). Conversely, it is important to realize that group behavior does not necessarily suggest a shared culture. There might be numerous factors contributing to a common behavior within a group, and this similar behavior may lead to different consequences. What is important in defining culture is “whether” and “to what extent” culture is shared and, defining what elements are shared, what the sharing consists of and how it emerges throughout the culture (Jantzen, 2004, p. 29).

People in different cultures have different ways of seeing things in the world. Koda (1985) investigated the meaning of the term “poor,” referring to the look of Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo’s designs in the 1980s, and how different cultures interpreted it. Rei Kawakubo’s visual form of a ripped, “poor,” and incomplete look captured an essential element of Japanese aesthetics called wabi-sabi, based on Zen philosophy. Koren (2008) described wabi-sabi as a “beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional” (Martin, 2007, p. 15). A similar visual form of a torn, ripped, poor, and deconstructed look was popular in Great Britain during a similar era. However, in Great Britain, the look symbolized the punk culture, representing a socio-political movement, individual freedom, and an anti-establishment view (Denberg, 2012). In the United States, the visual form has been interpreted as a sarcastic reflection on the homeless and lower classes (Denberg, 2012, p. 1). Filmmaker John Waters, an admirer of Rei Kawakubo’s styles,
described Comme des Garçons’ Rei Kawakubo’s style as undercover glamor: “She lets us be stylish in secret. Because most people think we’re poor when we have on her outfits” (Denberg, 2012, p. 1).

Different cultures have different views of the individual. In America, “the squeaky wheel is greased;” in Korea, “a cornered stone meets the mason’s chisel;” and in Japan, “the nail standing out gets pounded down” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). These three proverbs represent the idea that people in different countries may hold contradictory interpretations of the self and others with respect to how people should behave in their lives (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In collective cultures such as many Asian and African cultures, people are more likely to be interdependent within a group (e.g., nation, tribe, family), give priority to in-group goals, and shape their behavior according to social norms. As a result, they tend to have more flexible personalities. For example, a fear of the typical Japanese person is not belonging to a group or failing to connect with one’s group (Triandis, 2001). On the other hand, the worst scenario that can happen to an American is to fail to separate from others, not stand up for his or her belief, or be unnoticed by others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In individualist cultures like those of the West, the ideal person is independent from the group, self-contained, gives priority to self-defined goals, and acts on the basis of personal wishes and attitudes rather than group norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001).

Culture is the outcome of practices. Culture does not generate the act or the product of the act; it is rather the evolution of the act and the result of an individual’s action that takes on meaning in culture. An individual’s action is shaped by the society and culture to which he or she is either functionally or mentally attached (Jantzen, 2004). Culture is the process through which designers can attain a full understanding of the patterns of interaction and meanings of those
patterns. This process can be guided by witnessing what others have done and by finding possible reasons why they react in a particular manner. Cultural influences come into play in the product development process in that designers are partly shaped by the designer’s own cultural and societal values (Razzaghi, Ramirez, & Zehner, 2008). These characteristics of culture suggest an important aspect of cultural influences on the individual designer. Therefore, the cultural values and living patterns of a designer can play an important role in his or her work; cultural differences affect the way designers work (Song, 2009).

**Significance of the study**

As the world becomes more globally oriented in economics, politics and business, it is important to study how cultural meanings accompany or change a designer’s ideas with respect to his/her design work. It is important to understand how designers incorporate cultural meaning into their designs and how design meaning is shared among people of different cultures. The way that the meaning of culture shapes a design and how individuals differ from and are similar to one another within cultures are important determinants of whether or not a designer will be successful in the global market place. Accordingly, it is important to know how individual designers perceive their own culture. In particular, the most essential competitive advantage in today’s apparel industry is that of skilled human resources such as creative designers who serve as cultural interpreters when designing products (Jin, 2004). Other industry factors, such as labor or materials, are globally sourced; working with these global sources requires intercultural communication skills, but it is the development and marketing of a product or service by creative workers that makes or breaks success of a company today (Aspers, 2009; Jin, 2004). Therefore, knowing how cultural values influence the fashion designer’s creative decision-making process is important because, as pointed out by Lawson (1997), “recognizing the nature of the problem
and responding with an appropriate design process seems to be one of the most important skills in design” (p. 109). Understanding the impact of cultural values on product development may facilitate self-reflection on the part of a designer and possible adjustment when designing for a global market place.

To understand how fashion designers’ cultural value influences are integrated into their design practice, especially in terms of the design process, it may be useful to investigate the relationship between cultural identity and the use of cultural elements such as history, philosophy, and world view, as well as writings, paintings, music, and architecture in designing the product. Furthermore, fashion designers’ creativity may be affected by cultural factors such as systems of institutions, organizations, groups, individuals, and events (Kawamura, 2004). The characteristics of cultural values suggest an important application of the meaning of cultural influences on a fashion designer; culture can and does have an influence on creative and innovative processes (Westwood & Low, 2003). For example, fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto proclaimed his origin of inspiration in tradition: “. . . you will only be able to oppose something and to find something of your own, after traveling the long road of tradition” (Salazar, 2011, p. 51).

Mass-appeal fashion designers work with three main components during the design process: appearance, utility, and meaning (Cho, 2009). While architects are expected to work for their clients and users, fashion designers have more freedom to be “imaginative, unpredictable, and spontaneous” (Lawson, 1997, p. 109). In some cases, they focus on themselves to express their meaning through the end product. However, a fashion designer is not an artist; he or she “makes a business with creation” (Rei Kawakubo, 2011). Rei Kawakubo described her design process:
I have only continued all these years to try to make a business with creation. This has been my first and one and only decision of any importance. The decision to first of all think of creating something that didn’t exist before, and then after that to give the creation form and expression in a way that can be made into a business. I cannot separate being a designer from being a businesswoman. It’s one and the same thing for me. (Rei Kawakubo, 2011, para. 5)

In Kawakubo’s collections, her clothing represents, “art, architecture, container, disguise or displaced identity” (Slowinski, 2008, p. 14). The “Broken Bride” collection in 2005 is her most philosophical collection. By breaking down the Japanese image of geisha, she created the wedding dress prepared for a bride ready to break with tradition. She claims that her work is to create something new, but her details such as collars, waists, and hemlines were referenced in previous eras (Slowinski, 2008), especially the essential Japanese aesthetic called *wabi-sabi*.

Until the past few years, few published studies focused on professional fashion designers thought process or explanation of how designers’ thinking is shaped by cultural values. Previous studies mostly focused on how cultural background can influence students who study design. Khoza and Workman (2009) conducted a cross-cultural examination in university programs of the effect of culture and training with respect to perceptual learning style and spatial task performance in apparel design students. Results indicated that cultural background affects both perceptual learning style and spatial task ability. Even though the sample of this study was a student group from the United States, the take-away point from this research was that visual spatial skills and thinking are critical elements of designers’ cognitive processes and are therefore critical to success in apparel design (Khoza & Workman, 2009).
Song (2009) investigated differences in the ways designers work on the basis of differences in their cultural background. Differences existed among groups of undergraduate apparel design students from three countries: the United States, Taiwan, and Korea. Students from these three countries were each given the same problem, to design a *hanbok* inspired dress that could be worn by celebrities for important events. *Hanbok* is a part of traditional women’s dress in Korea. From her study, Song summarized that people of different nationalities approached a given problem differently because of their varying cultural backgrounds. However, Song could not draw any conclusions regarding why these group differences occurred.

Razzaghi, Ramirez & Zehner (2008) demonstrated that there is a connection between industrial designers’ cultural and societal values and the concepts they create. Australian and Iranian students showed both similarities and differences among ten patterns within each group in their approaches to a product conceptualization exercise (Razzaghi et al., 2008). The researchers concluded that designers’ cultural background influences design solutions. The previous studies clearly show how cultural background plays a role in designing products.

Previous research has reported the significance of incorporating culture into product design; nevertheless, the research does not explain the process by which an individual’s cultural values influence the design process. The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) considers culture to be an important part of designing the product. ICSID promotes the idea that, “designers shall strive to embody and further the cultural traditions of their national societies while incorporating the best characteristics of international design principles and standards” (ICSID, 2001, p. 3). The Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) defined industrial design as “the professional service of creating and developing concepts and
specifications that optimize the function, value, and appearance of products and systems for the mutual benefit of both users and manufacturers” (IDSA, 2013, para.1).

The final product created by designers is influenced by their cultural background, starting from the beginning stages of the design process during concept development. Culture can play a role in demonstrating a framework through which meaning is connected to the user (Razzaghi et al., 2008). Furthermore, the fashion industry is a distinctive example of global business; original or creative design is one of the solutions for elevating the fashion industry into the global market (Aspers, 2010). Therefore, understanding the process of how fashion designers’ cultural values influence their creative work is immensely important.

Fiore, Kimle, and Moreno (1996) described how psychological and socio-cultural factors affect a creators’ creative work; however, they did not address the question as to whether successful apparel designers solve design problems by use of personality, life experiences, and training or work habits. Fiore et al. (1996) reviewed the literature on creators and the creative process and suggested future research on how socio-cultural factors influence apparel designers’ creativity. Kawamura (2004) investigated a group of Japanese fashion designers working in the Paris fashion world to study the interdependence between Japanese designers and the French fashion system. However, to date there has been no study of the relationship of Korean culture to Korean apparel or fashion designers’ work and design processes.

According to Lau (2007), experienced designers focus mostly on design principles that affect information-seeking behavior and design strategies in performing a task. Fashion designers especially need base knowledge and skills to be creative, to solve problems, and to develop concepts (Khoza & Workman, 2009). Moreover, creativity and originality in design are the most important factors in becoming a successful fashion designer rather than just an ordinary
dressmaker. A designer’s ideas, specifically understanding of both themselves and others, must be communicated through design to consumers to describe just what the designer is trying to create. Therefore, investigating fashion designers’ decision-making processes, particularly as affected by the designers’ cultural values and personal experiences, is significant to study.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to investigate the relationship of South Korean apparel and fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences to their creative design process. This study aims to extend our knowledge of how Korean cultural values and the personal experiences of Korean designers are related to or reflected in apparel and fashion designers’ practices and processes. Another objective is to explore designers’ personal experiences in creating fashion objects. Throughout the study, the terms apparel and fashion designer will be used interchangeably. The term fashion designer will refer to both apparel and fashion designers. The intention is not to define creativity but to investigate sources of creativity. In other words, my focus is the origin of creativity and sources of design inspiration for selected fashion designers and how cultural values may be incorporated into their fashion design.

**Research Questions**

(1) How do South Korean fashion designers explain the role of cultural values in the creative design process?

(2) How are cultural values related to South Korean fashion designers’ decision-making processes in the conceptualization or creative process?

(3) How do individual experiences impact South Korean fashion designers inspiration and decisions?
(4) How are South Korean fashion designers’ inspirations and origin of creativity affected by the individual’s background, specifically with regard to cultural values?

(5) Do South Korean fashion designers experience the concept of “flow” during the creative design process?

**Definitions**

*Confucianism:* Confucianism is “a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that influenced the culture and history of East Asia” (“Confucianism,” 2010, para. 1). At its root, it is the teachings of a man who lived in ancient China named Kong Chiu (551-479 B.C). His teachings are sometimes called religious, but at other times are called non-religious philosophy. Confucianism was concerned with this life and this world (Peterson, 1997, p. 141). Confucianism was regarded as the perfect ideology in setting up a good government (Peterson, 1997, p. 139).

*Clothing:* A tangible, material production with [possible] utilitarian function (Kawamura, 2004). Clothing may also have symbolic function. Clothing is made of materials that encase, envelope, suspend from, or wrap around the human body (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992).

*Creativity:* “The process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies and so on; identifying difficulties; searching for solutions, making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about deficiencies; testing and retesting these hypotheses and possibly modify retesting, and communicating the results” (Torrance, 1965, p. 663-664).

*Creative process:* The creative process refers to the internal process of the artist/designer involved in development of the idea through completion of the aesthetic product (Fiore et al., 1996). It includes perceiving similarity where the ordinary mind sees only dissimilarity,
and integrating and juxtaposing elements that are usually considered opposites (Fiore et al., 1996).

_Culture_: Culture has been defined as learned and shared behavior patterns that are characteristic of members of society who interact with each other (Hoebel, 1958; Useem & Useem, 1963). Culture is the man-made part of the environment (Herskovits, 1955). It allows individuals to make sense of the world around them by providing a “frame of reference or perspective” (Khoza & Workman, 2009, p. 62).

_Fashion_: A “system of institutions, organizations, groups, individuals, events and practices that contributes to the making of fashion as a belief supported by these external factors” (Kawamura, 2004, p.1). Fashion is an excessive, intangible, and a symbolic production (Kawamura, 2004). It must be “institutionally constructed and culturally diffused” and exists in a specific cultural and organizational context” (Kawamura, 2004, p.1).

_Fashion system_: A “system that produces fashion designers”, “fashion professionals, preserves and perpetuates the culture and ideology of fashion” (Kawamura, 2004, p. 10). It is the system of “organizations, institutions, practices and individuals interacting with one another, and that legitimates fashion designers and their creativity but not to produce clothes which is a separate kind of manufacturing system” (Kawamura, 2004, p. 10)

_Flow_: Flow is the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they can pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 8). This optimal experience is called flow, because many of the respondents described the feeling when things were going well as an almost “autotelic effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 110).
Hanbok: Hanbok is the Korean traditional garment. Originally, there were three main divisions. At first both men and women wore hanbok; the typical jacket went down to the hipline and was tied around the waist with a band. This garment was made of a straight neckband and narrow sleeves with a trimmed hem, cuffs and a rectangular cloth with different colored stripes sewn to the center front line of the bodice (seop). The pants had narrow legs, tied at the ankle. Second was the skirt (chima) and the third element was a coat (po), worn over the jacket and skirt combination. The hanbok today refers to the hanbok of the Joseon Dynasty. The jacket of women’s hanbok became shorter and the waistband has disappeared. New elements included breast ties and the attachment of narrow white stripes called a dongjeong to the collar (Ryang & Hong, 2003, p. 10).

Ideology: Ideology is a word describing the “values and public agenda of nations” and organization groups. For the most part ideology describes the “relationship between organized thought and social power in large-scale, political-economic contexts” (Lull, 2000, p. 14).

Industrial design: “The professional service of creating and developing concepts and specifications that optimizes the function, value, and appearance of products and systems for the mutual benefit of both users and manufacturers” (IDSA, 2013, para.1).

Industrial designer: Designers who develop “concepts and specifications through collection, analysis, and synthesis of data guided by the special requirement of the client or manufacturer” (IDSA, 2013, para. 2)

Values: Values are standards that lead individuals to take positions on issues, predispose them to favor particular ideologies, guide self-presentations, influence how individuals evaluate and judge themselves and others, act as a basis for morality and competence comparisons with
others and direct individuals to challenge certain ideas and to rationalize beliefs and actions that would otherwise be unacceptable so as to preserve self-image (Erez & Earley, 1993, p. 49).
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first section of this chapter presents an overview of the meaning of culture and society. The second section introduces Korean cultural values, particularly Confucianism, as well as material, subjective, and ideological aspects of Korean culture. To better understand how Korean designers work especially in view of their culture, an overview of the Korean apparel industry and consumer behavior is necessary. The cultural heritage, as well as the religious and philosophical background of Korea, have led to a shared knowledge system in terms of both values and beliefs. The third section of the chapter describes research on the design process and on designers’ creativity. A designer’s personal experience in relation to the theory of optimal experience or “flow” is reviewed in the fourth section. Finally, the review ends with an assessment of current literature in the field and suggestions for future directions.

Culture, Humankind, and Society

Studying culture is important in all areas of design (Khoza & Workman, 2009; Westwood & Low, 2003). The word “culture” is commonly used in everyday life as well as in scholarly work. To understand the meaning of culture, we must examine how various scholars in different disciplines have defined culture throughout history. Culture, which has been defined as learned and shared patterns of behavior of members within a community who interact with each other (Hoebel, 1958; Useem & Useem, 1963), is the product of negotiation over time of the symbolic meanings and significance of forms and conventions. Culture defines who a person is and how a person sees him or herself even when in a foreign country (Mohammed, 2011, p. 4).

Culture allows individuals to make sense of the world around them by providing a “frame of reference or perspective” (Khoza & Workman, 2009, p. 62). As a basic concept of psychology, culture is “subjective perception of the man-made part of the environment” (Herskovits, 1995),
including social stimuli, associations, beliefs, attitudes, stereotypes, norms, values, and roles that individuals share (Osgood, 1974; Triandis, 1972). According to Erez and Miriam (1993) as cited by Mohammed (2011, p. 42), the most general view of culture is that it is a set of characteristics common to a particular group of people.

Contemporary culture is complex, incorporating multiple states of everyday life across a collection of diverse individuals (Kellner & Durham, 2006). Present-day culture is reflected in and shaped by media and communication technology, which are an essential part of contemporary society. Technology developments enhance the transferability of media and culture. Forms of media, including television, newspapers, movies, advertising, popular music, magazines, and the Internet, present and influence gender role norms, ideals of body image, lifestyle, fashion trends, and entertainment, as well as individual identity. Media culture presents ideologies and lures viewers to believe that what they see through the media is truthful and of value. For example, sexual content conveyed through media has been found to have some effect on adolescents’ sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Gruber & Grube, 2000). Television advertisements may have significant impact on young women’s body images (Aruna & Shradha, 2008), as has fashion advertising in magazines and other media (e.g., social networking sites, fashion blogs). Therefore, culture has been broadly expanded by various forms of communication and artifacts, including painting, opera, journalism, CDs, DVDs, cyber-culture, and virtual reality (Kellner & Durham, 2006).

Culture consists of “conceptual” and “analytical” constructs (Hamilton, 1987, p. 3), which are continually emerging from coordinated actions and repeated behavior patterns by cooperating individuals. Culture includes not just the artifacts and tools used by a group, but more importantly, how members of a group interpret, use, and perceive these objects (Banks,
Banks, & McGee, 1989). People with a culture in common, who share a common language and understanding, will likely share and interpret the meaning of symbols, roles, and values in the same or in similar ways (Banks et al., 1989; Mohammed, 2011). According to Mohammed (2011), “the value and beliefs held by members of two cultural groups lead to fundamentally different behavior and reactions to the same work setting and information” (p. 42).

From a historical viewpoint, culture results from the evolution of “human language, environmental adaptation, settlements, and economic systems” (Mohammed, 2011, p. 9). Although culture refers to a set of shared meanings and characteristics common to a particular group of people (Shweder, Levine, Erez, & Miriam, 1993), Geertz emphasized culture as meanings that people invent (Geertz, 1973; Mohammed, 2011, p. 2). Mohammed concluded that culture is “the product of symbolic forms and conventions, negotiated over time and imbued with conventional meanings” (2011, p. 2).

Culture can be approached from a multiple-method approach, examining both objective and subjective aspects of man-made elements. Objective elements are associated with material culture and directly reflect technology. Subjective man-made elements include social structure and ideology such as social stimuli, associations, beliefs, attitudes, stereotypical norms and values, and roles that individuals play (Hamilton, 1987). White (1998) described social structure as the ways in which human beings organize themselves into defined groups with various roles. The tangible work of a defined group such as fashion designers reflects the social structure of culture in which they live and work.

**Cultural System**

Culture can be defined in terms of three different levels or stages: technological, social, and ideological (Hamilton, 1987). Technology refers to the “material culture, to the physical
things used in adaptation to one’s physical and social environment, to the techniques for their use, and to the way these are organized for use in the cultural system” (Hamilton, 1987, p. 3). The sub-cultural system of dress consists of fabrics and techniques used to make it. In a “layer cake” model of culture, technology is at the top of the list, indicating that it is the result of the ideology and the social structure of culture. The layers of ideology and social structure are incorporated within and symbiotic with technology.

Social structure can be defined as, “the continuing arrangement of persons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions, i.e., socially-established norms or patterns of behaviors” (Hamilton, 1987, p. 177). Social structure can also refer to as “the way or ways in which humans organize themselves into defined roles and groups for using the technology” (Hamilton, 1987 p. 3). Social structure is part of daily life, government, law, customs of social stimuli, and associations.

Ideology, the third level of the layer cake model that Hamilton (1987) proposed, is the most fundamental concept of all. Without ideology, technological and social structures would not even exist. Ideology is the in-depth, essential core of culture (Hamilton, 1987). If compared to the parts of an apple tree, ideology would be the roots, social structure the wood, and technology the fruit that the tree bears. Ideology as part of culture includes “values, norms, knowledge, themes, philosophies and religious beliefs, sentiments, ethical principles, world views, ethos, and the like” (Kaplan & Manner, 1972, p. 112). While ideology is the “values and public agenda of nations” and organization groups, for the most part it describes the “relationship between organized thought and social power in large-scale, political-economic contexts” (Lull, 2000, p.14). It is the basis of judging whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, explicit or implicit, appropriate or inappropriate (Hamilton, 1987). In fashion design, ideology may refer to
Values and Culture

Values influence an individual’s attitudes, cognitions and behavior (Erez & Earley, 1993, p. 48). Value orientation is presumed to have a particular rank order in a given society. For instance, the Anglo culture in the United States generally places individualism self-orientation over collectivism and other-orientation (Erez & Earley, 1993, p. 48). Values help to define who we are and strengthen our sense of self (Erez & Earley, 1993, p. 43). They shape the individual’s guiding principles. According to Rokeach, values are

. . . standards that lead individuals to take positions on issues, predispose them to favor particular ideologies, guide self-presentation, influence how individuals evaluate and judge themselves and others, act as a basis for morality and competence comparisons with others, and direct individuals to challenge certain ideas and to rationalize beliefs and actions that would otherwise be unacceptable, thus preserving self-image. (Rokeach, 1973, p. 13)

Industrialization and modernization have changed many societies to make them more worldly, materialistic, rational, and adaptive, leaving the door open to new cultures in many countries (Granato, Inglehart & Leblang, 1996). For example, East Asian countries, such as China, Korea, and Japan, stress the importance of harmony, emotional dependence, cohesion, and cooperation rather than emphasizing individual needs, emotional independence, and
autonomy, which are characteristic of Western cultures (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). East Asian collectivism values family security, social order, and high respect for longstanding traditions, as well as honoring parents, elders, and teachers and emphasizing security, courtesy, and humility. In contrast, Westerners’ values tend to be more focused on individualist traits such as intellectual ability and autonomy (Sung & Tinkham, 2005).

Korean Culture and Overview of Korea

To understand Korean culture and the Korean people, it is critical to know how traditional Korean cultural values have influenced contemporary South Korean society. Cultural influences affect the activities and experiences of individuals growing up within a particular culture as well as how these individuals interact with the environment (Cherry, 1981; Pandy, 1990, Workman & Lee, 2004; Khoza & Workman, 2009, p. 62). These effects are seen throughout society, including the fashion industry.

Korea is one of the oldest countries in the world, with a history of more than 4,200 years (Koo & Nahm, 1997). Korea is a small peninsula in East Asia. Once a single nation, it was divided into two states in 1948, South Korea and North Korea, which share the same language, ancestors and culture. However, North Korea is a Communist country largely closed off from the rest of the world, while South Korea is a democratic society that has developed into a major economic entity in the world. Since the time when the two were separated, North and South Korea have confronted each other with different social, political, and economic systems -- i.e., communism vs. capitalism. Thousands of related family members have been separated, some in the North and some in the South, including some on the father’s side of the family of this researcher.
The size of Korea is around 222,100 square kilometers (“Population of South Korea,” 2012). To be specific, North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), occupies about 55 percent of the total area, or about 122,100 square kilometers (Koo & Nahm, 1997). South Korea, the Republic of Korea (ROK), occupies 45 percent of the land, slightly less than 100,000 square kilometers. The official language in both countries is Korean. The estimated total South Korean population was about 75,000,000 in 2011 (“Population of South Korea,” 2012), and North Korean population was about 25,000,000 in 2012 (“Population of North Korea”, 2013).

East Asian countries like China, Korea and Japan have similar cultures because of their geographic proximity. Korea is bordered on the northwest by China, on the northeast by Russia, and on the east by the Sea of China and Japan. Because of these geographical relationships, all the countries in East Asia -- Korea, China, and Japan -- have long been historically interrelated and interactively connected to one another. For example, Ema (1936) explains how Japanese costumes and culture were inspired by Korean culture in *A Historical Sketch of Japanese Customs and Costumes*.

At the end of the first period Jingu Kogo, an able Empress, conquered Korea, and the civilization of Korea and the Continent began to come into our country. The customs and costumes and the high class culture of the Asiatic continent were gradually introduced and were received whole-heartedly and eagerly by the Japanese. From these introductions arose new ways of hairdressing and various modes in the ladies’ toilet [Sic]. Costumes made of brocade and twill stuff of beautiful design, great in length and with big sleeves came into fashion (p. 8).
In addition, Korean headgear and a Korean sword were displayed in an exhibition (Feb. 24, 2012- Sept. 3, 2012) at Chicago’s Field Museum featuring Genghis Khan, one of the greatest leaders and conquerors of the world, who united the Mongol Empire stretching from central to East Asia, including Korea.

What, then, does it mean to be a Korean? How do they think? How do they live? What makes the Korean culture unique with respect to other cultures? To understand how Korean designers think, it is important to examine Korean culture, because values and beliefs held by members of the same cultural group may fundamentally behave and react similarly with respect to information and setting.

To understand Korean culture and the Korean people, the following discussion focuses specifically on South Korean cultural values, as North and South Korean cultures have developed separately and differently since 1948. The Confucian tradition in South Korean culture and impacting economic development, includes ideas such as collectivism, communalism, paternalism, social harmony, and respect for tradition (Kim, 1988; Sung & Tinkham, 2005, p. 335; White & Goodman, 1998).

**Confucianism**

Korean culture, similar to other East Asian cultures, is dominated by Confucian thought that permeates business, individual behavior, and family structure (Chang, Burns, & Francis, 2004). Korean culture is more heavily influenced by Confucianism than by any other religion or philosophy, such as Buddhism, Christianity, or shamanism (Peterson, 1997, p. 137). Confucianism is “a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical, and quasi-religious thought that influenced the culture and history of East Asia” (“Confucianism,” 2010, para. 1). Confucianism, which entered Korea from China around the 4th century, changed over time to
Neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism became the official ideology of Korea in the 14th century, and is considered to be the impeccable ideology for setting up a virtuous government (Peterson, 1997, p. 139). Unlike Buddhism and Christianity, both of which are concerned with the next life, the main focus of Confucianism is this life and this world (Peterson, 1997, p. 141). Also, the fundamental essence of all life is found in the Confucian principle, as well as the nature-centric worldview that is expressed throughout Korean culture (Peterson, 1997, p. 42).

Although visible aspects of culture such as Buddhist temples, Christian churches, and shaman ceremonial trees are seen throughout Korea, few Confucian shrines are seen. Far more Koreans are Buddhists, Christians, or followers of shamanism than are believers in Confucianism (Peterson, 1997, p. 137). How, then, can we determine the extent to which Confucianism has influenced Korean culture? In fact, Confucianism can be seen to be embedded in Korea’s daily life. For example, most Koreans observe a commemorative rite called jae-sa, a Confucianism ancestor-worship ritual that is held at home. During jae-sa, people prepare food, place it on the table, and open the front door so that the spirits of ancestors will come in and eat. People also bow and wear traditional Korean garments during this ceremonial occasion. Both the preparation of foods and the bowing are ways of expressing gratitude to ancestors. The influence of Confucianism is even evident in Korean money (Peterson, 1997, p. 137); of the four units of paper money, two bear the images of Confucian scholars Hwang Lee and Yi Lee.

Before South Korea achieved a high degree of economic success, people of other nations believed that Confucianism was one of the factors restraining Korea from becoming industrialized (Peterson, 1997, p. 149). According to Max Weber (1958) and cited by Sinha & Kao (1988), the failure of economic development in Asian countries was presumed to be related to the lack of the Protestant work ethic, sometimes called the heart of the West. This presumption
was not challenged until the late 1980s. In contrast to Weber’s analysis, modern Japan very
quickly became one of the world’s most developed countries without having to abandon its
values and cultural characteristics; it achieved this status by utilizing its own unique ways, social
system, and culture to meet the needs of modern technology evolving from the Western
economic revolution. The growth of Japan and the four Asian Tigers or Asian Dragons, terms
used in the 1990s to refer to the highly developed countries in Asia (Hong Kong, Singapore,
South Korea, and Taiwan), was the result of Confucian social values, institutional structures, and
family organizations that affected work attitudes, work ethics, and management styles (Sinha &
Kao, 1988, p. 12; Peterson, 1997, p. 149). For example, in South Korea, big capitalistic
conglomerates called chaebol use Confucianism as ideology to control employees both
politically and economically (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Also, the Korean textile and clothing
industry is also driven and controlled by paternalism, a component of Confucianism (Lee &
Song, 1994).

Confucianism originated in China and was reshaped in the form of Korean Confucianism.
Although Confucianism traditionally was a religion in China, it serves a somewhat different
purpose as an ideological system in Korea, and it has been reshaped and refashioned in Korea in
two ways. First, it is a set of ideas, which describe ideal social behavior and human values.
Second, in the Joseon period (late 14th to late 19th century), it became a set of ideas employed by
the ruling classes to legitimatize, rationalize, and perpetuate their status and power. In this sense,
Confucianism in the pre-modern Korean social historical context was both a prescription for an
ideal social life and a cultural system used to perpetuate relations of inequality (Abelmann, 1997,
p. 263). One example of why Confucianism was used to shape ideology in Korea was related to a
need for this “Confucian revolution” as a “rationalizing philosophy for rule, a body of
knowledge of mastery in academies that flourished in the *Joseon* Dynasty and, finally, as proscriptions governing family organization and daily social life and cultural values” (Abelmann, 1997, p. 263, 276). Because the worldview of Confucianism is nature-centric, humans are seen to be part of nature, and society is understood to need harmony with respect to the principles of nature. According to Confucianism, small groups of people, such as the family and the village, create society and individuals in these groups in accordance with their individual seniority and ability and their qualifications to become leaders or followers within the group (Lee, 1997, p. 210-211). In Confucianism, nature is categorized into groups of five: five directions, five colors, five tastes, and five organs in the human body. For that reason, in Korean culture there are five essential social relations among human beings: Loyalty and righteousness between the King and his subjects, filial respect between father and son, the differing roles of husband and wife, faith between friends, and obedience toward elders. After the Yi Dynasty, Confucianism took the form of an ideology and continues to the present (Lee, 1997, p. 211-212).

**Confucian Values in Korea**

In Korea, Confucianism still remains as fundamental thought, which guides the moral system, public relations, and high culture. It persists as a national belief system (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Confucianism ideology and values can thus be found to be present in the daily lives of Koreans, including family, school, and workplace activities (Sung & Finkham, 2005). Kim (1988) stated:

Confucian thought was deeply rooted in the ideologies of the traditional ruling class and had profound effects on ideologies on the social values of Koreans. The essence of Confucianism deals with social order and social integration based on harmonious human relationships. From the viewpoint of Confucianism, social order should be based on basic
human relationships, which are arranged in hierarchical order in terms of ascribed status
criteria such as family relations, age and sex. (p. 87)

**Family.** Family, one of the most important aspects of Korean culture, is related to the
notion of collectivism. The family relationship is considered one the most fundamental
ideologies of Korean social values and is often pitted against the individual’s attitudes and
behaviors. Koreans tend to have strong morals and sense of respect; sometimes Koreans are
under pressure to sacrifice an individual interest in favor of family unity (Sung & Tinkham, 2005)
because of Confucianism’s high value for harmony between human beings.

The importance of the family is evident within the Korean economy as a whole and in
large conglomerates. Family-oriented collectivism has been converted into corporate
communalism, especially evident in large, family-controlled Korean corporations called
*chaebols*. In Korea, *chaebols* have monopolized the Korean economy since the 1960s and are
present in a variety of industries, including construction, electronics, manufacturing, apparel, and
even the entertainment industry (Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Examples of *chaebols* are Samsung,
Hyundai, and LG. Individuals are sacrificed for achievement of collective interest. The same rule
applies within industrial operations and group organizations.

Industrial paternalism is clearly shown in the textiles and clothing industry (Lee & Song,
1994, p. 158; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Paternalism is “a relationship between the agents in any
economic organization in which the employers act toward their employees in a manner similar to
the way that parents behave toward their children” (Sung & Tinkham, 2005, p. 335-336). Thus,
paternalism in Korea stems from Confucianism and deeply accommodates the relationship of
loyalty and moral obligation between an owner and an employee (Lee & Song, 1994, p. 161;
Sung & Tinkham, 2005).
**Education.** Education is a top priority for most Koreans. One of the reasons why education is a prime concern for Koreans is because of traditional Confucian thought (Kim, 1988, p. 84). During the *Joseon* dynasty, the social status system was influenced by Confucian thought, and the literary class was called the *yangban*. Such Confucian practices or habits still remain in Korean daily lives. For example, the majority of Koreans believe that education is the fastest way to climb up the social ladder (Kim, 1998, p. 85).

Furthermore, education is one of the key factors that has led to Korean economic success (Koo & Nahm, 1997; Porter, 1998). Education has affected productivity rates and economic growth as well as work attitudes (Kim, 1988, p. 84). Shim (1986) conducted a cross-cultural study comparing the influence of education on quality of life in South Korea to that in the United States. The result of the study shows that, for Koreans, education is the fastest way upward to a higher socioeconomic level. Korean people firmly believe that education contributes to a better quality of life (Shim, 1986). Research illustrated that there is an actual income difference between college graduates and high school graduates. This is not just for Koreans, similar pheromone occurs in many parts of countries like the United States and China. College graduates earned more than double that of high school graduates during the 1980s. This salary differential still exists today (Shim, 1986; Kim, 1988, p. 85).

**Traditional Images of Korea and Confucianism in Dress**

The holistic approach of Confucianism has influenced not only Korean thought and values, but also has shaped traditional art, including painting, architecture, and traditional costume. Confucianism is found in painting, architecture, music, and calligraphy, as well as the traditional Korean garment called *hanbok*. The style of this garment evolved during the *Joseon* dynasty in the 14th century and is still very similar today. Women’s *hanbok* includes the *chima*
(skirt), “long and gathered with a wide band attached at the hemline” (Lee et al., 2003, p. 7) and the *jeogori*, a short jacket. Men’s *hanbok* includes the *jeogori* as well as the *baji*, the term for pants in Korea. Men’s *jeogori* style has been relatively the same over time, but women’s jacket style has changed. Both jackets are collarless and have a V-neckline opening to which is attached a starched white strip called *dongjung* (Lee et al., 2003, p. 14; Yu et al., 2001). The jacket is tied on the right side with *otgorum* (ribbon) or with fabric tied in a Korean-style knot. The most distinctive characteristic of Korean women’s dress over time is the minimizing of the short jacket and the varying bulk of the skirt. In the late *Joseon* period, *jeogori* became much shorter and the volume of the skirt increased. To achieve a complete appearance, people would match the dress with decorative accessories such as *norigae* (female ornament) and *jumeoni* (pocket), and hairstyles became fuller to match the volume of the skirt. Later, when skirts became narrower reflecting a slim silhouette, hairstyles also became smaller along with the skirt volume (Lee et al., 2003, p. 17-20). The relationship between hairstyles and volume of the skirt has not been studied; however, Lee et al. (2003) believe that there was such a connection.

The concept of Confucianism is an integral part of the aesthetics of Korean dress. The beauty of Korean dress flourished in the late *Joseon* Dynasty, when it became more refined and sophisticated than ever before; it was simple but luxurious, virtuous but vivid, and dignified but non-rigid (Lee et al., 2003, p. 15). Confucianism is reflected in these characteristics of dress that exhibits “dignity” in men’s costumes and “modesty” in women’s. Men’s dress also embodied Confucian ideas; dignity was associated with wearing a big hat called a *got* and wearing a coat called a *dopo*. The hat attracted great attention to noblemen’s everyday clothes. For example, in the 1880’s, G. W. Gilmore, an American instructor at Yokyounnggongwon (the first modern public educational institution in Korea), described Korea as “the land of hats” (Lee et al., 2003, p.
Women’s traditional costume was embedded with Confucian ideas regarding modesty. The Korean idea of modesty and beauty differs from Western ideas. Westerners usually think that modesty can be expressed by concealing the body and beauty involves revealing the body. However, inside the hanbok, the female body has been concealed but also revealed at the same time. For example, the jacket is extremely tight and short so it shows the waistband of the skirt, and the tight silhouette reveals the silhouette of the wearer. Showing the waistband of the skirt with the underarm peeking out from under the jacket was considered highly erotic. Another example of modesty in Korean women’s clothing is the voluminous skirt created by wearing many layers of skirts and undergarments called mujigi. Mujigi was worn only by upper class women. Wearing different colors and different hemlines of the mujigi allowed multiple colors to show through the skirt. The purpose of wearing multiple layers of mujigi was to hide the woman’s body so as to emphasize her elegant look. Davis (1980) expressed the hanbok’s beauty as “gracious gentility” in explaining the “gradual flare of the silhouette” (Lee et al., 2003). A similar example can be seen in the kimono; the Japanese think that concealing the female form as much as possible added to its beauty. The following paragraph shows how Japanese designers evidently have a perspective of beauty different from that of Western designers.

In traditional Japanese culture sexuality is never overt, an ideology said to be reflected in the style of the kimono, especially for women. Western clothing however, tends to accentuate the contours of the body, an approach Yamamoto rejects: ‘I think to fit clothes tight on a woman’s body is for the amusement of man… It doesn’t look noble. Also, it is not polite to other people to show off too much. (Kawamura, 2011, p. 54)
Contemporary Korean Culture

Korean Pop Culture “Korean Wave”

Confucianism is also evident in contemporary Korea culture (Maliangkay, 2006; Shim, 2006). Korean pop culture has become a major Korean export to Asia, including Japan, Taiwan, and China. Korean pop culture is also gaining a reputation in Western countries, including France and United States (Shim, 2006). The so-called Korean Wave (Hanryu) or Korean Pop (or its abbreviation KPOP) started around late 1990 and became popular among East Asian countries including Japan, China, and Taiwan starting in the late 1990s (Maliangkay, 2006).

The reason why Korean pop culture dominated in Asia is because of the “lack of profanity and sex,” fitting in with the moral values of Confucianism (Maliangkay, 2006, p. 15). The story and lyrics of the K-POP culture connect with Asian values that represent the Confucian values of sensibility and family (Shim, 2006). Moreover, the key success of Korean pop culture is sometimes symbolized as a “hybridization” of West and East modern and traditional values. “Hybridization” or “hybridity reveals itself as a new practice of cultural performative expression” (Shim, 2006, p. 27). For example, “hybridization” is categorized as “conventions and styles, including music, cuisine, cinema, and fashion” (Shim, 2006, p. 27). The hybrid artists created something that both East and West can enjoy. For example, Psy, the South Korean musician, is an iconic figure who composed a song that both Easterners and Westerners put together. The “Gangnam Style” music video went viral on Youtube, ranked as the first most watched video on its website with 1.831 billion views. (“Gangnam Style,” 2013). Gangnam Style, in Korean, refers to a lifestyle reflecting the Southern part of Seoul, which is called the Gangnam district.

K-POP is expanding its fan base beyond East Asia to Western countries. The Korean
celebrity Rain is another example of an icon who represents Korean Pop globalism (Shin, 2006). Shin (2006) published an article explaining the globalizing project of Korean Pop with a case study of Rain, a famous Korean singer, dancer, and actor who was chosen as one of the “100 Most Influential People in 2006” in Time magazine. He won the MTV Movie awards “Biggest Badass Star” in 2010 for his performance in the movie Ninja Assassin that was up against Angelia Jolie. He is the first Korean artist to win in the MTV awards (“Rain,” 2012).

The power of advanced technology, such as the Internet and television satellites, helped K-POP became more successful. Rain already had numerous fans all over the world watching his dramatic and musical performances. Rain’s strong fan base has made it easier to promote his name in the United States (Welsh, 2006). This example of contemporary Korean pop culture shows that:

Pop culture no longer moves simply in a single direction, from the West to the rest of the world. Instead, it's a global swirl, no more constrained by borders than the weather.

(Welsh, 2006, para.1)

As a result of Korean popular culture’s popularity, this phenomenon had a positive impact on Korea’s fashion industries as well. Korean products, including food, music, cosmetics, fashion, and accessories, became popular from Asia to East Europe, as evident in the following statement: “Call it 'Kim Chic.' All things Korean – from food and music to eyebrow-shaping and shoe styles -- are raging across Asia, where pop culture has long been dominated by Tokyo and Hollywood” (Visser, 2002, p. 1).

According to a survey conducted among 300 services and corporations by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 85 percent of respondents thought that the Korean Wave had contributed to the “friendly image of Korea and Korean products” (KCCI, 2012, para. 1).
The Korean wave directly impacted sales of clothing, with an increase of 23.3 percent compared to the previous year. Deco is a well-known Korean company famous for its prestigious brand name that had huge success in China (Jin & Moon, 2006). In 2001, 13 Deco stores were opened in Beijing and Shanghai (Jin & Moon, 2006). Moreover, K-POP created the luxurious fashion goods market in Korea by recruiting foreign tourists in order to boost the economy and increase foreign exchange reserves (Kim, Kim & Sohn, 2009).

**The Korean Fashion System**

**Economic Growth of Korea and its Clothing and Textile Industry**

Korean culture has changed rapidly and pervasively, and has been modernized over the past 40 years. Park, Warner & Fitzgerald’s (1993) research indicated that the most noticeable and prompt change was seen in Korean women’s adoption of a Western style of dress. It took approximately 20 years for Korean women to adopt a Western style of dress for everyday life (Park, Warner, & Fitzgerald, 1993).

Korea has achieved dramatic growth in all sectors since the 1960s. Since the 1960s, the textile and clothing industry played a substantial role in the growth and development of South Korea’s economy (Jin & Moon, 2006; Lee & Song, 1994). In 2010, Korea was the eighth largest exporter of textile and clothing-related merchandise in the world, following China, the European Union (EU), India, Turkey, Bangladesh, the United States, and Vietnam (Korea Federation of Textile Industries, 2012). The Korean economy began its accelerated growth of exports in the first year of the “Five-Year Economic Development Plan” launched in 1962, under President Jung-Hee Park. Between 1962 to 1982, Korea achieved sustained GNP growth at an annual average of 8.4 percent (Kim, 1988, p. 83). The textile and clothing industry accounted for 41 percent of total exports during the 1970s, and nearly 30 percent in the 1980s (Dickerson, 1999;
Porter, 1998; Jin & Moon, 2006). Many scholars have identified Confucian values as one of the key factors that led Korea’s economic success, directing and energizing the populace to value and relentlessly pursue advancement in social status through hard work, educational attainment, and consequent economic gain (Granato, Inglehart, & Leblang, 1996; Jin, 2004; Jin & Moon, 2006; Kim, 1998; Lee, 1995; Lee & Song, 1994; Sung & Tinkham, 2005; Sternquist & Jin, 1998).

Similar to that of the other Asian newly industrializing countries (NICs) like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan, the growth of the Korean economy was accounted for by human factors (Kim, 1988, p. 81). Because NICs are relatively deficient of advanced technologies, most begin with manufacturing industries to compete with other global countries, especially through the apparel industry, because workers do not need specialized skills and need relatively little training; most of the garment industry is staffed with labor-intensive and low-paying jobs (Lee & Song, 1994, p. 147). Because of such labor practices, the apparel industry provides underdeveloped countries an excellent opportunity for rapid economic growth in a short amount of time.

However, due to rising wages, by the end of the 1980s the Korean economy lost its competitive edge within the global economy. Against this backdrop, the nation’s agenda became solely focused on its economic growth. The South Korean share of world export volume of the textile and clothing industry was down to 2.1 percent compared to 30 percent in the 1980s (Korea Federation of Textile Industries, 2012; Dickerson, 1999; Porter, 1998; Jin & Moon, 2006). The Korean government and clothing factories no longer could depend on low labor costs and long hours of work. In 1987, there was a wage hike demonstration triggered by a labor dispute; the apparel industry took the brunt of such incidents. By the early 1990s, the South Korean apparel industry had lost its competitiveness in the world manufacturing sector (Lee, 1995; Jin,
2004). Moreover, the final phase of the quota and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States dramatically hurt the garment industry in 2000 (Korea Federation of Textile Industries, 2012).

Because competitiveness of human resources in textile and clothing manufacturing areas (i.e., low wages and cheap labor) lasted only for a short amount of time, the country desperately needed to find new strategies and competitive advantages to regain its reputation, let alone to overcome such difficulties in the garment industry as a whole. Some garment producers transformed their targeted markets to lucrative industries and began to find outsourced labor in underdeveloped or emerging countries, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Philippines, as well as to use foreign workers from those countries (Jin & Moon, 2006; Lee & Song, 1994, p. 157).

Jin and Moon (2006) investigated the strong points of the Korean apparel industry and gave suggestions to the industry with respect to achieving continued growth in the global market. They identified four factors needed by the Korean garment industry in order to advance based on the Porter diamond model (1998). For a country to succeed in a specific industry, the following factors should be included to compete against its counterparts: “factor conditions, demand conditions, related and supporting industries,” and finally, “firm strategy, structure and rivalry” (Jin & Moon, 2006, p. 196; Porter, 1998).

Researchers Jin and Moon (2006) suggested training of creative designers as a possible approach for the Korean apparel industry to improve their industry positioning (Jin & Moon, 2006). As education is the top priority for the majority of Koreans, Korea has a strong advantage in training creative designers. A foreign designer, Simon Throgood, mentioned how education has allowed for more “cross-fertilized work” resulting in “a culture shift, exploration, and cross-
over” (Bugg, 2009, p. 16). He stated: “New generations of graduates were coming out of art school as creative, rather than as a sculptor or fine artist or a fashion designer” (Bugg, 2009, p. 16). In summary, Jin and Moon suggested that 1) designers should work hard to gain international recognition, 2) Korean firms can hire foreign creative designers, and 3) Korean designers can co-develop designs with foreign creative designers (Jin & Moon, 2006).

More recently, fashion designers in South Korea are starting to receive worldwide notice and have presented their design lines in Paris and New York. Examples of designers who have gained such international recognition are Lie Sang Bong, Younghee Moon, and Lee Jean Youn. Lie Sang Bong is one of the most internationally notable Korean fashion designers (Reyes, 2011). Lie is also known as the “Korean McQueen” (“Lie Sang Bong,” 2012, para. 3). He gained international fame through his first collection, “The Lost Memoir” in 2002 at Paris Pret-a-Porter (“Lie Sang Bong,” 2012, para. 1). Since then, he has shown his collection every season in Paris. Lie is known for incorporating Korean motifs such as Korean alphabets and old paintings on Western style garments. Famous Hollywood celebrities such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, Lindsay Lohan, Lady GaGa, and Juliette Binoche wear his clothes (“Lie Sang Bong,” 2012).

Younghee Moon has presented her designs a total of 32 times over 16 years since 1996 in the Paris Pret-a-Porter collection. She is the first Korean designer acknowledged by the French Federation and the first to receive the French national decoration award L’Ordre National Du Merite in 2008 (“Younghee Moon,” 2012). Lee Jean Youn is a young Korean fashion designer who has recently gained international fame as winner of the 2nd edition El Boton-MANGO Fashion Award. As a supplementary prize, Lee was chosen to design the limited-edition collection LEE JEAN YOUN for MANGO for its worldwide branches. Throughout his 12 years of working as a designer, he has won several international awards and has had designs exhibited
in the “Who’s Next Fair” in Paris and at the Las Vegas Magic Show (“Lee Jean Youn,” 2012). Since then, he has shown his new designs at Paris haute couture. Nowadays, it is common to see many Korean designers who graduated from prestigious international fashion schools such as the Fashion Institute of Art and Parsons The New School for Design. However, Lie, Moon, and Lee have no experience studying abroad.

The second competitive aspect of the global Korean apparel industry is demand conditions (Jin & Moon, 2006). According to Porter (1998), demand conditions established by increased buyer refinement determine the size of the domestic market. That is, if the country has sophisticated and demanding consumers, companies are forced to meet higher standards in terms of quality and uniqueness (Jin & Moon, 2006). Korean consumers are well known for concern about and attention to their appearances. The majority of South Koreans believe that they will lose face if they are not dressed properly in a public setting. If an outfit is inappropriate, one will be more likely to be socially ridiculed in Korea, and Korean consumers therefore demand high quality and unique designs as well as affordable prices from fashion companies (Jin & Moon, 2006). For example, “As one manager of a multinational company operating in Korea once confessed, once we can satisfy Korean consumers, then we are sure of our success in other countries, too” (Jin & Moon, 2006, p. 202).

Nowadays, it is not uncommon for products designed in one culture to be marketed and used in other cultures. Japanese designers in Paris use their heritage as their strongest weapon when it comes to design (Kawamura, 2004, p. 97). E-Land Kids, one of the biggest clothing companies in Korea, launched their company in the United States in 1999. Since then, it has expanded into 500 stores across the U.S., including high-end department stores like Sak’s Fifth Avenue and fashion districts like Beverly Hills, California (Jin & Moon, 2006).
Korean Consuming Behaviors

It is great to tell a story in a collection, but you must never forget that, despite all the fantasy the thing is about the clothes … at the end of the day there has to be a collection and it has to be sold. We have to seduce women into buying it. That’s our role. What you see on the runway isn’t all that you get. That represents less than a quarter of what we produce. Merchandising is vital. – John Galliano. (Dowell, 1997, p. 59)

Understanding consumers has become the core issue for those who wish to understand the nature of the fashion business in South Korea. With the swift growth of industrialization and the information and knowledge economy, Korean consumers’ tastes and lifestyle is becoming more Westernized, leading to the expectation of high quality products and variety in choices (Chang, Burns, & Francis, 2004). Consumers are also changing; becoming more cautious about price and the practical values of clothing (Sternquist & Jin, 1998).

Korean consumers think of shopping as a leisure activity, partly due to the lack of leisure facilities around the country (Chang, Burns, & Francis, 2004). Chang et al. (2004) examined the role of hedonic shopping values with respect to consumers and gender differences in determining apparel shopping satisfaction rates. Hedonic shopping value reflects, “the value received from the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of the shopping experience” (Jones, Reynolds, & Arnhold, 2006, p. 974). The results illustrated that the physical environment of a store is the most powerful factor in accounting for satisfaction from a shopping experience for both male and female Korean consumers.

Brand names are extremely important for Korean consumers when purchasing clothes because of the cultural influence of Confucianism (Oh & Fiorito, 2002; Chang et al., 2004; Jin & Koh, 1999; Lee & Burns, 1993; Kim, Kim & Sohn, 2009). As mentioned earlier, Koreans tend to
be very cautious about their appearances. Even though Korea is becoming more Westernized, the Confucian ideal is still noticeable in Korean society (Chang, Burns & Francis, 2004). For example, group influence represents the most distinct departure from Western culture, and this is especially true for the decision-making process. In a Confucian, collectivist society, each fashion brand represents a social bond between group members who value affiliation and conformity (Oh & Firoito, 2002). Chang et al. (2004) states:

Problem recognition for Korean consumers is rarely internally generated. In most cases, an individual identifies a need and a want not through internal drive or self-reflection, but through external inducement generated by reference groups or opinion leaders (p. 188). Therefore, Korean consumers may use a brand name as a symbol to demonstrate solidarity and relative status with one another.

Several studies have focused on the cultural differences between Western countries such as the U.S. and Korea (Jung & Lee, 2009; Kim & Farrell-Beck, 2005; DeLong et al. 1998) Goldsmith et al. (2005) conducted a cross-cultural study to determine just how Korean consumers react to price range. DeLong et al. (1998) studied cross-cultural factors present in comparison of products (blue jeans) within different cultures. The researchers concluded that United States consumers tend to portray denim as a cultural symbol reflecting personal values, versatility, comfort, and social acceptance of casual clothing as fashion. On the other hand, among Korean consumers denim represents the youth culture. Korean respondents showed strong brand loyalty and orientation, and Koreans viewed brand name as the most important factor when it comes to purchasing clothes (Lee & Burns, 1993).

The Korean luxury market has expanded rapidly because of the distinct consumption habits of Koreans. Korea has become one of the most important markets for luxury fashion
brands in industrialized countries. In recent years, many Korean consumers have travelled overseas to shop for luxury fashion goods. According to The Ministry of Knowledge Economy, more than 100,000 South Koreans visited France for luxury good shopping in the first week of February 2008. While in the recent past, the majority of Korean consumers purchasing luxury brands have been wealthy individuals in the age range 40 to 50, such purchase have created a tripling effect among the middle class and younger consumers in the age range 20 to 30. An economic crisis has not seemed to be a barrier with respect to purchasing luxury items. Sales of luxury fashion brands in Korea are still increasing, at 11.9 percent in 2013 (Ministry of Trade, Industry, & Energy, 2013). One of the reasons why consumers are willing to buy luxury brands is that such brands are regarded as assets, and consumers want to be different and draw the attention of others (Suh, Oh, & Jeon, 2011). Koreans tend to think that luxury fashion goods are intended for fulfilling consumers’ yearnings for uniqueness and differentiating themselves from others through perceived prestige values (Park et al., 2008). According to Park et al. (2008), “Despite the recent influx of global luxury brands in the Korean market, Korean consumers still generally regard luxury brands as something hard to posses [SIC] because of their scarcity value” (p. 249).

Park et al. (2008) contended that young Korean consumers believe that luxury fashion goods represent their social status; they concluded that young consumers in South Korea express their fashion uniqueness and scarcity value through expensive luxury goods (Park et al., 2008). Suh, Oh, & Joen (2011) studied how social face (chemyon) influences Korean consumption habits regarding luxury brands. Consumers who purchased luxury brands were more concerned about others’ perspectives, enhancing their own first impression and ability to get recognition from others.
According to Wong & Ahuvia (1998), consumers in Confucian cultures, unlike average consumers in Western cultures, are willing to spend more money on luxury goods. Koreans are under the stress of needing to improve their public reputations to prove themselves as to be better than their fellow group members. Social face (chemyon) pressure is especially important with respect to purchasing tangible products like clothing (Chang, Burns, & Francis, 2004; Suh, Oh, & Jeon, 2011). Several studies indicate that consumers who enjoy “comfortable culture” are likely to spend more money on luxury fashion goods representing wealth (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998; Park et al., 2007). In Korean culture, social face symbolizes who you are; it helps to distinguish the proper way to act, reputation, honor, competence, and social status (Suh et al., 2011).

Social face has long been considered to be one of the most important factors in Korean society, because it determines how to act both in public and in association with other members of the group. Many scholars have studied the relationship between social face and the purchasing behavior of Koreans (Yoo, 2007; Sung; 1994; Kim et al., 2008, Choi, 1993; Kim, 2005, Suh et al., 2011). Yoo (2007) found that among many other psychological characteristics of Koreans, social face is especially highly correlated with consumption habits. Sung (1994) illustrated the impact of consequences of social face with regard to unplanned consumption practices in different situations. People who have a strong desire for maintaining social face tend to focus on social status; they also feel “social pressure” to meet the social expectations of others (Choi, 1993). One study illustrated that a group with high social face sensitivity may be highly influenced by their peer group with respect to purchasing fashion goods, in contrast to a group with low social face sensitivity (Kim, 2005). In summary, it is clear that social face has a great impact on the consumption of luxury fashion goods among South Koreans.
**Nature of Design Activity**

While designers share many of the characteristics of scientists and artists, they tend to be clearly distinct from people in those two occupations (Owen, 1998). Some believe that designers tend to achieve design skills through practice rather than via theoretical discourse (Yee, 2007). Some designers may tend to view their practice as creatively constraining and often see no value in theoretical models in their daily design activity (Yee, 2007). While a designer may seek new knowledge in order to innovate, the process of asking questions is often hidden, and the result may be evident only in the solution produced. In design research the creative process must be evident and clear so that anyone can regenerate the processes that in design practice may remain concealed (Yee, 2007). According to Owen (1998), theory, methods, and process can enhance design quality.

Although fashion designers may seem more “imaginative, unpredictable, and spontaneous” (Lawson, 1997, p. 109) compared to architects, who may work in close collaboration with clients, fashion designers must also meet the needs of customers, and design problems and solutions are interrelated based on such needs (Sinha, 2002). Fashion design depends on the both designers’ personal experiences and requirements of their employers, as well as on the garments that they produce (Stecker, 1996). To create a successful design, a fashion designer should understand social, cultural, economic and political elements as well. Although different fashion houses in each new season may separately and privately propose their designs, it is clear that they often produce collections that share a common trend theme with collections developed by other designers working for other companies (Sinha, 2002). The overlap and syncing of fashion designer outputs occur because designers need to absorb and reflect changes in society and trends in popular culture in their work. They observe many of the
same movies and TV shows, keep apprised of street and art trends as well as work of couture and cutting edge designers, watch the political and economic scene, peruse information from trend watchers and forecasters, and visit many of the same trade shows. Designers also copy one another through the process of design piracy. Designers need to be systematic and astute “readers” of societal trends; therefore, fashion designers need to know how to analyze and gather information related to design problems (Potter, 1998), as well as how to interpret the market and appropriately embed meanings into the decision-making process. Fashion designers usually use a catwalk, fashion stage, or the media to tell their stories and display imagination through presentation of a collection.

Increasingly, fashion designers around the world have been adopting a more conceptual approach to sharing their creative concepts (Bugg, 2009). More influential designers are stepping out of the commercial side of fashion and embracing a more progressive approach to fashion, expressing and embedding their personal philosophies and approaches (Bugg, 2009). For example, Bugg (2009) designed and researched her collection of “concept-based-work, which is driven by concepts and processes. It was tested and analyzed in a variety of contexts and written up as three major case studies” focusing on the relationship of the body, movement and its behavior. From her research, Bugg (2009) tried to search and identify new and alternative ways to deliver fashion design and communication through concept and context, rather than commerce, market and trend.

**Design Process**

Designing is a creative process. Design can be seen to be “a creative, magical, intuitive, and elusive process” (Regan, Kincade, & Sheldon, 1997, p. 37). It is a process for creating solutions with respect to a given problem. In fact, design is form of problem-solving, or a way of
looking at a problem whose primary goal is to solve a complicated problem and to create or explore innovative options. The design process transforms ideas into reality, based on designers’ conceptual ideas with respect to practical solutions. Design solutions can be developed based on designers’ skills, pre-existing knowledge, imaginations, experiences, inspirations, and problem-solving abilities. Ultimately, design successes can be characterized as designers’ abilities to identify a proper solution to a particular design problem (Regan, Kincade, & Sheldon, 1997).

Designers come up with answers based on their previous knowledge, experience, inspiration, skill, and problem-solving techniques in regards to the parameters of the problem. Jones (1992) states that designers go through three fundamental stages of process -- analysis, synthesis, and evaluation -- to reach an applicable conclusion in respect to the design problem (Jones, 1992; Yee, 2007). Some designers, rather than learning from theoretical discourse, learn design through project-based practice, “learning by doing” (Yee, 2007). Fiore, Kimle, & Moreno (1996) stated: “Creative individuals seem to have a similar cognitive style, exhibiting recurrent patterns in the way they approach problems and process information” (p. 33). The design process is a spiral structure-involving image, presentation, testing, and re-imaging (Gray & Malines, 2000, p. 76; Zeisel, 1984, p. 10, 14). Press and Cooper (2003) view the design process as embodying four processes: formulation, evaluation, transfer, and reaction.

Various fashion designers and patternmakers have used slightly different approaches in achieving the final design of a sample garment (Rissanen, 2007), and apparel and fashion designers tend to use a range of mental processes when dealing with designing and creating innovative works (p. 37). To a greater extent, numerous fashion designers around the world have adopted a conceptual approach in sharing their story around the world (Bugg, 2009). Hussien Chalayan is an example of fashion designer who creates a garment as an expression of his
concepts, method, and its performance rather than garments with functional and aesthetic qualities (Bugg, 2009). Another example of a designer who embeds his/her concept into design is Yohji Yamamoto, who feels “the passage of time” makes clothes perfect to him. He thinks perfection is ugly, so incorporates “the traces of wear and tear on something worn over and over again, the way creases are embedded in a garment from its owner’s posture and shape,” and “the changes in a textile’s character over time all embody what Yamamoto tries to achieve in his creation: the perfect imperfection, or in other words, the individuality of a garment” (Salazar, 2011, p. 23).

A few design research practitioners have developed a framework for the fashion design process stages. Lamb & Kallal (1991) created a conceptual framework for apparel design that divides the functional design process into six steps: problem identification, preliminary ideas, design refinement, prototype development, evaluation, and implementation. Parsons and Campbell (2004) describe the creative design process as consisting of four main design phases: problem identification, conceptual design, prototype, and solution. In summary, the design process begins with problem definition, followed by gathering information and analyzing the problem to be solved. The next step is to synthesize gathered information and generate ideas and concepts. Finally, formulation and evaluation of the output is performed. The most important observation is that the design process is not linear, but rather one requiring several iterative stages (Parsons & Campbell, 2004). The impact of culture has not been largely factored into studying the design process and the outputs of fashion designers.

Creativity in the Fashion Design Process

It can be stated that creativity remains one of the most unsolved concepts with respect to human thinking behavior (Liu, 2000). Researchers from various academic fields, including
psychology, social-cultural studies, philosophy, biology, education, and cognitive science, have performed numerous studies related to creativity, including investigation of cognitive, emotional, social-personality, and cultural perspectives of creativity in human beings. Creative thinkers use previous knowledge to solve problems, draw conclusions and make decisions.

The debates with regard to the definition of creativity still continue (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 7). Definitions of creativity are formulated in four terms -- product, process, kind of a person, and set of conditions (Torrance, 1965). Creativity within fashion design is considered to be a type of problem-solving technique which involves a spiral process; including identifying problems, finding preliminary ideas, designing, creating prototypes, evaluation, and implementation (Lamb & Kallal, 1992). Creativity is the ability to produce original and useful work (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 3, 5). It is a fully-developed skill, engaging fundamentally common cognitive processes to produce new and valuable factors (Fiore, Kimle & Moreno, 1996). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) articulated qualities of creative individuals: (a) “people who appear to be unusually bright,” (p. 25) (b) “people who experience the world in novel and original ways,” (p. 25) and (c) “individuals who, like Leonardo, Edison, Picasso, or Einstein, have changed our culture in some important respect” (p. 26). Sternberg and Lubart (1999) depicted a creative individual as “an empty vessel that a divine being would fill with inspiration” (p. 5).

A creative person has a high degree of vividness of imagination, which may be witnessed in the design of objects such as clothing (Kidd & Workman, 1999). Creative people usually favor complex figures and asymmetrical forms (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999), but these characteristics do not necessarily appear in all creative design solutions. Sternberg & Lubart (1999) stated Amabile’s (1983) definition of creativity as “the confluence of intrinsic motivation, domain-
relevant knowledge and abilities, and creativity-relevant skills” (p. 10). The latter skills include “a cognitive style that involves coping with complexities and breaking one’s mental set during problem solving” (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 10).

Creative people tend to have similar cognitive styles. For example, they have the ability to see recurring patterns, they approach problems in similar ways, and they think metaphorically and with flexibility (Fiore, Kimle, & Moreno, 1996; Lewis, 2005). Experiences in solving problems are based on individuals’ cognitive styles (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999). Psychologists have studied cognitive approaches to creativity to understand the mental representation and processes underlying creative thoughts. A generative phase and an exploratory phase are the two main processes used in creative cognitive thinking (Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992). The generative phase has properties of promoting creative discoveries (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). A subsequent exploratory phase usually helps to outline creative ideas (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 3). Lewis (2005) specified the means of generative formation of cognitive thinking as analogical and metaphorical thinking conceptual combination, productive thinking, and divergent thinking.

Divergent thinking has played a significant role among various approaches used in the study of creativity (Sinha, 2002). Divergent thinking is a thought process used to generate creative ideas by searching multiple solutions to a set of problems, which is applicable to the fashion design process. Divergent thinking has been the main instrument for measuring creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999) and is deemed to be one of the characteristics of creative minds (Lewis, 2005). Torrance (1965) created the Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), built on J.P. Guilford’s work. Torrance’s definition of creativity involves:

The process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty; searching for solutions,
making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies; testing and retesting these hypotheses and possibly modifying and retesting them; and finally communicating the results. (1965, pp. 663-664)

Torrance’s (1965) Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) is scored based on four scales of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration to test divergent thinking and problem solving skills, especially emphasis on creative thinking abilities (Torrance, 1965). Only a minimum of intelligence is required for an individual to exhibit divergent thinking (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999). Divergent thinking is composed of four factors: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Divergent thinking primarily relates to fluency.

There are several other attributes of creative individuals and components that contribute to creativity. First, “independence of judgment, self-confidence, and attraction to complexity, aesthetic orientation, and risk-taking” are the personality personas that often characterize creative people (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 8). Individuals’ personality and motivation including “courage, freedom, spontaneity, and self-acceptance” can lead a person to realize his or her full potential (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 8). Tolerance for ambiguity during the creative process is often marked as one of the personal characteristics of creative people (Plucker & Renzulli, 1999), such as fashion designers. Knowledge is also highly related to creativity and is distinguished by the potential ability to produce significant work depending on deep knowledge of an individual’s field (Weisberg, 1999). It is possible that these aspects of creative individuals are also essential traits of being a creative fashion designer.

It takes the essential elements of great effort and plentiful experience to become expert in a field; thousands of hours of deliberate practices may be required to create a first significant work (Feldman, 1999; Weisberg, 1999). Theoretically, it takes an average time of a decade for a
novice to master the abundant skills and levels of technical expertise required to become a professional capable of producing extraordinary products (Feldman, 1999; Policastro & Gardner, 1999), although this time may vary. For example, 10 years of practice and experiences may be required to become a creative musical composer; six years of preparation and practice might be typical for a painter, and five years might be typical for a poet (Weisberg, 1999). There is limited research regarding the average years of experience to become an expert fashion designer. Considering the nature of fashion design and skills, a potential fashion designer should be good at both technical and creative skill such as sewing, draping, tailoring, patternmaking, construction techniques, and illustration skills. In order to adapt such skills, it takes at least four to five years of industry experience and continued practice to gain professional stature in the fashion industry. Claims about the time it takes to gain professional stature have been heard anecdotally by the researcher from fashion designers and company executives in Korea.

Creativity is determined by cultural factors that nurture and contribute to progress (Feldman, 1999), and experts agree that cultural, social and environmental factors may contribute to creativity (Lewis, 2005). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) argues that creativity is never brought forth by individuals alone, but rather is the result of a system of cultural rules. He suggests focusing on community and social systems because they may strongly affect an individual’s creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). Cultural factors may either increase or decrease the probability of developing creativity in design (Feldman, 1999). Italy is an example of a culture in which people have invested in culture for the purpose of developing creative works of high quality (Feldman, 1999). Italy, particularly Milan and Florence, is internationally well-known as one of the world’s fashion capitals. Beginning in the 19th century, Italy was famous for its quality of fabric as well as for its collective artisan skills inspired by Parisian couture designs.
Famous design houses, such as Valentino, Versace, and Giorgio Armani, have contributed to Italy’s becoming one of the fashion capitals of the world.

**Impact of Eastern Cultures on Fashion Design and Creativity**

Eastern cultures have been a source of creativity and inspiration for many Western designers. Asian influences introduced into Western fashion have also gained popularity, dating back to the 18th century. Chinoiserie and Japonism have affected various aspects of Western culture, including art, architecture and fashion. Designers inspired by East Asian culture include Yves Saint Laurent and Carolina Herrera. Yves Saint Laurent’s 1977 F/W collection was inspired by Chinoiserie, as was Tom Ford’s 2004 collection. Carolina Herrera in 2011 was inspired by Korean ethnic dress. Leading designers have been successful in capturing the exotic and splendid components of Asian culture and have created markets for products such as oriental robes, dressing gowns, and silken slippers (Narumi, 2000) as well as incorporation of Asian-inspired design into everyday/sportswear and evening dress.

A French fashion designer, Madeleine Vionnet, developed construction methodology and design philosophy built on Japanese culture (Mears, 2008). Her interest in Japanese design is seen, for example, in the wavy parallel folds of a pin-tucked crepe dress which evoked the abstract image of a raked Zen rock garden, itself a Japanese metaphor for sea waves (Mears, 2008). Moreover, as Martin and Koda (1994) have pointed out, there may also have been Japanese influences with respect to the fashion of bias-cutting. The co-existence of the kimono and bias-cutting in 1920s and 1930s fashion was not entirely a historical accident. The principle of bias-cutting, a technique that wraps the body in a cylinder of cloth, seems an obvious result of the influence of the Japanese kimono (Martin & Koda, 1994). This could mean that Vionnet’s
design, which shows the natural shape of the body instead of putting the woman into the form, could be the result of an encounter with Asian philosophy, and especially, Japanese culture.

Although fashion designers often assume that they have good understanding and experience in matters of creativity, a few researchers have investigated the relationship between creativity and source of inspirations related to individual fashion designers. Previous literature searches have been conducted in the areas of enhancement of creativity for fashion design students in educational settings and creativity as part of a strategic response by industry (see Karpova, Marketti, & Barker, 2011; Kidd & Workman, 1999; Sinha, 2009). Additionally, the majority of researchers’ approaches to the fashion design process are mainly focused on a production-oriented approach to the design process (see Fiore, Kimle, & Kimle, 1996; Wickett, Gaskill, & Damhorst, 1999; LeBat & Sokolowski, 1999; Regan, Kincade, & Sheldon, 1997). Eckert (1997) studied the relationships between design inspiration and design performance in the garment industry. She emphasized the value of inspirational sources for knit designers and predicted that would lead to potential profit for design companies. One of the designers participating in her research felt that market-oriented design limited one’s ability to express an artistic sense. In a recent study, Karpova, Marketti and Barker (2011), interviewed a total of 28 apparel professionals and examined their perspectives on creative thinking to understand the role of creativity within the apparel industry. Apparel professionals in this study perceived creativity as “small creative improvement to everyday processes or development of products” (Karpova, Marketti, & Barker, 2011, p. 111). Moreover, artistic creativity was less emphasized because the fashion designer is not strictly involved in the form of “pure artistic” creation (Karpova, Marketti, & Barker, 2011, p. 111). This may be due to the nature of the fashion industry in the United States, which is focused on producing saleable ready to wear products for pragmatic consumer
use. In addition, copying or adaptation of other designers’ ideas is frequently encouraged to speed the design process and echo current global trends.

**Theory of Optimal Experience**

The theory of optimal experience or flow, outlined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2008), will provide a framework to help understand the creative process and personal experiences of Korean fashion designers. Additionally, the theory of flow establishes a basis for understanding the relationship between an inquiry of creativity and the creative process of designers.

The theory was based on the concept of flow, i.e., a condition of mind or psychological experience of a person when fully engaged in something they enjoy and in which they are interested. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) defined flow as “the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (p. 6). The theory of flow describes an optimal experience that leads a creative person to an invention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). If, due to limited skills, challenges are beyond one’s competence, a person may experience anxiety. On the other hand, if a problem poses no difficulty, the person may experience boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Thus, the level of challenge must balance the skill level.

Csikszentmihalyi (2008) described experiences with the condition of flow by examining experts, including artists, athletes, musicians, chess masters, and surgeons, who were individuals preferring to spend their time on what they enjoy. Based on many years of research, he proposed a system of explanation as to how creative flow involves a person’s enjoyment and happiness when engaging in a creative process. Gender, age, ethnic background, and cultural differences were considered to be immaterial with respect to experiencing the condition of flow.
The experience of flow can be described through nine main elements: 1) “Clear goals every step of the way;” 2) “Immediate feedback to one’s action;” 3) “Balance between challenges and skills;” 4) “Action and awareness are merged” (p.111); 5) “Distractions are excluded from consciousness;” 6) “No worry about failure;” 7) “Self-consciousness disappears”(p. 112); 8) “Sense of time may become distorted;” and, 9) “Activity becomes autotelic” (p. 113). During flow, people know what needs to be done without consciously thinking about the next step; action and awareness merge during the experience. Creative people often lose track of aspects like time and the surrounding environment during engagement in a creative process. There are pre-conditions necessary in order to be considered as in the flowing phase. A person must balance challenges and skills of their field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

The basic conception of flow lies in the creative process that yields a creative end. Creativity includes the production of innovation. Csikszentmihalyi (2008) explains that “the creative process begins with the goal of solving problems that are given to the person by someone else or suggested by the state of the art in the domain” (p. 112). For example, Csikszentmihalyi’s research showed that for artists, the more creative the artwork, the less likely is discovery of the goal of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 112). Independent designers also described themselves as artists, with clothing design a process of creating art pieces (Engel-Enright, 2007).

It is possible to say that one of the reasons why clothing designers choose their particular field is because they enjoy creating garments. While achieving fame or financial success may be the final goal of their practice, they also value their roles as designers and designing as an opportunity to do work that they adore. Yohji Yamamoto, an iconic Japanese fashion designer whose work has often been described as “Japanese” describes his motivation as follows:
“Each time I work on the next collection -- during fitting, during cutting -- each time I find some invention. That is the moment when I feel happy, it is the only moment I feel happy.” In this light, the joy he describes when finding something new, such as a different way of draping, folding or cutting, not only indicates a passion for his profession but also a desire to refresh, renew and possibly redraw the boundaries step by step. (Salazar, 2011, p. 51)

The concept of flow has been used by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists in many research studies addressing, for example, the study of happiness, life satisfaction, and motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). However, very little research has been conducted related to designers, especially fashion designers from varied cultural backgrounds. Because fashion design encompasses cognitive abilities that include creativity, critical thinking, and combining creative ideas from multiple sources, the theory of flow may be applied to the design process and the creative process in general.

A master’s thesis study by Engel-Enright (2007) of United States apparel designers in Colorado employed the theory of optimal experience. This study reviewed the needs, desires, activities, and skills of independent clothing designers. She tested the theory of optimal experience on a group of independent female clothing designers, each of whom owned a small business. She examined how independent designers’ experiences “flow” during the custom design process. The responses of designers’ experience of “flow” involved their design processes. Since the characteristics of design requires uniqueness, innovation, and variation, designers experience “flow” processes during their design activity. The findings from the study indicated that, if there was balance between challenge and technical and aesthetic skills, the designer experienced “flow.” This “flow” was manifested through the inner retribution of creating and
designing the garment. Achieving fame or financial reward was not the primary intention for independent clothing designers (Engel-Enright, 2007).

**Conclusions**

Only a few studies have been conducted relating fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences to their creative design processes. Many of these studies have been focused on market or consumers’ points of view. Additionally, there is only limited literature related to how a designer’s own cultural values and personal experiences influence the creative design process, particularly as a form of the creative process called “flow.”

The literature reviewed in this paper has suggested an evolving interest both among scholars and industry workers in seeking to understand the origin of creative work in relation to creativity and how it affects design output. Previously, it has been difficult to find the relationship between individual cultural values, personal experiences, and the creative process. This literature summarizes and suggests directions for future work in this area. The purpose of this research is therefore to explore the relationship between South Korean fashion designers’ cultural values, personal experiences and their creative processes. The findings from this study will potentially enrich knowledge in the field of design theory, in the apparel industry, and in education of students of design. Moreover, the finding from this research will provide valuable insights and preliminary work as a foundation for others who are interested in studying South Korean fashion designers.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD

Research Approach

In this exploratory research, a qualitative approach with semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one, long interviews is used as the main research method that can provide insight and in-depth understanding of how cultural values influence the creative design process. This qualitative research is based on the constructivist point of view that undertakes “understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 30). Qualitative research is used to gain a deeper understanding of a social setting and behavior from the viewpoint of the participants (Blomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 8). An in-depth and extended interview method enables access to a “mental world of an individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world; it also takes us into the life world of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). Based on this framework, I proposed a series of questions related to six categories: inspirations, cultural value influences, the creative design process, personal experiences related to flow, professional development experiences, and work patterns. Furthermore, along with the interviews and to further deepen understanding, each interviewee will be asked to fill out a personal data sheet that included demographic and background information.

Sampling Method

In choosing the setting, time, and population, a researcher must select an appropriate sampling method, as most research situations are limited; it is usually impossible to interview everyone or observe everything (Glesne, 2005, p. 34). A researcher rarely has the opportunity to
observe and study an entire population. Therefore, researchers select samples of populations that they hope will provide data quality while still minimizing the number of participants to reduce time and cost (Adler & Clark, 2008, p. 100).

Qualitative researchers seldom work with a large enough number of participants to allow generalizations based on results. The purpose of qualitative research is different from that of quantitative research, which may allow precise testing of individual theories and measurement of incidence of behaviors and attitudes. Qualitative research can facilitate greater understanding of complex meanings held by participants within specific social situations and settings. The interpretive approach of “less is more” suggests that it may be advantageous “to work longer, with a few people than more superficially with many of them” (McCracken, 1998, p. 17). The purpose of qualitative research is not generalizability. The selected sample group may not even be chosen to represent the entire population. Rather, qualitative research gives us “an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organization, and logic of culture” (McCracken, 1988, p. 17).

The sample of 12 designers was recruited using purposive and chain-referring sampling, sometimes called snowball sampling (Blomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). Purposive sampling is a “nonprobability-based sampling procedure that involves selecting elements based on the researcher’s judgment about which elements will facilitate his or her investigation” (Adler & Clark, 2008, p. 121). The important question in selecting the sampling method for qualitative research depends on what information is wanted from the study. The target population refers to a sample population sharing common characteristics related to the objectives of the research study. Designers in this study were identified through the researcher’s alumni directory at Kookmin University in Seoul, South Korea. Criteria for inclusion in the sample were fashion designers
with at least three years of experience working as professionals in clothing companies or, alternatively, who own their own businesses. A delimiting time frame of at least three years work experience as a designer was chosen to ensure sufficient experience in design; it typically takes a number of years to become a professional and become capable of producing an extraordinary product (Feldman, 1999).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Information obtained through interviews and observations were collected over a 12-week interval. Interviews have both strengths and weaknesses as a research method (Blomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 77). Therefore, to overcome to some extent the limitations of long interviews, observations, and information gathered from the designers’ runway collections or brochures, magazines, videos, and reviews of interviews published in Korean newspapers or magazines within the past 10 years were examined to give perspective on the designers’ work and accomplishments.

In-depth, long interviews provided insights with respect to designers’ thoughts and feelings as well as reports of their experiences and work patterns. The long interview method also helped to understand the “fuller social and cultural context” (McCracken, 1988, p. 9) of professional apparel designers and to understand how culture mediates designers’ actions and their creative design processes.

In the early stages of research design, preparations included the selection of a potential sample population of designers identified through alumni lists. The researcher made an initial phone call to each possible designer to verify their interest in the research and their willingness to participate and work with the researcher to set up a time for an interview.
Data Collection

The researcher sent out a list of semi-structured interview questions before the meeting, so that the designer could think about answers beforehand. The researcher met with a designer at his or her studio and workplace when he or she showed willingness to share information at the workstation. Seven designers were interviewed at their design studios or showrooms. The other five participating designers were interviewed in quiet areas such as a library or café. The interviews took approximately one to two hours, depending on a respondent’s speaking rate. Each interview was digitally recorded using a voice recorder with an iPad and iPhone.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent form and were asked to fill out a personal data sheet that included a demographic and background information questionnaire. The researcher asked the designers questions about their background, such as education and significant life experiences that led them into the fashion industry. One underlying reason behind beginning with background questions is to build rapport between the researcher and each participant. Participants may be more willing to talk about personal or sensitive information once a measure of trust has been established (Glesne, 2005, p. 113).

During the interview, the researcher inquired questions about participants’ design processes, creative processes, inspirations, and personal optimal experiences of flow. The researcher asked each participant to share journals or analyses of creative products including sketchbooks, fashion illustrations, designs in progress, and their most successful designs. It is important to take a thorough look at sketches or photographs of designers’ work because “creativity comes from mentally transforming their presentation by combining it and synthesizing it into a new design” (Khoza & Workman, 2009, p. 65).
Data Analysis

The initial survey questions were developed for English-speaking people by the researcher. All questions were translated from English into Korean by three translators: (a) a researcher; (b) professional translator; and, (c) an emeritus professor from a Korean university. Given that perfect translation is not guaranteed, translations could be varied by each translator. Checking across the three different translations helped to reducing translation errors. All interviews were completed in South Korea, in the Korean language. The transcripts were translated into English by a native Korean speaker, and then modified by a native English speaker to ensure readability.

Taking a grounded-theory approach, data was analyzed using the constant comparison method of qualitative analysis introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1965). Grounded theory functions as “a way to learn about the world we study and a method for developing theory to understand [the world]” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). The purpose of constant comparison is focused on “joint coding and analysis,” and “to generate the theory more systematically” (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 102). A constant-comparison method is an inductive approach, in which the intention is not testing or discovery of theory; it allows flexibility when generating theory that emerges from content of the data collected rather than narrowed by pre-existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

To analyze the data, all of the recorded interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. The next step was to translate the interviews in Korean into English by the aforementioned individuals into a Microsoft Word document in English. The researcher identified concepts and categories within the data, followed by comparison of items in each category. The next stage of analysis was to condense and divide initial categories into themes for
coding. The researcher wrote detailed notes or memos in relation to ideas and concepts in a separate document in order to help translators capture the “initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and to relive the conflict in his [her] thoughts” (Glaser & Strauss, 2009, p. 107). As coding continued, different concepts were constantly compared to one another, and built into emergent themes. Themes or categories were developed into a coding guide to use for open coding of the entire data set.

During the axial coding process, the researcher identified the patterns and relationships across the themes of interview data. The analyzed categories and themes were constantly compared to existing literature to perform “dialectical tacking” (Geertz, 1983), which provided researcher’s insights, interpretation, linkage, and patterns of themes to prior work and literature. Through this constant comparative approach, the researcher tacked back and forth between the multiple transcripts, existing theory, and previous research to find patterns of meanings in the data and interpretations of those patterns. The researcher’s own stock of knowledge of Korean culture also facilitated interpretation of meanings.

**Trustworthiness (Reliability and Validity Checks)**

In order to increase the trustworthiness and dependability of the data, multiple measures were considered to achieve confidence that what the interviewees stated was consistent with the work products observed. Then, the researcher and major professors discussed and edited the coding guide to deepen the relationships and meanings of thematic categories. Second, an additional coder (a fellow graduate student) was involved with the coding process; he implemented the coding guide and audited 25 percent of the data. The inter-coder reliability achieved was 93.94 percent -- calculated by the total number of agreements, divided by the number of agreements plus the number of disagreements. The researcher and additional coder
discussed, negotiated, and finalized all of the disagreements in coding throughout the process.

Finally, the researcher and advisors carefully checked to see that examples from the data clearly illustrated and demonstrated themes and theoretical findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is comprised of two parts. The first part discusses background demographic information about the fashion designers who participated as interviewees. The second part describes 11 emergent themes from in-depth interviews describing the fashion designer’s creative design process. The emergent themes include: (a) the uncertainty encountered by apparel designers vs. fashion designers; (b) the creative fashion design process; (c) the designer’s role in the system; (d) the designer’s skills; (e) fashion as communication; (f) the creative role as a source of inspiration; (g) fashion system’s role; (h) merchandising as a vital entity; (i) role of cultural value; (j) fashion as a global phenomenon; and (k) individual designer vs. in-house designer differences.

Demographic Background Information

Twelve South Korean fashion designers participated in this study, but one of them declined to fill out the survey of demographic background information; therefore, the results are based on only 11 participants. Of these 11 participants, four were male designers and seven were female designers, representing percentages of 36.4 percent and 63.6 percent respectively. The age of participants ranged from 25 to 51 years. The detailed age breakdown of the 11 participants is given in Table 1.

Out of 11 designers, eight designers (72.7 percent) had bachelor’s degrees, two had master’s degrees, and one dropped out of college (Table 2). The country where each obtained their degrees varied. Eight designers (72.7 percent) earned their degrees in South Korea, one (9.1 percent) in England, one in Italy (9.1 percent), and one in France (9.1 percent). One designer studied in France, but did not complete a degree (Table 3).
Table 1. Age of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-30 years old</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-34 years</td>
<td>54.5% (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-40 years</td>
<td>27.3% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ years</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participant’s education background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final degree</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>72.7% (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete four year college</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master degree</td>
<td>18.2% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Countries where final degrees were obtained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>72.7% (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France * (Degree incomplete)</td>
<td>9.1% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 11 designers had an average of 9.6 years of experience working as designers. By analyzing the relationship between age and years of experience, it can be seen that the age and the years of design experience show a linear relationship. (Table 4)

Table 4. Average years of experiences by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-30 years old</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-34 years old</td>
<td>6.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-40 years old</td>
<td>10.7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+ years old</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of five designers (45.5 percent) worked in large clothing companies, and six (54.5 percent) had their own individual labels. The average work experience for designers working in large companies is 12.2 years and for independent designers 7.3 years. Three designers launched their individual brands after they had worked in large clothing companies for several years, so the average work experience of three designers is approximately 4.3 years, compared to that of designers who launched their own brands.

Table 5. The analysis of current work status and their work experience as a designer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Company</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>n=5 (45.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dependent</td>
<td>n=6 (54.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average of work experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Company</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>12.2 years (n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>7.3 years (n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the average design work experience for eight designers was 11.5 years combining the total experience of working in a large clothing company and in their own business. Based on this result, it is possible to conclude that the average work experience of designers working with an individual designer brands is shorter than that of designers working in a fashion company.

The analysis on average design work hours can be divided into three categories: gender, age, and work field. Average design work hours for a week are shown below:
The average work hours of 11 designers were approximately 35.9 to 36 hours, and assuming that designers work five days a week, they spend their time on designing approximately 7 hours and 12 minutes a day. With respect to gender differences, four male and seven female participants reported 35 hours and 36.2 hours respectively; so there is virtually no difference in working hours by gender. With respect to age, the average work hours for ages 25 to 30 was approximately 55 hours, for ages 31 to 34 it was 35 hours, for ages 35 to 40 it was 32 hours, and for age 51 it was 35 hours. This result shows that the young designers on average tend to work more hours than mid-aged designers.

Moreover, the average work hours for designers with fewer than 10 years of design experience was 39 hours per week, and designers with more than 10 years of experience was an average of 33 hours per week. Designers with more than 10 years of design experience tend to spend less time on designing compared to that of other designers. This tends to occur because, after several years of working as a designer, a worker achieves greater know-how in managing time and design work. The older designers perhaps work smarter based on experience and pulls on their time. Also, in time, designers are promoted to higher positions and therefore spend more time on managing and organizing the brand.

The average work hours for five designers working in the fashion industry were approximately 41 hours per week, whereas the average work hours for six designers working for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-20 hrs</td>
<td>n=3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30 hrs</td>
<td>n=0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40 hrs</td>
<td>n=4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-50 hrs</td>
<td>n=1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>n=3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
an individual brand was 31 hours. In-house designers for a fashion company tend to work more hours than do designers working in individual brands. In-house designers usually work under pressure to launch their own brand within a fixed time period, despite their work flexibly without time constraints imposed by a company.

Nine (69.2 percent) participating designers worked in women’s daywear, and the others worked in men’s daywear, men’s outerwear, and others (handbags and footwear), respectively. When it came to this question participants could select all applicable answers, so the total answers to this question were 13. All of the designers working for individual brands worked in women’s daywear, while the designers working in men’s daywear, handbags, and footwear all worked for fashion industries.

In the short survey, the researcher asked designers to rank the skills that apply to clothing design in order of importance. The total of 17 skills were categorized as: fit of the garment, patternmaking, garment construction, creativity, inspiration, design concept, sketching process, aesthetics, materials (fabrics), market research, design research, design research, design details, time management, communication with team members, work environment, target market, and customer needs. The reported rank of important skills in clothing design are shown in Table 7. The design concept was named as the most important of the skills in clothing design. The second most listed was patternmaking, and the fit of the garment and material (fabric) ranked third and fourth, respectively; creativity and inspiration ranked fifth and sixth respectively; customer needs, aesthetics, and target market ranked seventh, eighth, and ninth, respectively; garment construction ranked 10th and, finally, market research and communication with team members ranked 11th and 12th with only a small difference. In addition, the sketching process and design research ranked 13th and 14th respectively; details and time management
ranked 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th}, and, finally, participants stated that the work environment ranked 17\textsuperscript{th} in terms of valuable factors for design. The ranking’s standard deviation is 3.16.

Table 7. Important skills in clothing design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Skill</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Design concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pattern-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fit of the garment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Material (Fabric)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Customer needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Target market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Garment construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Market research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Sketching process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Design research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Work environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1 = most important

All of the participating designers were of the opinion that the most crucial aspect of design is the design concept. Designers with fewer than 10 years of experience put emphasis on inspiration as well as the design concept, but designers with more than 10 years of design experience ranked inspiration as only the eighth important aspect. Moreover, designers with fewer than 10 years of design experience preferred “abstract” imaginary settings including design concept, inspiration, aesthetics, and garment construction, but designers with more than 10 years of design experience highlighted the importance of patternmaking, fabrics, and target market needs.

Such contrasts depend on whether a designer is an in-house designer or not. Designers with greater than 10 years of design experience were all in-house designers who set their targets
by considering aspects of sales profit and brand identity. The target market of designers working in fashion companies is relatively targeted to the broader target market, for example from 20 to 40 years old, compared to other independent young designers; in-house designers tend to concentrate more on garment patterns and fabrics and functional means that reflect a customer’s practical needs, while independent designers attract customers through a distinct taste of design; such designers think concepts, inspiration, aesthetics, and garment construction are important.

The data illustrate that designers, regardless of their particular working fields, shared a common response in terms of most critical design factors. Both types of designers think that design concept, patternmaking, fit of the garment, and garment construction are the most important factors. The most evident factor of design is creativity; in-house designers think creativity is the second most important factor for design while independent designers ranked creativity eighth because they must grasp their own concept before starting their careers. In-house designers should design garments that will differentiate their brand from garment designs offered by large fashion companies. Designers marketing their own brand did not emphasize communication between team members because they are understaffed, while in-house designers put an emphasis on such communication among team members because they have adequate numbers of employees working with designers.

**Personal History of the Fashion Designer**

Unexpected life experiences led the designers participating in this study into the fashion world. All of the male designers wanted to become designers in other fields such as visual communication, interiors, or industrial design. The nature of the Korean education system and low-test scores prevented them from getting into a program of study they wanted; fashion design was their second choice. However, the school accepting them was one of the most prestigious
design schools in South Korea, so they decided to try the program for a year. Transferring a major was easier than gaining acceptance into a different school. Interestingly, they fell in love with fashion and decided to pursue it as a career. One of the participants described his experience when committing to the fashion world:

Honesty, I was more interested in visual design than fashion design, but I applied to both industrial design and visual design programs. At that time, prospective students could apply to a given college only four times. I really wanted to go to the Department of Visual Design at Hongik University, but I was not accepted. However, I was accepted into the Department of Fashion Design at Kookmin University, but I had less interest in fashion design. So, at that time I considered changing my major from fashion design to visual design. But I decided to stay in the School of Fashion Design because the college system was better than I thought. After seeing a fashion show at school I fell in love with it and thought I would dedicate myself to the fashion design industry. (Participant 1, 30s)

The majority of participants reported that at first they were not sure they wanted to be fashion designers. For only a minority the decision came naturally. The following describes how a life event led a male participant to become a fashion designer unexpectedly:

It happened in a natural way; I had no intention of becoming a fashion designer. I always liked drawing pictures, but then I had an opportunity to work with fabrics and clothes, and I found I enjoyed working with fashion more than drawing. It’s not that I was inspired by Alexander McQueen from an early age; it was natural--just like that. I gave up other hobbies like drawing and music because I became obsessed with clothes. At first I did not know anything about Yves Saint Laurent, or anything related to fashion. I went to a boy’s high school. Initially, I wanted to attend a visual design department at another
college…. Honestly, I never thought I would really love fashion design. At one time I thought about becoming a fashion illustrator, but I love designing clothes more than drawing. It just happened naturally. (Participant 6, 30s)

Another participant shared how her childhood favorite activity, drawing, led her to become a fashion designer:

From a young age, I liked to draw pictures, so it was natural for me to become a fashion designer. This had been my dream since middle school. I think I have an aptitude for designing women’s wear. I like to wear them, so I have chosen this field. (Participant 7, 30s)

As seen above, childhood experiences and interest in art and fashion have led some of the participants to the fashion industry. One of the take-away points from these interviews was that even though a fashion designer could have become an artist or painter, they had a desire to express their creativity in a practical, concrete way. Participant 3 describes her passion for fashion as follows:

I think I like fashion design more and more as I study more and more, and fashion design is fascinating. I have no regrets whatsoever that I chose fashion design as a way of making a living, because humans must satisfy three things to live: clothing, shelter, and food. Fashion design that celebrates the arts satisfies a basic requirement of human existence. (Participant 3, 30s)

Another factor influencing the majority of female designers is their love of clothes—even as children.

From a young age I was good at drawing, and I became interested in design during middle school. I was in love with clothes so much that I vaguely longed to be a fashion
designer. As I grew older my motivation for studying was to become a fashion designer, even though I did not know what fashion designers did. (Participant 5, 30s)

**In-depth Interviews with Fashion designers**

**Uncertainty Encountered by Apparel Designer vs. Fashion Designers**

The first theme to emerge from interviews used in this study was uncertainty about the role of apparel designers vs. fashion designers. This theme category focused on describing the differences between apparel designers and fashion designers, including the designers’ own thoughts about the two. Designers’ responses can be divided into three categories: (1) synonyms, (2) apparel designer as a practitioner, and (3) fashion designer as a cultural producer.

The words *fashion* and *apparel* are commonly used in the fashion industry interchangeably. Previous research by Barnard (2002) suggested that fashion and apparel are words nearly synonymous in meaning, described the similarities and dissimilarities and why he believes they are synonyms.

When the researcher asked participants, “How do you define yourself: fashion or apparel designer?” The majority of designers answered, “What is the difference?” When the researcher asked them to give their own definitions of *fashion designer* and *apparel designer*, the majority of designers did not have a clear idea of the difference. The following section will note the differences of apparel designers and fashion designers, and compare the meaning of apparel designers and fashion designers more deeply. In the apparel industry, the words “apparel” and “fashion” is most often used interchangeably.

**Apparel Designer**

*A Practitioner.* Consistent with Kawamura (2004), it might be said that fashion designers design for a broader target market, while apparel designers produce material products,
specifically garments. Perhaps fashion designers attempt to incorporate meanings for consumers, while apparel designers let the wearers create meanings. Instead of creating leading trends or acting as frontiers in the fashion industry, apparel designers are more *conventionalized* to a general population, focusing more on management of product development than on creativity and innovation. An understanding of market research, including trends and past seasonal data, influences an apparel designer’s concepts that are important for success. A participant in the study explained the flow of fashion trends as follows:

If a trend emerges for the first time, the public will adapt to it. I found it takes three years to conventionalize a trend and make it appealing to the general public. I think fashion design can be anything that creates a luxurious or individual designer’s brand or trend for a company or the public, eventually creating conventionalized apparel brands or fads penetrating into the low-cost brand markets. So all this helps distinguish between fashion and apparel design, or helps to differentiate a fashion company from an apparel company. (Participant 1, 30s)

The following participant described the role of an apparel designer as creating material products such as clothes:

Aren’t they the same? They seem the same to me but I want to be a fashion designer. An apparel designer seems to be a person who just churns clothes out, but a fashion designer seems to be a person who takes care of general fashion design. (Participant 4, 30s)

**Synonyms**

**Same meaning.** The meaning of the words *fashion* and *apparel* were unclear to most participants. Twenty-five percent of participants answered that fashion and apparel are clearly different. Twenty-five percent answered they were not sure. Interestingly, even though they said
they did not know the difference between a fashion designer and an apparel designer, they preferred to be called *fashion designer* and attempted to explain their preference.

Fifty percent (n=6) of participants believed that two words mean the same. Four of these participants preferred to be called *fashion designer* and explained their preference. One participant could not decide which title was preferred, believing both have the same meaning. An interesting answer from one participant was, “I think it is just wordplay.” The 66.66 percent of designer participants wanted to be called fashion designer rather than apparel designer. The 83.33% of participants answered that fashion designers create more than just clothes in spite of the fact that they are “unsure” about the correct meaning.

This sense of synonymous meaning of terms is consistent with Barnard’s (2002) definition of the words *fashion* and *apparel*. According to Barnard (2002), “fashion, clothing, and dress are the artifacts, practices and insinuations which constitute a society’s beliefs, values, ideas and experiences. According to this view of fashion, dress and clothing are the means in which people communicate, not only for feelings and mood, but also the values, hopes and beliefs of the social groups of which they are members” (p. 39). One participant said that the distinctions between apparel and fashion designers are just “wordplay.” Another participant believed the words are used interchangeably, saying:

What is the difference? I don’t see *apparel designer* in job descriptions. Usually the word *fashion designer* is used, so I usually introduce myself as a fashion designer.

(Participant 7, 30s)

**Fashion Designer**

* A cultural producer. Participants who answered questions about the role of a fashion designer believed designers create clothing’s symbolic values, trends, images, styles, and in
broader terms, culture. Most of the participants thought of the fashion designer as a producer of culture. Previous literature by Kawamura (2004), also defines fashion designer as a cultural producer. She defines fashion as a separate system from clothing. Clothing is part of the basic requirement in life, to clothe oneself, which can be found in any culture and any society everywhere. On the other hand fashion is “institutionally constructed and cultural diffused” (p. 1). Moreover, fashion is intangible and requires creativity (Kawamura, 2004). Participant 11 also supports how fashion is more than just clothes, and is part of culture by explaining:

Well, I am not sure because I am not an expert in theory, but I think the word fashion broadly refers to the culture of a particular area, and to all items, from head to toe, whereas the word apparel means just clothes. Am I right? My feelings about apparel design during my college years and a few years after graduation were that it was concerned with the making of clothes only, through pattern drafting, fitting, etc. But my feeling towards fashion design is concerned with hairdo, decoration with accessories and makeup, in addition to clothing. (Participant 11, 40s)

As seen here, clothing comprises concrete objects that develop cultural meaning.

Most designers believe values are reflected in dress. Every garment is a fashion statement with styles going in and out of fashion. All fashion reflects style, but not all fashion is determined by clothing alone. Changes in fashion colors, trends, physical appearance expectations, consumption, design patterns, and even aesthetic points of view occur. Fashion determines what people wear, their patterns of behavior, and what people do. An interesting remark was made by a participant who defined herself as a fashion designer because her job focused on designing for an evolving Korean wedding culture:
In my opinion, fashion designers work in a broader area than apparel designers. The former designs not only for clothes but also for designer accessories and overall appearance, whereas the latter concerns only clothes. Thus, an apparel designer is more of a craftsman. I would like to do more than designing clothes, making and drafting.

However, at some point my job changed. Recently, I have spent more time on planning, focusing more on research and promoting the company and sales, so I feel like more of a fashion designer than a clothing designer. I am working differently than other designers…. I started with designing wedding dresses and gradually shifted to designing wedding culture. Now I am working on redesigning the Korean wedding culture.

(Participant 3, 30s)

Fashion designers realize their ideas, imagination, creativity, taste, sense and style through designing clothes. Kawamura (2004) reported, “Fashion is a symbol manifested through clothing” (p. 14). When designers believe their primary focus is on developing creative design, they prefer to be called a fashion designer, as described by one participant:

I think I am closer to a fashion designer. There are so many clothes in the world, and our job is to make better and different clothes using appropriate design. Design is very important to our company, so I prefer to be called a fashion designer. (Participant 2, 20s)

One of the participants believed the word *fashion* meant *trend* rather than *clothes*. For him, apparel was the way he displayed his fashion. Fashion is more about expressing a designer’s creativity, identity and design concept:

I am a fashion designer, of course, but I show fashion using apparel. The word *fashion* does not represent clothes. It means and can be analyzed as a trend. Fashion is a way to
show the trend and other aspects. So I do think that fashion and apparel designer are the same. (Participant 6, 30s)

Another participant expressed a similar view:

Aren’t they the same?…. I still don’t know the difference between those two words but I believe I am a fashion designer. If fashion can be defined as a style, I am a fashion designer because I create style. (Participant 10, 30s)

**Creative Fashion Design Process**

A second theme that emerged from the data is the *creative fashion design process*. The categories that emerged from interviews about the design process can be categorized as: (a) product develop process; (b) an iterative process; (c) an optimal experience of flow; (d) and a reflex in action. The *product development process* involves creating an artifact, such as a dress. An *iterative process* and *reflected in action* demonstrates the psychological aspects of a designer’s creation. An *optimal experience of flow* explains mental stages of the designer’s cognitive and affective processes leading to design solutions. It is impossible to determine the order of design processes because the four processes happen concurrently during the creative fashion design process.

**Product Development Process**

This category explains the production process of ready-to-wear clothes. It may differ from company to company, but overall production methods are the same. The production process for ready-made clothes can be divided into nine sub-categories. The production process includes the designer’s involvement in specifying the garment’s quality, material selection, sketching, designing, draping, sample sewing, prototype creation, grading, drawing tech flat sketches, and mass production manufacturing processes. It describes the process of creating a garment.
For the most part, the production process for ready-made clothes happens concurrently with an iteration process, especially at the synthesis stage. Further production processes for ready-made clothes usually happens at the last stages of the creative process, because these processes involve constructing, creating, and manufacturing a garment. Participant 2 described her weekly work schedule. Because she is an in-house designer, the production process has a tight schedule. While she explained the production process, the interviewer noticed that the creative design and iterative processes were occurring simultaneously, as explained in the following statement:

As I do sketching on Monday and Tuesday, I need to create a complete design on Monday and finish it by Tuesday. On Wednesday, I need to go to other team’s prototype meetings. Monday and Tuesday are the days I need to make a design sketch and choose colors--the first-fitting is scheduled for Wednesday. The company has a lot of reformed silhouette clothing, so the rough sketch and outcome will be far different than the actual garment. (The designer talks and shows her method of sketching while she is being interviewed). I briefly explain the design when the pattern is presented, and the first fitting is done with muslin, cheap fabrics or other similar fabrics. The outcome of the design should be really attractive. I need to pick the place where it should be emphasized or not and thoroughly explain its highlights. Then after taking a look at a fitting on Thursday, designers try to fix their sketches, design, color or fabrics, and modify it to a better version. And by Friday, we will have completed the whole design. I use weekends to finish it, upgrading the quality of the design with accessories, metal, and belts necessary to emphasize the design. (Participant 2, 20s)
An Iterative Process

Consistent with previous research by Yee (2007), the designers in the sample endure several iterative stages of cognitive processes during creative design development for three sub-categories including “analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” to arrive at a creative design solution (Yee, 2007, p. 5). The process also involves exploring and analyzing various ideas for finding connections between ideas and consecutive ideas to investigate the leading solution. Designers “explore, understand, and solve problems by experimenting with a variety of possible solutions” (Yee, 2007, p. 8). The following interview by Participant 2 describes the process she uses to develop a brand concept through design:

We try to incorporate design principles and element into our design. For example, we try to find a way to help our clients look slim when they wear our dresses. This season we used straight lines and lots of 2D flat patterns. Even though we embedded straight lines or a 2-dimensional look, the point was to make a women’s body shape appear sexy to others. (She’s drawing an hour-glass silhouette for the interviewer to show her design focus). L’s first priority is to make a women’s body look fabulous. By exploring different ideas, we come up with design solutions to make a woman’s body look fabulous and slender, and we use various methods to express modernity and minimalism within one design. You can explore different color schemes, or include an element to manipulate the design pattern. Another example can be to wear a long shirt, and on top of that wear a micro mini-skirt to show the bottom line of the shirt. (Participant 2, 20s)

Each sub-category can be segmented into three codes. Analysis is the process of (a) identifying problems and opportunities, (b) brainstorming and sketching, and (c) investigating and researching. Synthesis includes (a) generating multiple solutions (or concepts), (b) choosing
the best option, (c) developing a solution, and (d) redesigning, modifying and improving. The last step, revision, involves (a) modeling and prototyping, (b) testing and evaluating, and (c) redesigning, modifying and improving. Also, evaluation occurs simultaneously at every stage of the process.

**Analysis.** Steps in the process can be changed within categories according to situational or design problems. Some designers start the process with an investigation and research to identify problems before exploring opportunities. Some combine the process of identifying problems and opportunities. The iterative process can also be divided into two methods central to whether it is client based or not. Respondent 3 is an eco-designer, and the first step of her design process is *identifying problems and opportunities*. For example:

If we sense a problem is the result of thinking about solutions to social and environmental troubles, we go over what has been done and what we will do to solve the problem. To tell the truth, designing eco-wedding dresses started this way. Currently, wedding dresses are quite expensive, and are made with a synthetic fiber. About 1.7 million dresses are believed discarded every year in South Korea. Most of them are synthetic fiber dresses because silk dresses cost 5-6 million won and are too much to pay for ordinary people. Most Korean brides wear a synthetic fiber dress that does not have long durability. A dress can be rented for up to four times only; after repeated adjustments and dry-cleaning, it does not look fresh and white, and appears old. So we approach this problem by selecting fiber materials that decompose naturally and are cheaper than silk. So the first material used for the dresses comes from cornstarch, followed by Korean paper and milk. Then we think about how to reuse the dresses after the wedding. So we deconstruct garments and make them into cocktail or daily-wear dresses. (Participant 3, 30s)
**Synthesis.** After identifying the problem, Participant 3 seeks to understand it by researching secondary data and investigating opportunities. “Investigating and research” is critical because “I am going to design clothes, not produce works of art,” she stated. She emphasized the value of design by explaining:

The value of design work is enhanced by the use by many people, while that of artwork does not depend on uses. Therefore, I should always determine through research whether problems perceived by me are indeed social problems--or ask people around me about the problems”.

She brainstorms by writing the advantages and disadvantages of using potential fabrics, the frequency of use of fabrics and amount of materials that can be used. She wrote a note to herself asking, “Why do wedding dresses always have to be white, heavy, and long?” She thinks that a “systemic and analytical mind” is required in design work.

**Revision.** After analysis and synthesis, she goes into a revision process step by: (a) modeling and prototyping, (b) testing and evaluating, and (c) redesigning, modifying and improving. For her, the production process happens within the *evaluation process*, because following the construction of her designs, wedding dresses are custom made. Participant 3 continued to explain her design process in detail by stating:

Since our dresses are custom made, we talk with brides to know what kind of design they want. Then we analyze their body shape and location of the wedding. If a bride with a short neck and big face wants a halter-necked dress, we indirectly persuade her not to wear it because it will make her face look even bigger in pictures. After this, we draw sketches. The next step is fitting. We keep communication open all the time, and tell brides they can change lines any time they want. Revision is possible at the first fitting
stage. Fitting material is white cotton cloth. Original fabrics are used for the second fitting. Then the dress is completed, worn by the bride, and adjusted after the wedding ceremony. (Participant 3, 30s)

**Optimal Experience of Flow**

Optimal experience of flow involves the mental state of a designer’s creation and the designer’s cognitive and affective processes leading to design solutions. Flow includes the designer’s feelings of joy, frustration, anxiety, barriers, and opportunities during the design process. This process can be divided into four categories (a) break-time; (b) barrier; (c) autotelic experience; and finally, (d) happiness from recognition.

**Break Time.** This category is related to how idle time, vacation, and rest enhance a designer’s creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (1992) explains *break time* as “a period of incubation” (p. 79). *A period of incubation* occurs during the second phase of the creative process. He states, “It is during this time that unusual connections are likely to be made” and “ideas call to each other on their own, without our leading them down a straight and narrow path, unexpected combinations come into being” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 79). This “mysterious idle time” or *incubation* is often considered to be “the most creative part of the entire process” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 98). What happens during the *incubation* process is that “some type of information processing keeps going on in the mind” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 101) even when the subject is not aware of it, even during sleep. Freeman Dyson, a physicist, described similar experiences stating that:

“I am fooling around not doing anything, which probably means that this is a creative period, although of course you don’t know until afterward”…. “but people who keep
themselves busy all of the time are generally not creative” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, p. 99).

Participant 8 stated that idle time inspires him to be creative. He stated, “it doesn’t come right away but after 3 to 4 hours of fooling around not doing anything, having idle time, having a cup of coffee, a smoke, wandering around for a while, it comes out just like that.” Creative people working outside the fashion area emphasized the importance of this stage.

Participants in this study describe this idle time as break or vacation time. All participants in this study said that idle time or break time helps them to become creative persons and helps them to solve problems. Participant 1 explained how idle or break time helps him to solve creative problems:

I used to keep working on the problem until solved, but now I am different. I take a rest for a while, or put it aside, doing other things, and sometimes the solution unexpectedly comes by itself. I do not have to go to a resort area to take a rest, but one can rest by doing other things, or by just sleeping or taking it easy.

However, because of the particular characteristics of the fashion industry, South Korean designers get hardly any vacations or breaks that they deserve and need. All participants stated that being a designer is a physically and mentally daunting job because of tight schedules and harsh working conditions. Proper breaks and vacations support brain flow and enhance creativity. Participant 2 described how breaks enhance creative thoughts and creativity in the design process:

I need to design and sketch every two weeks, so sometimes I was forced to do such things. For example, foreign fashion designers hold collections twice each year. One of my friends who worked at Vanessa Bruno for one year said that it takes him approximately six months to design a collection, and he takes a vacation after that, i.e., the company
gives designers a vacation after their daunting work. So I think their vacation could positively affect their working styles and creativity. I need to take a vacation after hard work, but I can’t. I don’t have enough time to take a rest. (Participant 2, 20s)

Some fashion companies in Korea are aware of the value of idle and break time, so they are changing their companies’ systems to enhance designer creativity. Participant 4 explains how his company changed their work schedule flexibility “to enhance creativity.” This is not the usual case in South Korean industry, but he explains,

Being a designer is a daunting job. We cannot have lunch or we will need to work late at night. However, our company lets us come in whenever we want to as long as we work 9 hours a day. So if we worked late one night, you might come in around noon the next day and stay until 9pm. This system was employed to enhance designer creativity.”

(Participant 4, 30s)

It is possible to say that short or long periods of incubation or break time seem to be extremely important for designers, for whom “the role combines creative freedom with the pressure of returning a profit in a highly competitive, financially perilous business” (Goworek, 2010, p. 649).

**Barriers.** This category explains how designers need to overcome their worries about failure, financial problems, and time management in order to enjoy the design process during the creative phase. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), a person engaged in flow is an individual “too involved to be concerned with failure” (p. 112). However, this was not the case for independent designers who constantly worry about their business failing due to financial problems.
**Money constraint.** Within this category a sub-category emerged, *money constraint.* Designers explained how financial problems affect creativity and design. This is a common barrier to full engagement in the process of flow for independent designers. Lack of money and financial support can interfere with a designers’ creative freedom. Many young independent designers experience financial difficulties each season, and this affects their design activity and manufacture of their design lines. The following phrase explains how financial difficulties negatively impacted on Participant 8 and stated that he could not produce all the designs that he planned:

I do not get too much stress when it comes to designing clothes. I do not invest much time in designing clothes. I am not a person who sketches eight hours a day. I draw or sketch whenever necessary, and I show the sketch to employees and discuss it with them. I work under that kind of routine when I decided to create a sample garment. It is not hard to create a sample design, but a bigger problem is the difficulty of getting funds and seed money from other companies. I think it is devastating that we cannot manufacture as many clothes as we want, because our company is underfunded even when we have an abundance of designs, sketches, and samples. It would be so sad if we cannot manufacture enough clothes even if we have many design options. I actually had that kind of experience, and I had to tell customers that their clothes were not yet available. But, other than that, I really enjoy being a fashion designer. (Participant 8, 30s)

Additionally, lack of reactions or feedback from customers and worries of failure make it difficult for designers to fully engage in the process of flow:

I get 99 per cent anxious or frustrated when I work. (smile) I get really stressed out when my designed clothes do not receive any “reactions” or “feedbacks” from customers and I
also worry about sales and profit from my designed clothes. I visit every pop-up store to
check out stocks of our brand’s clothes, and this is also stressful. I think I am subject to
pressure and stress every day I work. (Participant 8, 30s)

Demanding work time and an overload of work hinders designers’ capability for
experiencing the optimal flow process:

It does hinder. Unlike in foreign markets, we must work with many models or items, so
we must finish the work within a short time. Since clothes should be out and on display at
a department store by the date set, we must work under a tight schedule to go through all
the processes that I mentioned earlier. Sometimes as we are proceeding with so many
items, their details are more or less the same, but we still must put out clothes to meet the
deadline even though they are unsatisfactory in some aspect. (Participant 11, 30s)

After designers have overcome these barriers they usually experience happiness and joy.

**Autotelic experience.** In this category, designers described the *joy of being a designer*. The joy includes “designing something new” and relates to the feeling of joy through creating *something new*. Additionally, designers are happy to have a chance to do work they enjoy. The word *autotelic* comes from the Greek words meaning, “*auto*=elf” and “*telos*=goal” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 57). According to Csikszentmihalyi (2005), autotelic is “something that is worth doing for its own sake” because “it contains its goal within itself” (p. 57). It is not about money or fame, because their fundamental reward is simply being involved with the
activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Simply being involved with the activities leads to
experiencing flow stages, by discovering joy of designing and the joy of solving problems during
the creative fashion design processes. Joy of designing accommodates *joy of finding fresh ideas*
and thinking about the things they love everyday. During the interviews, designers described
how they like to observe and watch new things every season. Designers feel bored by looking at old things and repetitively doing the same things. They like to play with fresh and new ideas. These characteristics have led them to enjoy being a designer. Participant 11 explained the joy of being a designer by saying:

I think I do. I tend to like fresh feelings, but there are not as many occupations that generate such new feelings as you might think. This may be a stressful job, but I like it because it is fast-changing and trendy. (Participant 11, 30s)

The description from Participant 2 might be the best summary of what it means to have an autotelic experience as a designer. She describes the experience of flow by describing how she enjoys designing that is a purely autotelic experience and continues to be involved with it:

It is hard being a designer, but it is fun. I think it is some kind of human instinct to enjoy a job. I like to make and create something. I can create whatever and whenever I want while working as a designer, and I get to make something all year long, as long as I work here. Nobody forced me to make and create something and I can design what I want. I do design and make something because I like to do it. I really enjoy working as a designer. (Participant 2, 20s)

**Happiness from recognition.** This category describes how designers experience happiness after flow, or at the end of a session, because of their accomplishments through their own work and design. Usually happiness comes after an individual designer has overcome his or her barriers, retains the self, time and surroundings and eventually feels happy for his or her achievements.
Recognition from others was a commonly emerging sub-theme that explains the joy of being a designer when receiving positive feedback from customers. All participants (100%) stated that they felt happy because of satisfaction from being chosen by consumers:

When I meet a lady who wears a coat that I made, I feel too good to be described. Last winter I went to a department store to do market research. On my way out, I saw a lady wearing my coat across the crosswalk. I initially thought it was an imitation of my work, but when we passed in the middle of walk, I could see that it was a coat I designed and I followed her. I found that she was Japanese and had selected my new coat instead of the one she had been wearing, so I let her know that her coat was my design work. That is my most delightful moment as a designer. (Participant 10, 30s)

Another element of satisfaction and happiness comes from recognition and reputation from fashion professionals, such as buyers and members of the press.

And I am really happy when customers give compliments about my clothes; for example, “I like the color” or similar comments. I am also pleased when I get interviews from the press after collections or runway shows. (Participant 8, 30s)

If a designer has positive experiences from five categories, including barrier, break time, balance, autotelic experience, and happiness from recognition, participants experienced the flow during the design process. However, if a participant experienced more negative experiences related to the five categories, it is possible that a participant could have difficulties experiencing flow. Participant 6 experienced flow, or in his words, “thankful that I am a fashion designer, and that I have found my identity as a designer…. And I think I would not be here if I did not enjoy fashion design.” He used to write music, dance, and enjoy other activities; however, he decided to only concentrate on fashion design.
I think I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t enjoy fashion design. I just love fashion and clothing. I get thrilled and excited whenever my design ideas become real, and it makes me happy to see people wearing the clothes. (Participant 6, 30s)

Participant 6 also described the autotelic experience of flow. Participant 6 claimed that being involved with designing leads to certain stages of experiencing flow. He is willing to change his work and design whenever is necessary. Although fashion design is a labor-intensive job, he enjoys being a fashion designer because it simply involves the work of designing clothes. However, the financial challenges and his lack of business skills are sometimes disadvantages of being in the fashion industry. The statement below explains how he overcomes obstacles and eventually gets to experience flow.

Interviewer: Do you feel anxious or get frustrated with your work? If yes, when?

Participant 6: As I said before, I did not start my business with a lot of seed money. I wanted to make clothes, but I could not design them because I did not have any money. I was disappointed with myself when that happened and it made me really anxious. I don’t get disappointed anymore because I have overcome so many barriers during the last five years.

In some cases, the opposite effect takes place. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2005), a good flow activity is “the one that offers challenges at several levels of complexity” (p. 45). As Participant 10 consistently experienced negative effects of five categories, it hindered experiencing and producing flow. Not being in control, worries, anxiety and difficulty of facing challenges create a situation in which a designer cannot fully engage in the flow process. When asked whether she enjoyed working as a designer based on the autotelic experience, Participant 10 answered:
Actually, I don’t enjoy being a designer. Sometimes I want to quit my job, but at the same time, I cannot give up being a fashion designer. I cannot explain why, but I know for sure that I am not enjoying this work.

For Participant 10, lack of break time is a trigger for not being fond of her job as a fashion designer:

I guess I am mentally exhausted, because I always think about designs. However, I cannot do anything else yet because I am used to doing such design work. Sometimes, I just want to get rid of everything but there is something that I’m not aware of, which makes me that I cannot quit my job even though I really don’t like it. (Participant 10)

Participant 10 admits that she lost her fashion sense during the production process of ready-made clothes, especially when she modified clothes in front of the mirror. Participant 10 feels satisfied whenever customers give recognition to her.

**Reflection in Action**

Themes that emerged from this category described “the process of carrying out the course of acting, intervening, observing changes and reflection on their effect” (Yee, 2007, p. 9). This reflection in action was defined by Yee (2007) studying an architectural studio environment. Although an architectural studio environment was studied, fashion designers in this study experienced a similar process when they designed garments. From the interviews, one can conclude that reflective practice is used in the fashion industry, as well. The reflection-in-action process occurred after a completed project.

It is challenging for designers to reflect on their designs or actions because the fashion industry has such a short and tight deadline. A majority of designers in South Korea use a quick-response-system as their business marketing strategy. In the following passage, Participant 4,
who works in one of the largest fashion companies in South Korea, described season planning and how the quick-response system works in terms of every season in their design collection across the board:

I am currently working on F/W 2013. We are preparing collections S/S and F/W as usual. We changed our plan from 2 seasons to 4 seasons based on proximity planning. If we divided our project to reflect just two seasons in a year, there would have been a gap between what we planned and what we could show from the shop. However, this work load keeps me very busy because I am closing F/W 2012, designing F/W 2013 and manufacturing S/S 2013 simultaneously. These three seasons are being operated on a basic plan. The most important season of the three is F/W 2013. B’s brand sells about $500 billion in every year. I have heavy responsibilities because I’m in charge of half of those assets. If I fail one of those seasons, I have to resign. This is burdensome work. However, from a different point of a view, all the profit comes after I enjoy the work. I have accumulated lots of know-how during my 10 years of experience, and I enjoy the work. That helps me enjoy my work a lot, and making profits is a result of enjoying one’s work. (Participant 4, 30s)

Whether one is an in-house designer or an independent designer, the reflection-in-action process is used in Pre Spring/Summer or Pre Fall/Winter collections. The current fashion system is divided into Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter collections. The planning of the Pre Spring/Summer or Pre Fall/Winter collection is determined by the previous sales. Design companies start the creative design process by either identifying the next trend or brainstorming design ideas. Even though they set-up the seasonal concept and design line at the beginning of the year depending on the previous month’s sales and records, or change of weather or season,
designers have to design what’s called “SPOT” items. For example, the following participant’s comments show the reflection in action process in detail.

I want to make the best-selling clothes through rapid selection and concentration, not through concept, according to the present situation… I think about how to design while I am eating, before sleeping, and even in the bathroom, because I have to make new merchandise continuously. I also always think about the next output following the items I am making now. Let’s suppose I have designed and produced five items for the coming season. I like them, but they are not received favorably. Only one or two are favorable, or all five are unfavorable. If one item sells well, I need to critically think about why that’s the best selling item. Then I can start thinking about why this is the best selling item and I design from there. For example, let’s say the oversize T-shirts sell well. Then I start by thinking about the possible reasons why this is the best selling item. Is it because they can hide their body shape underneath that shirt? Then other thoughts follow. If my first thought is right, then I ask myself what kind of T-shirts would serve the same function. If the old T-shirts had a single color, I would change the fabric and make striped T-shirts, using crossover in fashion. (Participant 5, 30s)

Participant 5 is starting her design process as a reaction to her best-selling clothes during the previous season through “selecting” what to continue and “concentrate” on from the original items. In other words, she selects the bestselling item from the past season sample, makes small changes and sells it in the market. One of the reason why her approach to design is slightly different from others is because unlike other designers who participated in this study, she designs for internet shopping malls and wholesale clothing markets. Designers who design garments for Internet shopping malls and wholesale clothing markets in Korea are different from designers
Designers’ Role in the System

This theme explains the multiple roles of designers in the fashion industry. A South Korean designer’s role ranges from creating designs to planning production processes and marketing the brand, and this variety can be either an advantage or a disadvantage. Four role categories have emerged from this theme: researcher, manufacturer, entrepreneur, and problem solver.

Researcher

This category is based on the need for studying the consumer market, inspirations, concepts, trend analysis and past sales data. All participants (100%) in this study emphasized the designer’s role as a researcher during the production development process. All of the participants also expressed the need for focusing on the practical aspects of research, including research and analysis of current trends, consumer behavior, and past sales data. Participant 12 conveyed this view when she said:

I collect and analyze the previous and current market sales and other data. If I want to set up plans for next year, I need to analyze all data from the company and market sales and data from other competitors. I both gather data and figure out various differences for the company and its competitors, and an inspiration then arrives from New York. When a theme arrives, we prepare to analyze it. (Participant 12, 50s)
Participant 6 also explained his role as a researcher in the following statement:

Sometimes, concepts come from the things I know; however, most often concept and inspiration follow from things I don’t know, so since I perform research in order to discover the deeper meaning of concepts, I think research is important. (Participant 6, 30s)

**Problem Solver**

This category describes how designers focus on solving existing design issues and try to synthesize information represented by two themes, *recognizing existing problems* and *facing difficult situations*. The purpose of starting her own company for Participant 3 was to solve the currently existing problem of protecting the environment by creating an eco-friendly wedding dress. She believes that being a designer should include *recognizing existing problems* in the world, so her “design starts with the sensing” of such existing problems. For the most part, it is a joy for her to go through the process of solving problems. She stated that her role as a problem-solver led her to the fashion industry in the following way:

Sensing problems is the result of thinking about the solution to social and environmental troubles. Then we go over what has already been done and what we can do to solve problems. To tell the truth, designing an eco-wedding dress also started in this way. Currently, the wedding dresses are quite expensive, and are produced with a synthetic fiber. (Participant 3, 30s)

Designers also described how they solve problems when *facing difficult situations*. A few participants (3 of 12 [40%]) described by doing “whatever they can” to solve problems. Participants expressed this in the following ways:

… Now I try my best to settle the problems. We remake clothes, or we ask clients whether they will sell these products even if they come out like this, or the length of the
clothes is cut short and sold to others. Now I try to solve problems by all means.

(Participant 5, 30s)

**Entrepreneur**

This category explains how fashion designers administer design by organizing, promoting, and managing a business through identifying *price ranges, marketing, and raising financial support*. They describe the difficulties of multi-tasking, which is necessary to maintain their businesses. However, designers “compromise” and “accept” reality and try to enjoy the work as much as possible. Participant 6 directly explains how being a designer involves working with businesses, and describes his attitude of being an entrepreneur by stating:

… I have to compromise with reality. Being a designer is something you can do because you like designing. Even an artist cannot do that in these days. Designers are directly related to business; therefore, I have to accept the reality and work. At first I really hated this reality; however, I accept it now. I understand that this is another role of being a designer. Therefore, I try to enjoy it as much as possible. When fashion designers are on television, they only show the good side of being a designer, but being a fashion designer is a daunting job. (Participant 6, 30s)

**Manufacturer**

This category explains how fashion designers administer the clothing production process, ranging from sketching design ideas to resolving production issues to satisfy customers. The fashion designer is usually involved in research, garment design and development, range planning and selection, and development and finalization. This relates to previous research by Goworek (2009) describing the key stages in the fashion product development process in terms of seven steps: research of directional comparative shopping, fabric sourcing and development,
garment design and development, range planning and selection, and range development and finalization. Participant 4 has worked in jean and casual men’s wear design for the last 10 years. He described his responsibilities as a designer as ranging from designing garments and related issues, to drawing technical sketches, to resolving any product issues, to business marketing, to sales, and to communicating with customers:

Korean designers should set up a plan right from the beginning and then execute it. Foreign-style designers solely draw pictures. While not making an exact picture, we (Korean designers) give technical sketches to designers, even putting in colors, lights, and shades. (He shows a technical sketch while he’s talking.) We draw down jackets, and then we provide a blueprint with light and shades added. Samplers would create the work nicely. We use an illustrator to draw pictures since he or she is best suited to express the meaning of drawings. Using lines is considered to be expressing feelings, and designers recognize the potential of other designers by checking out the usage of lines. Designers sketch drawings and then hand them to technical designers who convey the drawings to manufacturers. Korean designers participate from the beginning; we need to play a role as technical designers, tell other people about sourcing, do marketing business, and go to shops wherever the product is on sale. We sometimes talk to customers (Participant 4, 30s).

Communicating with customers is a common activity for the majority of participants because at the end, designers are designing for those who are wearing their clothes.

**The Designer’s Skills**

This theme describes the important skills necessary to become a successful designer in the South Korean fashion industry. An outstanding or leading designer in the South Korean
fashion industry has his or her own techniques and skills that can be divided into three categories; *producing creative products, problem-solving skills, and time management.*

**Producing Creative Products**

This category includes a designer’s description of skillful knowledge and activities such as fast-sketching, designing, draping, drafting patterns, sewing skills, and drawing tech-flat sketches. In addition, such knowledge and activities of generating creative products help designers to solve design problems. Participant 6 explained how such knowledge and skills contribute in helping a company in solving their design-work difficulties.

In terms of problem-solving issues, I try and do everything. Unlike other fashion companies, we draft patterns, draping, and sew prototypes at a design office, and those kinds of practices are beneficial for our company. For example, there was a time when I made six differently designed prototypes of skirts, because the pattern did not come out as I had expected so I did draping and fitting until I got something I wanted. If fitting and creating prototypes occur multiple times, its original touch, purpose or idea may be lost. If that happens, I drop that design, because it does not produce the clothes that I had intended. I believe that a maximum of three tries at fitting and creating prototypes are the best overall. If we go through more than three cycles of the process, it is highly likely that the original feeling will be lost, but this totally depends on particular items. (Participant 6, 30s)

Five out of twelve designers answered that South Korean designers have exceptionally well-developed skills and techniques compared to those of foreign designers or foreign fashion brands. The South Korean designers who studied in Italy, New York, and England and
participated in this research study became more aware of their design talent and skills when studying abroad. For example:

Korean designers definitely have strong skills; I felt that while I was studying in New York. We are good at sewing, draping, and drawings. (Participant 6, 30s)

Participant 7 and 12 stated that Korean designers’ outstanding performance in sewing, draping, and drawing might be due to South Korean fashion schools’ curricula; the South Korean fashion system tends to emphasize technical rather than creative skills.

Korean designers learn technical skills in fashion schools in Korea so we are good in drafting patterns or manipulation-based technical skills to come up with innovative designs. Such concepts and characteristics are also suitable for Japanese fashion practices.

(Participant 7, 30s)

**Problem-solving**

Problem-solving methods include *communication* and *collaboration*. Communication and collaboration are especially crucial skills used by in-house designers to resolve issues. However, independent designers are often an exception in this area because, due to small company size, they often work, plan, and design by themselves.

**Communication.** When designers participate in “client-based projects,” the success of a particular design depends on “communication.” Communicating effectively is critical for resolving design solutions. In this case, the role of a designer is to analyze and synthesize a client’s idea by communicating and collaborating with the client; finally, designers represent their final output. Participant 3 stated:

The success of a design work depends on efficient intercommunication between designers and clients because designers acquire concepts and guidelines from clients.
Clients usually brainstorm and give rough ideas to designers, given that they do not themselves have the ability to create designed items. This is where we step in, grasp clients’ ideas, and design for them. Clients and designers work together. The success or failure of a certain design relies on whether a designer fully understands a client’s intention or the notion of a company’s projects. To put this into perspective, a design work is nothing but the communication between the people involved and, as a next step, there are other procedures, including the processes of research, investigation, and expressing their own opinion. (Participant 3, 30s)

Participant 1 has been working in Italy for five years; he stressed the significance of communication skills when working in a big clothing company. In addition to his work experience in Italy, he had also worked with other foreign designers throughout France and Germany. He explained the obstacles he encountered at work in terms of communicating with his teammates because of his contrasting “cultural perspective and background.” In Asian countries, especially in South Korea, education and cultural values reflect that harmony is more important rather than raising a designer’s own voice to express a certain opinion.

There are a lot of differences between foreign and Korean fashion companies, but the biggest difference is that you need to express your thoughts when you are working in Italy. However, many Koreans—including myself—are not used to expressing our opinions to a specific person or to the public. Such practices could be derived from cultural perspectives or distinctions. Korean education teaches students to accustom themselves to learn something without making opinions, and these practices tend to carry over when working in a company. When working at a certain company, it is pivotal to communicate with other employees. I found that there are sometimes different tastes for
favorite designs and style and colorful products that do not make a profit. Designers should create products for special occasions using communication. (Participant 1, 30s)

Collaboration. In-house designers never work alone; they solve design problems and produce final solutions in collaboration with teammates. The following interview describes the production process of working with a team member. Participant 2 is a junior designer with three years of experience. She is required to communicate and confirm her designs with a head designer.

There are two members in our team, including myself. The head designer has 15 years of experience, and I have three years of experience. I think we collaborate with each other pretty well, because the head designer has excellent skills and knowledge gained from her previous experience and the length of her career. I can propose fresh and new ideas from the point of view of a novice fashion designer. The head designer and I find answers to a problem by discussion, by using other methods like changing fabrics or color, and by revising after a fitting trial. When we start to design, we create a concept map for final products; however, the concept and look is less defined. The use of clothes can be classified into elegance lines, social lines, and daily lines. We tried to make corrections within the line of usage by employing various methods. Sometimes we want to determine what other teams think when we are not sure about our own design decisions, or if there are any disagreements with respect to a certain design. Other teams might give us fresh insight in finding an answer to problems (Participant 2, 20s)

When the researcher asked her about the design process, she answered with “we” instead of “I” throughout the entire interview. Her use of words indicates the important value of working as a team when designing a garment. Participant 2 reconciled her past experience by saying,
“When I was a junior designer, I lacked assurance and wavered in the presence of lots of obstacles, so I relied on many senior designers.” Participant 6 has 10 years of experience as a designer and he is now a manager of a men’s wear department. Even with that many years of experience as a designer, he still needs to sort out his design with his boss because “I am not a perfect person and my design is not perfect.”

**Time Management**

**Deadline.** This category includes the statement that managing time and a schedule is the foremost significant factor in achieving success in the fashion field and to becoming a skillful designer. It also includes references to meeting deadlines in the fashion industry. Interestingly, two designers have used the word “fish” as a metaphor to describe the nature of the fashion industry.

A time schedule is really important because we work as a team. Personally, I believe the fashion business is the same as selling fish. Fish must be fresh, and the same comment applies to selling clothes. They must be on the shelf and ready whenever necessary. For example, if we try to sell long sleeves in summer something is not right. You must sell products in appropriate seasons (Participant 12, 50s)

Clothes are like fish that become stale within a short period of time, so finishing your work within a limited time is important (Participant 7, 30s).

Time-management skills are a prerequisite to becoming a notable fashion designer. The successful outcome of a fashion business depends on selling products in the right season and time. Participant 5 said that being able to produce a design work within a deadline is an obligation, not an option, for a fashion designer.
If you are a fashion designer, your design ability is determined by whether you can design and produce within a deadline…. A fashion designer does not make just one item of clothes during his or her lifetime. It is the designer’s ability to create beautiful clothes for lucrative profit within a season and sale periods. (Participant 5, 30s)

Managing time and schedules are key aspects that will help fashion designers in the long run. Participant 7 expressed how she tries to control her time and not to over-work in continuing her current career as a fashion designer:

I have spent the night working to meet the deadline… Now, I am trying to control and fix my pace and working habits because I think that using my time efficiently without overworking is more desirable than expending too much energy all at once. During my graduate school years in England, my school workload was too high. Sometimes I could sleep for only four hours in two days so as to finish a project, and there were always assigned projects, one after another. I was sick and tired of this situation, and I began to realize that I should not work under these kinds of pressure and conditions. (Participant 7, 30s)

**Fashion as Communication**

This theme focuses on how designers utilize garments as a form of nonverbal communication to deliver their intentions, their beliefs, their design philosophy and their values to customers. Fashion and communication can be divided into three categories: function, aesthetics, and the designer’s intention.

Fashion is a form of nonverbal communication by designers through which they explain their creative ideas, philosophy, beliefs, feelings, tastes, and values. According to Barnard (2004), “designing and wearing of fashion and clothing are an innocent form of communication or
neutral culture activities. Thus, it is even possible to consider that designing fashion and wearing clothes enables the peaceful coexistence of different interpretations and the way of life” (p. 39).

**Function**

**Human centered design.** This category focuses on descriptions of how fashion designers explain important aspects of functionality with respect to design. A critical factor to be considered is that garments should be *wearable* and *comfortable*. Despite the fact that creativity is crucial in fashion design, participants explained that, if the produced garments lose functionality, a customer would not purchase them. Unlike art, the true meaning of fashion design is revealed when people wear the garments, so they should be wearable and comfortable at the same time. When the researcher asked the question, “What is the most important aspect of designing clothes?”, five out of the twelve participating designers emphasized garment functionality. It “should not be hard for them to put on the clothes” (Participant 5, 30s). The following statement summarizes the aspect of functionality in clothing design:

I think inconvenient clothing designs are useless. Customers might wear their clothes once or twice even if they are uncomfortable, but in the long term such clothes become useless. I prefer clothes to be designed as both very sophisticated and comfortable. (Participant 8, 30s)

As stated earlier, creativity represents itself, but I believe that people everyday wear ordinary and comfortable clothes, not clothes with profound meanings. I used to make garments for fashion shows, but now I question myself as to whether I should make garments that are worn by only a few people. I do not want to design clothes that are so-called “designer-made clothes” that even I do not want to wear. I think designers must
make garments that people really want to wear, even including such cases as simple shirts.

That is why my design concepts have been changed. (Participant 10, 30s)

Aesthetics

This category focuses on how designers illustrate the visual elements and is important when designing a garment. Aesthetics is equally crucial with respect to functionality of clothes. Customers will not purchase clothes if they think the design is not sufficiently attractive enough even though the clothes may be comfortable and wearable. Fashion designers in one study claimed that clothes are a means of representing an individual’s characteristics, so aesthetics and visual elements are important because clothing can make people appealing and beautiful. Most fashion designers who participated in this research stated that visual elements and aesthetics were essential to all participants in this study. Participant 9 selected aesthetics as the primary factor in his or her design progress.

Aesthetics is the most crucial factor for designing. A design should look pretty whether customers choose to buy clothes or not. For clothes, beauty is everything. (Participant 9, 30s)

The definition of beauty is subjective and different for each designer; however, fashion designers embed their definition of beauty into their designs. Participant 2 tried to communicate with customers by creating her definition of beauty represented by the descriptions “confident, attractive, modern, and sophisticated.” The following quote illustrates how she communicates her idea of beauty through design.

The most important thing for wearing clothes is to look beautiful but the meaning of “beautiful women” is subjective; I think women should look confident, attractive, modern, sophisticated, and able to make their own decisions. I want them to think about clothes
differently. Clothing is a valuable object and I wanted to make it last for a long time. I want people to think of clothes as a tool with which to represent their confidence. Clothing is not an object that you can easily throw away. I want them to know the power of clothes. (Participant 2, 20s)

The following excerpt also captures how design aesthetics play an important role in making people beautiful:

The most important things to consider in designing are: the silhouette of clothes that makes people look beautiful, the feeling that the clothes that customers bought perfectly fit them, and familiarity with clothes. The best design makes people look more beautiful. (Participant 11, 30s)

Another designer mentioned how he is obligated and feels responsible as a designer to seek beauty in women or men through clothing design. At the beginning of the interview, he emphasized the functional aspects of clothing design. However, at the end of the interview, he summarized his career as a fashion designer in terms of employing the value of aesthetics in design.

It is my job; I think people should look elegant and stylish when they wear clothes. I did emphasize functional perspectives of clothes for specific and particular items. Why do you think people wear clothes? Is it because they are embarrassed? People wear clothes because they want to express their identities and themselves. People express their body through clothes, just as they express their thoughts by speaking. I really want people to express their beauty using their own clothes. Korean men do not have attractive body figures. Therefore, I believe clothes will make them look more attractive and fascinating. It is my duty as a designer to make Korean men elegant. (Participant 4, 30s)
So I ask myself why I chose to be a fashion designer. I decided to become a designer to seek beauty in men. When you buy any clothes, it is better if they fit you nicely.

(Participant 4, 30s)

**Designers’ Intention**

Designers consider garments as an expression of their values, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. A designer’s intention appears through his or her philosophy.

I remember Marc Jacobs said something like he wants to make clothes that people wear the most. I somehow agree with Marc Jacobs. I want to communicate with other people through clothes. I think the word “design” is deeply related to the word “communication,” so it is really important to interact with each other instead of showing yourself off. I think it is not worthwhile to design something without interaction. I think designers should fully interpret the word “understand.” In my perspective, the word “understand” literally means, “you are standing under the person”, rather than “standing over the person.” I think that is my design philosophy. (Participant 6, 30s)

**Sources of Inspirations**

**Everyday Experiences and Surroundings**

This theme explains how fashion designers derive inspiration from everyday experience and surroundings. Fashion designers bring reflections and impressions of everyday experiences and surroundings to the subconscious mind where they take on new identities and produce new relationships and unique patterns. All (100%) designers in this study said that inspiration comes out naturally; it is not something that you are forced to create. Designers look for and search out inspirations from everywhere to discover connections between creative ideas and images. Because inspirations are drawn from everyday experiences, designers often carry notebooks or
sketchbooks with them and sketch anytime, anywhere. Participant 10 summarized the creative role of inspiration by stating:

For example, if I met someone or someone just passed by and I liked the details of his or her look, I would sketch them. I always sketch a design of what I want to wear, so I sketch anytime anywhere. (Participant 10, 30s)

**Observation**

**Objects.** Designers who participated in this study frequently commented on how observing objects will help them to find new relationships and unique patterns that can be incorporated into their design activity. What we see everyday can be a source of creative inspiration for fashion designers as they observe and think about the textures and various aspects of nature that can be embedded into their design. Natural phenomena like “sunrise, sunset, cloudy weather” can be sources of inspiration for designers. Participant 2 commented on what is being observed when she looks at objects and her surroundings, “By looking at leaves and trees, I could see that they cannot be separated, and whenever I watch repetitive and combined objects, I try to use them as a valuable resource when designing, and I think I might use that resource when designing the garment” (Participant 2, 20s). In fact, Participant 1 described the process of how sources of inspiration could be embedded into the final product of design. He stated:

I get design ideas in numerous ways. For example, I saw and liked beautiful clothes on the street. Its lines can be used for designing shoes, and buttons for detail. If I see texture of water draining on the street, I can use it for designing a shoe outsole, so I think that design ideas come from endless sources. (Participant 1, 30s)

**People.** The participants’ creative inspirations come from observing people. For Participant 6, “people” are his source of both inspiration and design philosophy. His purpose and
intention of design are for “people.” For him, fashion design exists in order to meet the needs of humans who comprise the center of everything, including inspiration, concept, purpose, intention, and the philosophy of his design.

People, people always give me inspiration and people inspire me. People, numerous thoughts come from observing, watching people. For example, let’s say I decided to use one building as my concept for this season, and deep down at the bottom, the reason I choose one building as my concept is because of people. (Participant 6, 30s)

The word people can refer to friends, family, artists, musicians, customers, clients, and students, whose life stories can often provide inspirations for fashion designers. Participant 12 worked as a designer for more than 20 years and, with this background, she now teaches at a fashion school as an instructor. She commented that her source of inspiration is from people, including her students and friends from outside the fashion world. Her indirect experiences, such as interacting with a group of artist friends, becomes her inspiration; she believes fashion, art, architecture, and music are interrelated. Her indirect experience and lifestyle influences, inspires, and fuels her design ideas.

I usually get inspired when teaching and observing students. I also get lots of motivation from friends and other artists who do not work in a fashion business. (Participant 12, 50s)

From a different perspective, Participant 9 derives inspiration from studying the life or artwork of a famous artist.

Artworks might reflect artists’ lives when they were emotionally unstable, when they enjoyed peaceful lives, or when they earned money to live, so I get my creative inspirations from their life and their paintings. Even though some of them had lived a few
hundred years ago, we still have the same questions about achieving inspiration.

(Participant 9, 30s)

**Personal Experiences**

Personal experiences can become a designer’s creative source of inspirations. Typical experiences might consist of traveling, shopping, going to museums, visiting art exhibitions, visiting with friends, or eating at “hot and trendy” restaurants. By participating and performing such activities, they can discover new relationships and connect to currently existing problems. It is a natural process expanding on what they have seen or experienced in the past, and this creates synergy. It is the process of reinterpreting and applying past experiences to develop inspiration.

My creative inspirations are from personal experience. It is rare to get a striking moment of inspiration. I love traveling and really like to travel a lot, so I have been to Eastern Europe many times. Every aspect that I saw and experienced there has become my inspiration and created a synergy that generated a further inspiration. I never created the concept and inspiration deliberately; the practice of creating a concept just happens naturally whenever necessary. (Participant 8, 30s)

I like to try out “hot” “trendy” restaurants, visiting nice galleries, and so forth. I tend to enjoy other parts of artistic life and do related things. (Participant 12, 50s)

**Material Culture**

Participants are inspired by material culture, including, books, art, phrases of words, architecture, music, and even European history. Moreover, inspirations sometimes come from personal beliefs and values.

I think I get creative inspiration from everywhere, including, words, buildings, music, poems, books, lyrics, or even foreign countries. (Participant 6, 30s)
As can be seen, designers usually do not have one single source of inspiration. An overwhelming majority (11 of 12 [91.66 %]) of participants said that there is not any one source of inspiration that they always refer to; Participant 8 was the only designer in this study who has a consistent source of inspiration. He indicated that “armor” represents his identity and he refers to it frequently.

Armor is the biggest resource of an inspiration. I am an introverted person rather than being outgoing. I wanted to create designs that could represent more strength on the outside appearance, and I really like the concept of armor. (Participant 8, 30s)

For him, armor symbolizes strength and protection and is a source of inspiration for representing strong and confident women. He explained that he studied armor from all over the world, including, Japan, France, and Korea, and he uses it as a source of inspiration during every seasonal design activity. Moreover, he also uses music to activate his creativity. By listening to “gloomy, sad” songs, he is able to express his deepest feelings and creativity from his own interior. In this situation, music triggers his sad emotions and feelings to help him to design creative garments.

I listen to gloomy, sad love songs a lot. I listen to a lot of gloomy songs whenever I am having a hard time with sketches or designs, and I can do some sketches after I get really sentimental. (Participant 8, 30s)

**Personal Beliefs and Values**

Finally, personal beliefs and values are source of inspiration for some of the designers. Participant 10 believes that her sources of creative inspiration are related to her religion, Christianity. She believes that God is the creator of the universe and human beings; therefore,
she believes that her creative design inspirations are also from God. She prays every night to receive new ideas for her designs.

I am a Christian so I am encouraged from Jesus. Whenever I want to give up, I believe that I have a vision from Jesus so I can keep working on. In addition to that, I get my design ideas from Jesus, too. I always pray to Jesus for getting new ideas before going to bed. As a matter of fact, inspiration of ideas come from nowhere at a certain time. I believe those ideas come from my belief of Jesus. (Participant 10, 30s)

**The Fashion System’s Role**

This theme states how the South Korean fashion system affects creativity, and how designers explain an ideal type of fashion system, one that would enhance their creativity and their work. The system is influential in permitting designers to become famous. The two categories in this theme are the *sales commission agreement* and the *buying system*.

**The Sales Commission Agreement**

**South Korean fashion system.** This category describes the South Korean fashion system as a “consignment system.” Such a system is based on a sales commission agreement between a designer and a clothing store or a department store. The design company or designer has to pay for production of products before sales are made. Then the fashion designer asks to sell their designs to department stores or fashion shops. Each department store or fashion shop that sells a designer’s clothes or branded clothes receives between 30 to 90 percent commission on everything sold. If the garments end up not being sold in the showroom, the unsold items are returned to the designers who return the clothes to his or her own inventory. This type of consignment system does not exist in many of the major world fashion cities, including Paris, New York, London, Milan, and Tokyo. Instead, the major fashion sales system that operates in
most fashion cities is called a “buying system.” In contrast, South Korean fashion designers follow a sales commission agreement described as follows:

As you know, the South Korean fashion system is operated under a sales commission agreement. The store receives nearly a 90 percent commission fee on each sale. If I do not have seed money to start a clothing business, I cannot produce any clothes. I have to manufacture in advance 50 to 100 pieces of clothes in order to sell them in stores. I think it is ridiculous. There can be another way to start a business such as finding a sponsor. (Participant 6, 30s)

Participant 9 describes in detail how the fashion system works in South Korea by explaining her experience with a selected shop contractor:

Compared to other countries, it is easy to get a business registration certificate in Korea. Even college students can get such a certificate. Large-scale select shops easily open their market to many small brands without merchandise dealers (MDs). Select shop MDs select brands and put them in the store, but this does not work in Korea since select shops open their doors to anyone who wants to sell their design. Shop owners do not ask designers questions such as “we want these items more, so can you please supply these items more,” because they do not buy items directly from designers. If design products from certain brands are not popular, they simply ask designers to remove their item from their stores. In addition, fashion stores usually own many branches and designers must make items for each branch, and then if items are not popular, designers take all the responsibility for stock and inventory. It is relatively easy to get a business certificate in Korea, but there are also negative impacts from obtaining such a certificate. I worked for a designer S once and my design works were sold in S’s online shopping mall. Since I
wanted to operate an online shopping mall on my own, I visited a select shop called A-land with my portfolio and design samples. During the meeting with A-land, the crew simply asked me to sign the contract without looking at my portfolio or samples, so I asked the crew: “Aren’t you going to look through my items before you decide to contract?” They answered, “We are going to let customers decide whether your items are good or not.” This is how most select shops and fashion department workers think in Korea; they shift all the responsibility on designers. (Participant 9, 30s)

A majority of designers, seven out of 12 [58.3 %], answered that the sales consignment system is one of the most negative factors with respect to maintaining their business and creativity. Why do designers believe that this has a negative impact on South Korean designers’ creative process and creativity? The pressure of returning a profit is a critical factor in maintaining the business, and one has to produce garments that are preferred in the market and can thereby create a profit. This makes it harder for designers to express their creativity. The following passage is a summary of reasons why Participant 10 no longer develops creative designs even though she hopes to eventually:

There is no buying system in Korea except for the consignment system. We always must be concerned about commission fees and inventory. If a designer expresses his or her own feelings and colors for garments, it is hard to sell those garments here in Korea. I think my design motivation is heavily dependent on different surroundings and environment. It is crucial to maintain sensitivity as a designer. I wish customers in foreign countries could respect a designer’s creativity. (Participant 10, 30s)

Of the participating designers, only one of 12 [8.3 %], experienced difficulties expressing his or her creativity and style. Participant 8 described his difficulties as:
I got lots of comments that our designs are not easy to wear and customers cannot accept such designs. I admit that it is difficult and a little more sophisticated to wear, so some people like it and some people do not like them. Some items do make a good profit, but some products do not make any profit at all. I cannot sell the entire range of clothing items as I planned because of customers’ preferences. (Participant 8, 30s)

**Buying System**

**Ideal style of fashion system.** This category includes descriptions by participants of an ideal type of fashion system for enhancing fashion designers’ creativity and design work. It improves creativity by giving designers an opportunity to outline their own ideas. What is a buying system? It exists when designers exhibit at a fashion show or in show rooms where buyers select and order the desired products and subsequently launch their products in department stores or select shops. This buying practice is considered to be a business-oriented role. The role of buyers in the design of apparel lines has increased outside of South Korea. For example, fashion buyers in the United Kingdom have “a high level of influence on the design of the product” (Goworek, 2010).

Why do designers believe that buying systems enhance creativity? Designers who have described their experiences with the commission fee system have often struggled to create their own designs. Fashion business fields have also created negative influences on their particular work. The example below illustrates a particular participant’s view on the relationship between the fashion system and a designer’s creativity:

I think this is the best environment for designers to work in if buyers are responsible for 60 to 80 percent of garments. I have to be a multiplayer. I have to manage finance, taxes, and do everything by myself; almost every fashion designer in Korea takes care of such
works. I think South Korean designers are somewhat similar to businesspersons.

(Participant 6, 30s)

Thus, the buying system actually encourages young designers to come up with creative designs to promote themselves and their businesses. If fashion designers concentrate on their work in creating designs, they will have ample opportunities to sell their designs to buyers. A previous study by Kawamura (2004) stated that the setting of the ideal fashion system is the most influential factor for producing noted fashion designers. Participant 6 mentioned that, “The best environment for designers to work in is one in which 60 percent of the garments are sold to the buyers, and if that happens, I strongly believe that this will help us to grow in the end.” In addition, Participant 8 believes that it is the fashion system that creates famous designers:

I think Korean fashion systems represent an extremely hard field in which to survive for fashion designers. Department stores are the biggest distributor in the apparel businesses. I think Korea is the only country that pays commission fees to stores. No other countries in Asia, including China, pay such service fees. In other countries, buyers get their clothes for a wholesale price and sell them in their stores. Korea has a different system. I must manufacture design works first and then wait until I can find a good showroom or other place to sell them. I work under stress when manufacturing clothes; we need seed money to process the design or manufacturing line, so I try to attend foreign fairs whenever possible. I think there are certain limits existing in Korean domestic markets, and both young designers and veteran designers are fully aware of these limits and difficulties. (Participant 8, 30s)
Merchandising as a Vital Entity

This theme describes the role of merchandising in fashion design. Despite all the fantasy aspects with regard to clothing, designers must design clothes that will be saleable in the market in order to maintain their businesses. Four categories emerging from this theme include customer needs, price range, market research, and brand.

Customer Needs

This category incorporates explanations of how understanding the need of target customers is crucial for maintaining a business. Customer needs are important to consider in the fashion business in general. One of the keys to success in the fashion industry is to meet the needs of customers. Designers must design garments appropriate for customer needs, target markets, and varying seasons.

Apparel design is for customers. It is not creating art. Therefore, customer needs are important. It is also important to understand who the target customer is, so merchandising is important. (Participant 12, 50s)

According to previous research, finding the customer’s mindset is important to all creative industries including fashion businesses (Mete, 2006). Participant 12 highlighted this important aspect throughout her entire interview by stating:

My design philosophy is totally based on customers. It is essential and crucial to figure out how to please target customers or not. I just simply need to apply my design style for target customers. I think it is not a good design if customers are not satisfied with my brand and clothes; maybe I could even say that my design is a failure, so I always think of how to make customers happy with my designs and to reflect my taste of the work. (Participant 12, 50s)
Price Range

The second category describes price as an important factor related to customers’ willingness to purchase a garment. A designer must consider the price of the garment; if price is not in accordance with the quality of the design, it will not lead customers to a final purchase. Designers also need to think about the cognitive processes underlying their target customers’ consumption behavior with respect to matching up price and design. Participant 6 expressed her notions of price, design, and consumer behavior by saying:

As I told you before, clothes should be beautiful and have affordable prices. You can’t go around explaining why the garment is priced in that range. It is price-competitiveness that draws such customers into your stores, and they are influenced by cultural values. I don’t make clothes for department stores, nor do I make top-level clothes. I make clothes for ordinary people, but I use good quality fabric. I used to make clothes for suppliers to the department stores. They were sold at department stores at the price three or four times higher than that of the market. I don’t use cheap fabric, and this idea is different from that of other mass-production designers, but consumers may not think like that. Ordinary people don’t buy clothes if they are expensive even though they want to wear fashionable clothes. It is psychological, not a cultural effect. We are far better off now, in spite of the economic depression. The five-day work in a week gives more free time. During the weekday, people dress formally, but during the weekend they wear casually. However, casual clothes should be decent enough to cover hips, and skirts should not be shorter than a certain limit. I am thinking about these things always. People are so serious and simple-minded that they won’t buy if the clothes go over their budget limit. (Participant 6, 30s)
Market Research

This category describes the significance of research and how market research and analysis is significant in maintaining a business. A majority of designers [11 out of 12 (91.6%)] described research as critically important in any creative business including the fashion business. By conducting research, designers gather background information related to design, current and future trends, inspirations, concepts, world fashion, competitive brands, and customer needs. These results will help the designer in future designs. The following passage describes how visual ideas resulting from market research can be translated into design:

We are trying to see as many collections as possible, usually from world collections. We also research the domestic brand market and analyze what is missing in our brand compared to others in local markets. By doing this it gives us fresh ideas or inspiration that will help us improve our designs. For example, this brand has feelings that we don’t have, or I like this impression. These good feelings from the collections could be incorporated into our design. (Participant 11, 30s)

We try to analyze and research the general direction of a trend. I believe you know that the jean market is moribund these days. However, if you design and manufacture 10 new jean designs, you are a designer who can’t follow and read the current trend and market. Instead of creating jean pants, I can resolve this issue with combining denim Lycra instead of using raw jean fabric. In the case of participating in a world fashion fair, you can see future trends, so analyzing future trends is important. However, there is not a 100% guarantee that this pre-trend will be a trend in the local market. Nevertheless, this pre-trend has very high chance to hit as a trend. (Participant 4, 30s)
Brand

This category describes customers’ perception with respect to brand, brand image, and an identity of the brand, all critical factors in success as a designer and as a business in the fashion industry. An overwhelming majority (11 out of 12 [91.6%]) of the participants emphasized brand identity and brand image. Successful designers should know how to design without damaging the brand identity and the brand image. The majority of designers stated that consumers purchase a garment with an image created by designers. The significant effect of the relationship between brand identity and garment design was best summed up by Participant 6’s interview. Participant 6 mentioned that “if companies create some products suitable for the brand’s identity, consumers’ preference for a particular brand will likely increase, and it will return a profit. Additionally, a designer’s “positive” experience will be a tool used to enhance his or her reputation as a renowned fashion designer. Therefore, it always is important to remember to create a concept within the brand identity and image.”

The brand identity is important, and I also set particular concepts for every season.

Company R has its own signature identity and seasonal concepts and the seasonal concept emerges without destroying its brand identity. (Participant 6, 30s)

Similarly, Participant 7 emphasized the key position of brand image in garment design. The design intention for Participant 6 is to represent the brand image applied to her garment design rather than illustrating certain details and style. The following excerpt illustrates her perspectives about brand image and design:

I want to make clothes with images that people can easily understand, rather than making clothes that show off certain design and details . . . . Those factors are the most important factors in terms of creating brand images. Designers should also consider the inspiration
and its concept when they are establishing concepts . . . . My design philosophy is to
design clothes showing images rather than showing the detail of design. It is important to
design clothes that are similar to the brand image and mood. (Participant 7, 30s)

**Role of Cultural Value**

This theme explains the role of cultural values in designing. Most designers in this study
were not aware of their cultural values and background when designing. The role of cultural
values and background can be divided into two categories, *direct* and *indirect* effects. Direct
effects take place when material culture provides an influence on garment design.

**Direct**

**Material Culture.** A few (2 of 12 [16.66%]) participants tried to directly introduce
Korean culture into their garment designs. Participant 3 is the only designer wishing to directly
apply Korean culture into garment design. She uses *hanji* (Korean traditional paper) fabric, and
she borrows details from *hanbok* and applies them to Western wedding-dress designs. She said:

I have tried because I have a personal ambition to embed Korean costume design and
traditions. The Korean costume is very beautiful, but not practical. I think we can get
costumes with good lines by intensive study of the clothes. I know people who make
white Korean costumes for wedding purposes, but the dress looks so much like white
mourning clothes. Many famous stars have tried such dresses, but they are still looked
upon as mourning clothes. We are trying to improve the dress for wedding purposes by
including various small details. (Participant 3, 30s)

Because of the impracticality of *hanbok*, Participant 3 finds it challenging to use or borrow
details from it; however, she is still performing research to find the best solution to embed
*hanbok* into western-style wedding dresses.
In the past, Participant 8 also tried to embed Korean culture into his design development. He went to France to “study more about transforming hanbok and adapt its style to western-style garments.” His design portfolio that he submitted to a school in France was the “combination of a hanbok design with western-style garments.” However, once he had tried this, he “lost interest” in transforming hanbok into western-style garments, although one sometimes can find details in his designs, such as a jacket without a lapel, to be reminiscent of hanbok. Yet, it is hard to tell that such a jacket detail is inspired by hanbok because he sees similarities with other cultures, such as Scandinavia. Therefore, he noticed that he does not find it is “necessary” to change the style of hanbok to a more western-oriented look. He now uses whatever he knows in terms of creating the most satisfactory combination with western apparel and creates unique “style” and “characteristics” of his own design. He still thinks that he would “employ the Korean style as much as” he had previously done, “together with Western style” he had learned.

**Indirect**

**Social Value.** Indirect effects take place when social values influence working environments, so they indirectly influence both garment design and the fashion development process. In this study, participants were not aware that they were indirectly influenced by cultural social values. A majority of participants (10 of 12 [83.33%]) had not considered or weren’t even aware of their own culture. What was unique about Participants 7 and 9 is that they both heard from foreign buyers that their garment designs had an “Asian” look. However, neither could understand why foreign industry buyers perceived their designs to have such a look. It was hard for them to pinpoint why they thought their designs were influenced by Korean culture. The following are examples of participants’ comments regarding culture and design.
Participant 7: Westerners say that I design in oriental style, but I am not sure of this. They also say they know right away that the design has been done by an oriental designer by just looking at it. I don’t know why they say this because I didn’t intend to design in such a style.

Researcher: Did they give any explanation?

Participant 7: I will show you a photo of those clothes. These two are said to have an oriental style. A color like this is very unpopular in Korea and the same goes with strong pink; coloring like this is disliked here, but in Paris they liked the clothes and the title “K” which gives feelings of calmness. They said that the title caused them to think the clothes were made by an Asian designer.

When I begin to develop my brand, I never thought about Korean cultural elements and eco-friendliness, but people tell me that my brand has these properties. I don’t know why, but I guess I use the green color a lot and also use lots of curved lines. We don’t use traditional Korean prints or make garments similar to Korean traditional clothes called hanbok. In addition to that, when we develop a pattern, we draft a flat pattern and not a 3-D pattern. Korean traditional clothes start from developing flat pattern, not a 3-D pattern. In Europe or Western countries, when they work on dresses they use 3-D patterns, so I questioned myself as to whether this is one of the reasons why my brand seems to have Korean cultural elements. (Participant 9, 30s)

Participants were indirectly influenced by social cultural values in the process of design, which may influence the working environment. In most cases, participants are not aware of how they were influenced by social cultural value. However, Participant 10 was fully aware of how
her family, particularly her mother, played an important role in the design process and in increasing her creativity.

Yes. My mom is a hanbok designer, so I guess she influences me a lot. When I look at hanbok, I can see very beautiful lines in garments that I didn’t notice before. The very relaxed silhouette of hanbok also provides me some inspiration, as did the beautiful colors of rolled fabrics of hanbok. (Participant 10. 30s)

An overwhelming majority (10 of 12 [82.33%]) of participants answered that knowledge of Korean contemporary culture, thoughts, and lifestyle is important in design development. Moreover, these participants believe that it is important to understand Koreans’ body types and preferred colors. Indirect influences of Korean culture were best summed up by Participant 2:

Interviewer: Do you notice any Korean cultural elements embedded into your final output?
Participant 2: No, not at all. I cannot tell that this design directly came from Korean culture, but I think I’ve embedded some Korean practice and culture into its design somehow. I think a lot about overall Korean customs, including their thoughts; a way of clothing, attitude, favorite music, and artworks can be an inspiration in designing.

Interviewer: Is there any design that applies all those aspects?
Participant 2: No, there is not. Clothes and garments are directly related to a human’s body. For example, when you take a look at garment history, people want to wear different style of clothing as time goes by, and all these transformations begin from a change of the body and being attractive. I think most Koreans know how to make themselves look good and fabulous. Many Koreans want to have their body shapes look more like those of Westerners, so I think all these aspects are necessary when designing clothes.
Hardwork. East Asian societies like Korea and Japan believe in the value of hard work and devaluing of play, and this phenomenon can indirectly affect a designer’s design process and creativity (Kim et al., 2011). Degrading of play and rest indirectly affects a designer’s design process and creativity because rest and play are “psychological attributes that flourish creativity” (Kim et al., 20011). For example, previous literature indicates that believing in hard work results in a devaluing of childhood play and fun time (Kim et al., 2001). Participant 2 summarized the relationship between social cultural values and the design process:

Being a designer is a physically and mentally daunting job, and while this may also apply to foreign designers, what’s ironic is that Korean companies take for granted that designers must perform under tough working conditions. Many Korean designers have to work nights and during holidays, and the same thing applies to other workers as well. Korean employees work in tough environments with huge workloads, but it is kind of disappointing that designers and other employees do not get much compensation while working, even while working more than 15 hours per day. Sometimes many employees develop diseases while doing their jobs. What I do not like is that many other fellow designers think that long working hours are not a big deal and would not listen to me. For example, let’s say that even though I have worked 100 hours per week, some fellow designers think that doesn’t reflect long working hours. I also think that while there are not many vacations at work, I get inspired when taking a vacation. So on weekends I usually read books, visit exhibitions and plays, and do a lot of other things to be inspired; these activities give me many different experiences, but I don’t leave much time to enjoy leisure activities. (Participant 2, 20s)
Fashion as a Global Phenomenon

This theme emphasizes that fashion has no boundaries in our daily lives. Fashion travels all around the globe with its unique style, and people easily adapt to fashion. Fashion also embodies the current phenomenon; that garments are produced globally. Three categories are crucial factors in this theme including international sourcing vs. local sourcing, contemporary South Korean culture, and the non-existence of South Korean style.

International Sourcing vs. Local Sourcing

This category explains and compares two different types of sourcing in the South Korean fashion industry. Unlike in other countries, international sourcing is an uncommon sourcing practice in Korea. Outsourcing the garment is, on the other hand, common in the United States. Only one participant briefly mentioned the production processes involved in international sourcing. Participant 4 works in one of the biggest fashion companies in South Korea. The company also outsources their brand to other countries.

Then we send sample designs to Indonesia, Vietnam, and even Pyongyang in the Kaeson industrial complex (North Korea). Labor costs in China have risen, so we no longer produce our products in China; instead, we do local sourcing. Once we set the stock date, the entire product arrives from all over the world on the same date; after that, we distribute the products to stores. (Participant 4, 30s)

One of the reasons why participants in this study did not say much about international sourcing is that South Korea still has many sourcing and manufacturing companies within the nation. Secondly, seven out of 12 designers are independent designers; they explained the benefits of working as a South Korean designer and the necessary background in production process within a fashion industry. Nowadays, the number of local manufacturing companies is
dwindling because South Korea has joined the ranks of developed countries; labor costs in Korea are high compared to those of many developing countries. Participant 6 stated that:

The foreign country’s fashion business is more developed compared to the South Korean fashion industry. If the Korean economy grows it may be possible that local sourcing will eventually disappear. Even though many factories are closing these days, Korea still has the best local sourcing system and wonderful manufacturing factories.

**Local Sourcing**

*Dongdaemun.* The greatest primary benefit of working as a South Korean designer is to be able to take advantage of local sourcing. *Everything is in one place* refers to the specific fashion hub in Seoul, South Korea, called *Dongdaemun.* Designers describe the benefits of obtaining resources, including fabric markets, sewing factories, manufacturing sites, and fashion design plazas, from *Dongdaemun.*

I can say that Korea is like a heaven for designers, because Korea has a big fabric market called *Dongdaemun,* and their fabric quality is higher than in New York. Fabric sells at a great price value. I first sketch the design and then think about fabric. Then I can go to *Dongdaemun,* and buy the fabrics that I want. However, when I studied in the United States, I had to first come up with concept, then the fabric, then the color, then the idea sketch, and finally the design selection. (Participant 6, 30s)

**Contemporary South Korean Culture as a Business Asset**

This category describes the effects of contemporary South Korean culture that help to promote the South Korean fashion business in other countries, especially China. Ten out of 12 designers said that either their company or their brand sells designs to other Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, or Japan. China is the biggest market for Korean designers and
companies, and this phenomenon is related to development of the Korean economy. It is much easier for clothing companies to do business in China compared to Western countries like the United States or France, based on the facts that China represents a similar cultural background and similar body shapes. In addition, Participant 12 claimed that South Korea is one of the developed countries, and Chinese fashion companies are trying to emulate Korean fashion style and its trends. Chinese fashion companies try to benchmark Korean companies in order to achieve success in their domestic fashion market. Participant 12 explained why clothing companies had huge success in China by stating:

As I mentioned earlier, China and Korea share similar cultural backgrounds and body shapes. I think Chinese and Korean people have similar tastes. Chinese people want to follow the fashion trends of developed countries. I think all of the above can be prerequisites to marketing the Korean fashion brand in China. (Participant 12, 50s)

The Nonexistence of Korean style

This category describes designers’ impressions with respect to current South Korean fashion style. All participants (100%) described their understandings of the current South Korean fashion style and spoke unfavorably about the present state of that style. It is hard to define the “South Korean fashion style” in a word because such a style really does not exist. Some (3 of 12 [40 %]) of the participating designers believe that South Korea is in a transitional period of adopting and creating a new fashion style. Participant 2 explained, “I do not think there is a fixed Korean fashion style, but Korean fashion design is making progress in adopting new aspects in fashion design. I think we are facing a time in which other objects rather than those maintaining the Korean culture and aspect will be accepted.”
Most participants assert that *nonexistence of Korean style* is due to the short history of Western clothing and culture in South Korea. Therefore, the majority of participants believed that Koreans do not fully understand Western clothing, the clothing that we wear these days, and this can be a barrier for fashion designers trying to create an unique Korean style clothing. As stated by Participant 7, “clothes which we are wearing didn’t originate from our traditional costumes, but changed dramatically with the arrival of new civilization.” Two participants explained how culture and traditions might be effective in generating a unique fashion style:

I think there are no particular characteristics for a Korean fashion style. In Paris or Italy, designers display each of their collections in terms of their own traditional apparel and garments. I think fashion designers from both countries inherently learn about their fashion taste by exposing themselves to their own culture. There are differences, for example, in Italian and British suits. Each country has its own culture and tradition, and that makes it difficult for Korean designers to compete against other foreign designers by ignoring its own Korean cultural taste and instead try to produce Western-style garments. I think it is hard to find a Korean signature design in fashion. For example, the Japanese fashion style was a huge hit in the 1990s, but nowadays it is an out-of-date style in the fashion industry. Even in fashion, I think it is important to be persistent in order to transform some aspect into a culture; constant changes cannot generate a tradition. I think it is hard to find a Korean fashion style of it’s own. (Participant 8, 30s)

Frankly speaking, there are no tradition-reflected clothes, because clothes that we wear do not originate from our traditional costumes, but changed dramatically with the arrival of new civilization. When I was studying in the U.K., I received comments that it is difficult for Korean designers to make “in-depth clothes,” because Korean designers did
not experience the intermediate steps of development. It may be a personal opinion, but he also said that designers who design classical clothing do not have a taste of classical sentiment. My British professor gave me those remarks in 2005. He also said that Korean department stores have a “trend,” not a brand identity or image, and also said that it was difficult to find clothes with a unique brand concept. I think he has a point there.

Westerners expect conceptual design, not classical design, from oriental designers; they want designers like *Comme des Garçons* and Yohji Yamamoto. Both those designers demonstrate unique originality and characteristics and do not reflect high regard for classical designers. It was unpleasant to hear such opinions, because I thought that they demeaned oriental designers, but on second thought, they might be right. (Participant 7, 30s)

In addition, a number of participants also stated that the non-existence of Korean style is due to cultural background. Participant 7 mentioned that the contemporary Korean fashion style is all about “fashion trends.” Participant 10 said, “Korean style and fashion does not seem to be excessive, but conscious of other people’s attention.” It is possible to predict that this phenomenon is related to the Confucian value, called *chae-myun*, meaning “social face” in English. Korean consumers are cautious about how they look in public. They follow a trend as a way to illustrate their solidarity with one another. Education and lifestyle also influence individual style. Participant 9 mentioned how education and lifestyle can impact Korean style and a designer’s creativity:

Korean styles are very precise and inflexible. Roughness and avant-garde sense is missing from Korean fashion style. I think this is because of education and lifestyle; in other words, the Korean society is very conservative. Overall, Korean fashion designers
design-work has a fixed sense. But I do not think it is bad to have this kind of perception.

(Participant 9, 30s)

**Difference Between Individual Designer vs. In-house Designer**

Throughout the interviews, there were two major differences between independent designers and in-house designers. The two major differences found in this study are *role of the fashion system* and *communication skill*. Out of a total of 12 designers, seven are independent designers who own their own companies, while five are working in major fashion companies. The comparison of individual designer vs. in-house designer did not indicate significant differences in terms of design process, definition of fashion designer vs. apparel designer, designer’s role in the system, skills, merchandising, sources of inspirations, cultural influence, and the experience of flow.

**Awareness of Fashion System**

Independent designers are fully aware of the influence of the fashion system on their businesses. They believe that the type of fashion system is influential in creating a designer’s reputation. Fashion is now a global phenomenon that the majority of designers in this study experience. They believe that, in terms of design perspective, they have no particular disadvantage or difficulties related to being a South Korean designer. Participant 3 states, “I don’t think Korean designers are despised or maltreated just because of where we are from. Recognition as a designer depends on the design work, not on the nationality.” In fact, the majority of independent designers sell their clothing line outside of Korean, in countries like China, Japan, Hong Kong, France, and the United States. However, because of a weak fashion system in Korea, they do feel lack of support from fashion system participants like buyers, agencies, federations, editors, and journalists. Participants 5 and 8 described the difficulties of
having to promote oneself outside of South Korea because of system deficiencies. A majority of the designers think that they have language barriers and that there are no influential agencies for promoting their businesses and reputations in foreign countries. Participant 8 states:

There are few Korean fashion agents settled in foreign countries. It is hard to settle their business in other countries and to enter other foreign fashion markets unless a person is already really famous, so it is tough to make a profit if you are not widely famous. I do not think there are small Korean fashion agents who could manage or be gatekeepers in providing entry to famous showrooms or to foreign buyers. Most business agents demand a lot of service fees. I think there is not enough manpower to bridge the gap between designers and dealers. I once signed a contract with a couple of agencies capable of handling marketing and management consulting, but it did not come to a good end.

In-house designers did not fully recognize the influences of the fashion system on creative design because the role of fashion designers who work in big fashion companies is slightly different from that of individual designers. Independent designers need to manage finances, create designs, and promote their companies to manufacturers. In most cases, designers who work in big fashion companies are engaged in planning, designing and creating prototypes. Money and finance is not usually an important issue to in-house designers because merchandisers and financial officers will usually work in that area, so in-house designers are not directly influenced by the fashion system.

**Communication Skills**

As discussed earlier, the second category distinguishing the independent designer from the in-house designer is the set of required communication skills that enable effective collaboration during design development. All in-house designers in this study talked about the
importance of teamwork communication between designers and people in various departments during the design development process. This process involves analyzing a “trend from marketing and consumer’s perspective” as well as “balance between marketing orientation and a product orientation” to get the best idea and achieve the most successful outcome from everyone (Goworek, 2010, p. 657). Through good communication, they are able to develop “a well-balanced and profitable range” of designs (Goworek, 2010, p. 654).

On the other hand, independent designers are sometimes not aware of the value of teamwork and communication because, like the designers who participated in this study, they mostly work alone or with another assistant. Because of the size of the company, independent designers who participated in this study had multiple responsibilities, but communication and teamwork was not emphasized throughout the interview. Instead, all of the independent designers stated that the main design-related responsibilities are to develop the collection, identify price points, convey designs to manufacturers, resolve production issues, engage in sales, and promote their company. Independent designers are responsible for all of these many production-related issues in promoting their brand.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of how South Korean fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences relate to their creative design process. I was particularly interested in expanding knowledge of how Korean cultural values and the personal experiences of South Korean fashion designers are related to or reflected in their practices, processes, and creativity. For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 South Korean fashion designers ranging in age from 26 to 50 years, all of whom had been working in the fashion industry for at least 3 years. The findings from the study are summarized in this chapter. Additionally, the connections among themes are discussed in answering the research questions that guided this study. Finally, this chapter closes with a discussion of the significance of this study, its limitations, and suggestions for future research in this area.

Summary

This study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by describing how successful South Korean fashion designers solve design problems, and how cultural values and life experiences are related to or reflected in creating fashion objects. Few or no research studies have been described to explain either how cultural value and personal experiences shape professional fashion designer’s thoughts during the process of design or the creativity of such designers. The present study aims to explore how South Korean fashion designers are influenced by cultural values and personal experiences that shape meaning associated with the creative design process.

Since only a few researchers have studied the creative fashion design process, the present research used a qualitative approach with semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gain understanding related to the influence of cultural values on fashion designers’ creative design and decision-making processes, as well as the impact of personal experiences on their design
process and creative design outcomes. Twelve South Korean fashion designers were selected through a snowball sampling technique. The analysis illustrated 11 overarching themes: 

(a) the uncertainty about the difference between apparel designers vs. fashion designers; 
(b) the creative fashion design process; 
(c) the designer’s role in the system; 
(d) the designer’s skills; 
(e) fashion as communication; 
(f) the creative role as a source of inspiration; 
(g) the role of unconscious creativity; 
(h) the fashion system’s role; 
(i) merchandising as a vital entity; 
(j) fashion as a global phenomenon; and, 
(k) individual designer vs. in-house designer.

A Conceptual Model of the South Koreans Creative Fashion Design Process

A conceptual model of the South Korean creative fashion design process (Figure 1) reflected and summarizes the connection and relationship of the 6 major themes, 

(a) South Korean fashion system; 
(b) creative fashion design process; 
(c) merchandising as vital entity; 
(f) indirect cultural effect; 
(e) direct cultural effect; 
(f) inspiration; and finally, 
(g) personal experiences.

The primary contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual model of a South Korean creative fashion design process model. Previous apparel design process models are focused on effectiveness and existence of industry processes (Gaskill, 1992; Wickett, Gaskill, Damhorst, 1999; Regan, Kincade, & Sheldon, 1998), functional, expressive, and aesthetic (FEA) requirements (Lamb & Kallal, 1992), and how to structure the design process when working with an industry client (LaBat & Sokolowski, 1999). The South Korean creative fashion design process model implicates the functional and product development process of fashion design. It also includes the designer’s cognitive, psychological and mental processes while they are designing the garment. Moreover, the model illustrates the direct and indirect relationships of how cultural values and personal experiences influence the fashion design process.
The product development process, an iterative process, optimal experience of flow, and reflection in action happen simultaneously during the creative fashion design process. In addition, in between the four stages of design, designers concurrently think about links between ideas to interpret actions and decisions made during the process, as well as to find the best solution to solve a design problem. The theory of optimal experience of flow explains the mental state of South Korean fashion designers during the design process. Flow experience occurs when the balance between skills and challenges that the designer has to face during the design process is optimal. Additionally, cultural values influence the creative fashion design process directly and indirectly, along with designers’ personal experiences.

The study has shown that the external factor, the fashion system, has a huge impact on both the designers’ creative process and decision-making process. The findings support previous research discussing that organization structure affects designers’ success and status (Kawamura, 2003). Fashion designers who participated in the study have discussed the significant inter-relationship of a designer’s designs, decision-making processes and their creativity. Such findings are consistent with previous research on the ideal type of fashion system, the mechanism that transforms process, and promotes designers reputation. The South Korean fashion system is uniquely different from any other fashion system in the world, including Paris, the United States, China and Japan. The consignment system in South Korea poses real challenges, which make it difficult for South Korean designers to be fully engaged in experiencing the flow. Furthermore, the system puts limits on South Korean fashion designers’ creativity.
Figure 1. A conceptual framework of South Korean fashion design process
Conclusion

Culture and Fashion Design

The findings from this study suggest that fashion designers can be defined as producers of culture, i.e., individuals who create more than just clothes. Fashion design is intangible and requires creativity. Fashion designers are those who create the symbolic value of clothes, trend, style, and beauty, by expressing creative ideas, philosophy, personal beliefs, and values through garment design. As stated previously, a designer’s ideas, specifically his or her understanding of current contemporary South Korean culture, are communicated through design to consumers who may or may not “buy in” to those meanings.

The primary finding of this study is that the cultural values have an indirect influence on designers’ creative design processes, their creative ideas, and their creativity. Among many other cultural values, Confucian ideas directly influence South Korean designers’ working environments and creativity, and this influence has a negative impact on designers’ design processes. For instance, the Confucian value of hard work tends to create a demanding work environment that may reduce a designer’s creativity by not providing a proper amount of time for rest and reflection. Moreover, the Confucian idea of chaemyun (translated to mean social face in English) deeply affects consumers’ taste and style of fashion. Designers are sometimes limited in expressing their creative ideas through design, because if his or her design is too innovative, Korean consumers may refuse to try or purchase something they have not seen before. This is because of a cultural tendency to follow group ideas, another characteristic of a collective society.

The seconding finding suggests that designers’ creativity is affected by cultural factors, which may include organizational systems, groups, fashion systems, individuals, and family. Participants in this study described the importance of fashion systems, structure, and industry
factors like labor or materials that may affect the ability to become a successful international designer. This finding supports previous literature that the ideal type of fashion system is influential in creating a designer’s reputation (Kawamura, 2004). Culture affects an analysis of creativity and the innovation process that generates creative product ideas and makes decision-making easier (Westwood & Low, 2003). Moreover, Korean consumers’ attitudes, styles, and behaviors may have a negative impact on designers’ capability for generating creative product ideas if consumers will not accept new and innovative styles.

The third finding suggests that an overwhelming majority of participants seemed unaware that they were influenced by cultural values or their background when asked whether their design ideas were influenced by such factors. However, it is interesting to note that even though they may have said they are not influenced by cultural values, they did acknowledge that their designs are made for Korean consumers. Therefore, current Koreans’ thoughts, contemporary culture, tastes, trends, as well as body shape and color preferences are embedded in products. Foreign buyers also informed participants that their designs had an “oriental” look, even though the designers themselves were unable to tell what factors stood out in their design that creates this impression.

**Personal Experience**

An initial research question was: How do individual experiences impact designers’ inspiration and designer decisions? Participants in this study derived inspiration from everyday experiences, and they may transfer these impressions through subconscious ideas that they take from new entities in connecting new relationships and unique ideas and patterns and in creating innovative ideas. Also, previous research by Mete (2006) indicates that fashion designers derive ideas and inspirations from “everywhere” and “everything” including “visual and tactile, in fact
sensual” (p. 282) and “influence of all the arts, and lifestyle throughout the world” (p. 283). Mete (2006) defined this activity as “fashion awareness” and emphasized it by declaring, “Designers must learn most of all to keep their eyes open, to develop their skills of observation, to absorb visual ideas and to blend and translate them into clothes that their customers will like” (p. 279).

Personal experiences that serve as sources of inspiration play an important role in the design process and may directly result in an increase in creative design ideas and thereby overall contribute to creativity. The role of inspiration is key to creativity (Mete, 2006). Findings from both the present study and previous literature suggest that such inspiration plays an important role in the “early informal and actual clothing design process” and “throughout the entire design process” (Mete, 2006, p. 278). However, when conducting this research, I was able to understand that it is not the inspiration or personal experience alone that creates creative ideas or innovative design; it is the designers’ competence in pooling the ideas together in seeking to develop new creative products.

**The Optimal Experience of Flow**

The last research question addressed in this study was whether designers experience flow during the creative design process. Flow is the optimal experience that describes the “feeling when things are going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly-focused state of consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 110). Regardless of the particular activity of the participants involved in Csikzentmihalyi’s study, his explanation of the flow experience was that it is basically similar for different groups of people, including athletes, artists, sportspersons, scientists and ordinary working people independent of culture, gender, or age (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).
The findings were consistent with the theory of optimal experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). If a designer has positive experiences from five categories, including *barrier, break time, balance, autotelic experience, and happiness from recognition*, participants experienced flow during the design process. However, if a participant experienced more negative experiences related to the five categories, it is possible that a participant could have difficulties experiencing flow. In the case of South Korean fashion designers, the result of fully-engaged flow activities can be derived from overall positive experiences with *barrier, break time, balance, autotelic experience, and happiness from recognition*.

For participants in the present study, to fully experience flow they must first overcome numerous barriers, such as fear of failure and financial problems. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996) during the process of flow, “there is no worry of failure.” Flow experience occurred when a designer felt balance between challenges and skills. The designers’ experience of flow did reflect the previous research of the experience by Csikszentmihalyi (2005); if balance exists between challenge and skills, personal experience of flow can occur; too much challenge and not enough skills lead to a person experiencing anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). However, for South Korean fashion designers in this sample, constant challenges that they had to face included the fear of failure, which may have inhibited their experience of flow. All the participants are under a great deal of pressure, and they constantly worry about failure because financial problems may curtail their ability to maintain their fashion businesses. Sometimes the designers feel anxiety and are overwhelmed in trying to overcome difficult financial situations. This is the most common barrier to fully engaging in the process of flow, and it has a negative impact on designers’ creativity.
Throughout the present study, the second most common challenge that participants described was how hard it is to fully engage in the flow process when they must meet deadlines and take on the multiple responsibilities of a designer. Because of fast-changing schedules in the fashion industry, it is critical to meet deadlines while creating a fresh new look, so designers sometimes must push themselves to exceed the limits of their abilities. In such a case, participants may feel “overwhelmed” by their workload, time constraints, and the work environment. Additionally, participants describe that lack of breaks, idle time, and vacation can reduce the overall quantity of their creative ideas.

Once they overcome such barriers, South Korean fashion designers specifically experience flow, an autotelic experience and feeling of happiness about being a designer. Similar to previous research, once they are really engaged in the flowing phase, participants do enjoy the process and have a good time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 117). All participants in this study experienced flow during which they enjoyed the experience of creating something new, the joy of discovery, the joy of solving problems, and doing the work that they enjoy. To experience such joy and happiness, a balance between challenge and skill is needed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Skills range from basic skills like fast sketching, draping, drafting patterns, sewing skills, drawing tech flat sketches, to time management and business skills. Communication and teamwork are also important skills for in-house designers.

The fashion industry is a creative industry, and fashion designers are considered to be creative persons. Creative individuals may be different from one another but they have one thing in common in that they all enjoy what they do (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Despite all the barriers and daunting tasks of working as fashion designers, they choose to keep these jobs because they
enjoy the process of making and selling clothes regardless of whether they achieve success or fame. The joy of being a designer is what fuels their design ideas and creativity.

**Significance**

This research adds to the knowledge available through existing literature related to design methods and design research, creativity, and cognitive/affective processes of South Korean fashion designers. Because only a few research studies have been conducted with respect to South Korean fashion designers’ creative design processes, the findings of this study will help extend knowledge of the relationship between cultural values and personal experience with the creative process. Exploring designers’ experiences contributes to understanding of other ways cultural factors affect designers’ sources of inspiration and creativity. Understanding the impact of cultural values on creative design may facilitate self-reflection on the part of a designer and enable possible positive adjustments when designing for global markets. Moreover, this research provides a framework or conceptual model of the creative design process to test on other South Korean designers, as well as designers in other countries.

The key significant finding from this study comes from beyond the research questions proposed. From what I could find, the present study appears to be the first empirical research suggesting that the business environment, especially in the South Korean fashion system, has impact on the design and creative thinking process. Moreover, influence of the cultural environment of Confucian ideology had impact on contemporary South Korean fashion designer’s creativity and creative thinking. The Confucian notion of creativity highlights the relationship of an individual’s creativity, which “allows the environment to change himself or herself” (Niu, 2013, p. 283). However, the hard work ethic emphasized by Confucian ideals may
at times drive designers so intensively that they have no time to experience conditions that allow creativity into their work.

Moreover, it is difficult to find research studies focusing on the South Korean fashion system, which pinpoints how the fashion system impacts a fashion designer’s creativity and creative process. The present research accentuates how the South Korean fashion system -- a consignment system -- is unique in comparison to fashion systems in other parts of the world. The consignment system is one of the most discouraging factors in respect to fashion designers’ creativity, creative process, becoming a famous designer and achieving success in the fashion business. All participants in this study explained that the buying system, which exists in other countries including France, the United States, and China, is an exemplary type of fashion system that facilitates creative output and success in a fashion business.

The consignment system may interrupt the creative process of designers. The findings provide evidence of South Korean fashion designers’ experience of flow during the creative design process. Few researches have examined industry designers’ experiences of the flow process related to five categories including barriers, break time, balance, autotelic experience, and happiness from recognition. In addition, no other research explained the barriers to flow inherent in the South Korean fashion design industry. The interview responses illustrated the constant challenges that South Korean fashion designers face every day: Fear of failure and financial problems. Moreover, the result of this study gives feedback on how these barriers interfere with designers’ ability to be fully engaged in experiencing flow while they work.

Finally, finding of differences between the independent and in-house designers is meaningful in this research. Few researches have noticed the differences between the South Korean independent and in-house fashion designers. The comparison of independent designers
who own their own brands vs. in-house designers did not indicate significant differences in terms of the design process, definition of fashion designer vs. apparel designer, designer’s role in the system, skills, merchandising, sources of inspirations, cultural influence, or the experience of flow. However, the two major differences between independent designers and in-house designers are the role of the fashion system and communication skills. Due to the nature of their working environment, independent designers who participated in this study are fully aware of the adverse effect of the South Korean fashion system and the influence on their business. The lack of support from the fashion industry made participants feel that it is difficult to succeed as a global designer. Supports that are limited or missing in the South Korean fashion system include buyers, agencies, federations, editors, and journalists. The second finding that distinguishes independent designers from the in-house designers is the set of required communication skills, which enables effective collaboration during the design development process. Communication skills are critical to in-house designers because the product development process is considered a teamwork rather than individual work; collaboration with other designers or workers from other department such as technical designers, pattern-makers or merchandisers is requisite. On the other hand, independent designers work alone or with an assistant, so communication skills are less important compared to other skills such as time management and production skills.

Limitations

The generalizability of this study is limited for several reasons. First of all, while the sample population in this study may not be representative of the entire population of all demographic segments within the community of South Korean fashion designers, it provides only limited representation on a global scale with respect to ethnicity, nationality, and geographic identity. Second, a single in-depth interview cannot lead to the discovery of all of a
participant’s actions and thoughts about the design process. Some participants may have hesitated to reveal all of their views and intentions, while others may have chosen to not share specific information in detail because they believed either that the information was too personal or that it would reveal their unique creative idea or creative business methods which are guarded carefully as proprietary capital. Since the purpose of the qualitative interview is to understand the deeper meaning held by individuals, thus including a relatively small sample that can be interviewed in depth, findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of all South Korean fashion designers.

**Future Study**

This study focused on how cultural values and personal experience influence some South Korean designer’s creative process, as well as ways cultural values may indirectly influence designers’ creative design process and creative product ideas. Furthermore, it looked at some ways South Korean designers’ personal experiences and backgrounds directly influence designers’ creative work and inspirations. Therefore, for future study, a larger sample group of fashion designers from different geographic regions would be beneficial in studying whether designers in other countries hold the same views and opinions as do South Korean designers. A cross-gender comparison between female and male designers is another possibility for future research.

Further research could involve a cross-cultural comparison to determine whether creativity and the design process are influenced by socio-cultural factors. For example, researchers might study how cross-cultural differences influence how creativity emerges; characteristics of North American fashion designers vs. Asian designers, for example, might be recommended for future studies. Previous research by Kim et al. (2011) concluded that
American educators are more creative than are Korean educators because Korean educators have “strikingly more Confucian ideals than Americans, whereas Americans have more creative strengths and are more adaptively creative than Koreans” (p. 357). However, the Kim et al. (2011) research results focused on educators, not designers. Future research could examine whether this assumption is true for fashion designers as well.

In addition, cross-examination between designers from different geographic regions within a given country might be a topic for future study. For example, differences among U.S. designers working on the west coast and those on the east coast could be examined. Findings from the present study suggest that designers’ work is highly influenced by consumers’ taste in clothes; and behaviors based on lifestyle and culture may vary in different parts of the same country and thereby generate different consumer tastes and wants. Topics investigated in this study present numerous possibilities and opportunities for further research. Eventually, developing a model regarding the impact or use of flow in a design process can be further studied with fashion designers. For example, it is possible to look into different design groups such as industrial designers vs. fashion designers, and find out whether those two types of designers go through a different process when experiencing flow.
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APPENDIX A: INSTRUCTIONS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal data collection form

_____ Male
_____ Female

Please check the best answer for your current age:
1) 25-30
2) 31-34
3) 35-40
4) 41-44
5) 44-50
6) 51 years over

Please check your highest education level
_____ High school
_____ Associate degree
_____ Bachelor’s degree
_____ Master’s degree
_____ Doctoral degree

Please write down the name of the country in which you got your final education?
______________________________

Please write down your number of years of experience as a designer. _________________

Please write down your current position as a designer. ________________________________

How many hours per week do you spend designing on average?
1) 0-10 hours
2) 10-20 hours
3) 21-30 hours
4) 31-40 hours
5) 41-50 hours
6) more than 50 hours

Please write down your previous experiences before you started to work in current company (or own business). ________________________________

Please check the best answer for your current area in fashion or clothing design.
_____ Women’s daily wear
_____ Women’s evening wear
_____ Women’s lingerie
_____ Men’s day wear
_____ Men’s evening wear
_____ Sportswear
Knitwear
Outerwear
Bridal wear
Accessories

What is the average age of your target customer? ________________

Please rank the following in the order of importance to the skills that apply to clothing or fashion design.

- Fit of the garment
- Patternmaking
- Constructions
- Creativity
- Inspiration
- Concept
- Sketching process
- Aesthetics
- Textiles or fabrics
- Market research
- Design research
- Design details
- Time management
- Communication with team members
- Work environment
- Target market
- Customer needs
Interview Questions

**Professional development experiences**
- Who do you design for? Who are your customers?
- What made you decide to become a fashion designer?
- How do you define yourself, fashion or apparel designer? And why?

**Creative and design process: related to work pattern**
- Could you please describe your current collections (or design, projects)?
- Can you describe your design process?
  - Is there a routine to your design process?
  - What does your design research entail?
  - How do your designs move from sketches to samples and final product?
  - What process do you use to solve problems?
- What creative skills do you use when you use design clothing?
- Do you have a team that is involved in the design process? If so, what do they do?
- What is the best environment for you to work in?

**Inspirations**
- What fuels your design ideas?
- Where do you get your creative inspiration from?
- Do you have one or more sources or inspiration that you always revisit?
- What kind of help inspire you to be creative?

**Personal Experience: Flow**
- Do you enjoy working as a designer? Why or why not?
- Have you ever gotten lost in your work, i.e., experienced flow or optimal experience during the design process?
- Do you feel anxious or frustrated with your work? If yes, when?
- Does the deadline of having to show a collection (or design) a few times a year help or hinder your creative process?
- Can you tell me more about your favorite collection or design?

**Cultural value influences**
- How is the fashion system in Korea different from other fashion systems in the world?
- Could you please describe the characteristics of Korean style or fashion?
- What are the advantages of being a Korean designer?
- What are the difficulties of being a Korean designer?
- Have you attempted to market your collections outside of Korea? If so, as a Korean designer, have you ever had any difficulties entering different markets?
Do you notice any Korean cultural elements embedded into your final output?

**Grand summary**

What is the most important aspect for designing clothes for you?
Do you have a philosophy when it comes to design? If so, was it guided by your own cultural values?
APPENDIX B: HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPROVAL

Informed Consent Document

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Fashion designers decision making process: The influence of cultural values, creativity and personal experiences in the creative design process

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This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the relationship of South Korean fashion designers’ cultural values and personal experiences to their creative design process. Additionally, we are interested in how creativity, design inspiration, and cultural values can be incorporated into a product created by designers. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a fashion designer with at least three years of experience working as a professional in a clothing company and/or as a business owner. You should not participate if you have less than three years of experiences as a designer in a clothing company.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer interview questions which will last for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. You will be asked to fill out a personal data sheet containing questions related to demographic and background information. During the interview you will be asked questions related to six categories: inspiration, cultural value influences, the creative design process, personal optimal experiences, professional development experiences, and work patterns. Additionally, the interviewer will observe a day of design activity if you agree to permit such shadowing.

Any information that will be collected during the interview and shadowing process, such as your name, brand label, sketches of work, photos, or any information that could potentially provide direct or indirect information of your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All voice records and information obtained during the interview will be kept securely locked and destroyed on or before May, 2014.

After the interview, the researcher may contact you to clarify information from the interview. After the completion of the study, a summary report of the findings will be sent to you.
RISKS
There are no risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS
If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing in-depth understanding about how South Korean cultural value and personal experience influence the creative design process.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or feelings of ill will. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Numeric codes and pseudonyms will be assigned to your interview and data sheet in order to keep your information confidential. The data will be transcribed by the researcher. The interview will be translated by me and two other translators from Korean to English. The data will be kept in password protected computer files. The records of the transcribed data will be retained for ten years and will be destroyed after that. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.
QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact the supervising professors, Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Phone: (515) 294-9919, mldmhrt@iastate.edu
- Dr. Eulanda Sanders, Phone: (515)294-7857, sanders@iastate.edu.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

********************************************************************************

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ____________________________________________________

(Participant’s Signature) __________________________ (Date)
Human Subject Approval Letter

Human Subject Approval Letter

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515-294-4566
FAX 515-294-4767

Date: 2/8/2013
To: Ja Young Hwang
31 MacKay
CC: Dr. Mary Lynn Damhorst
1088 LeBaron Hall
Eulanda Sanders
31 MacKay

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Fashion Designers Decision Making Process: The Influence of Cultural Values, Creativity and Personal Experiences in the Creative Design Process

IRB ID: 13-033

Study Review Date: 2/7/2013

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application. Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please be aware that approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the
institution(s) as required by their policies. An IRB determination of exemption in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)  
Exempt Study Review Form  

Title of Project: Fashion designers decision making process: The influence of cultural values, creativity and personal experiences in the creative design process  

Principal Investigator (PI): Ja Young Hwang  
Degrees: MFA, Ph.D candidate  
University ID: 1089582719  
Phone: 5139645087  
Email Address: jyhwang@iastate.edu  
Correspondence Address: 31 Mackay  
Department: Apparel, Event, and Hospitality Management  
College/Center/Institute: Human Science  

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS (Required when the principal investigator is a student)  
Name of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty: Mary Lynn Damhhorst and Eulanda Sanders  
University ID: 05532157017  
Phone: 294-9919  
Email Address: mlenn@iastate.edu  
Campus Address: 31 Mackay  
Department: Apparel, Event and Hospitality Management  
Type of Project: (check all that apply) ☐ Thesis/Dissertation ☐ Class Project ☐ Other (specify)  
Alternate Contact Person: Eulanda Sanders  
Email Address: sanderson@iastate.edu  
Correspondence Address: 31 Mackay  
Phone: 515-294-7857  

ASSURANCE  

☐ I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and accurate and consistent with any proposal(s) submitted to external funding agencies. Misrepresentation of the research described in this or any other IRB application may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct.  
☐ I agree to provide proper surveillance of this project to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are protected. I will report any problems to the IRB. See Reporting Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems for details.  
☐ I agree that modifications to the approved project will not take place without prior review and approval by the IRB.  
☐ I agree that the research will not take place without the receipt of permission from any cooperating institutions, when applicable.  
☐ I agree to obtain approval from other appropriate committees as needed for this project, such as the IACUC (if the research includes animals), the IBC (if the research involves biohazards), the Radiation Safety Committee (if the research involves X-rays or other radiation producing devices or procedures), etc.  
☐ I understand that approval of this project does not grant access to any facilities, materials or data on which this research may depend. Such access must be granted by the unit with the relevant custodial authority.  
☐ I agree that all activities will be performed in accordance with all applicable federal, state, local, and Iowa State University policies.  

Ja Young Hwang  
14/10/2013  
Signature of Principal Investigator  
Date  

Mary Lynn Damhhorst  
1/14/13  
Signature of Major Professor/Supervising Faculty  
Date  
(Required when the principal investigator is a student)  

Eulanda Sanders  
1/14/13  
Signature of Department Chair  
Date  

☐ I have reviewed the application and determined that departmental requirements are met, the investigator(s) has/have adequate resources to conduct the research, and the research design is scientifically sound and has scientific merit.  

For IRB  ☐ Not Research Per Federal Regulations ☐ No Human Participants  
Use Only ☐ Minimal Risk  
Review Date: 11/14/2013  
Exempt Per 45 CFR 46.101(b): ☑  
Office for Responsible Research
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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