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Apparel and textiles (AT) programs offered through colleges and universities are located in a wide variety of locations including large, cosmopolitan cities and small, rural towns. Knowing higher education serves all types of locations - *urban, suburban*, and *rural* - college is the place where all students are connecting to learn and become prepared for their respective careers in the rapidly globalizing world. Usually, it is "urban America where culture is shaped and reshaped by politics, media [fashion], and money where new jobs and technology are incubated, where big ideas start and flourish. Rural Americans- all 46 million of them - are often left on the sidelines" (Lichter & Brown, 2014, p.1). However, today there is a *rural-urban interface* that is erasing boundary lines so each can complement one another rather than compete against one another (Lichter & Brown). In today's global economy and on the heels of the most recent recession, obtaining education beyond high school appears increasingly important to improve one's economic prospects. Education also plays a critical role in the economic development of communities across the United States (Marre, 2014, p1).

Understanding this concept of complementary rural-urban education, fashion faculty aim to teach similar topics to students, yet many of these students may not have the same understanding of the concept of "fashion" and what it takes to be successful in the fashion industry. *New knowledge* is built on existing knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Considering this premise, *the researchers proposed students studying in an urban area will have different views about AT from those studying in less populated regions*. Researchers also wanted to streamline assignments to create the *rural-urban interface* in higher education using knowledge of AT. The topic of rural-urban relationships is tied to social learning and social constructivism theories whereby students learn through collaboration in a social environment given the interaction of a student's personality, behavior, and environment (Bandura & Walters, 1963) and as an interaction between the student and his/her context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The **purpose** of this study was to explore the understanding of these social learning and interaction concepts in AT curriculum (Saiki & Adomaitis, 2014) among students in different regions of the United States. The main research questions were: (1) *Will students from two regions (rural and urban) have different definitions of (a) fast fashion and (b) apparel quality? (2)If there are rural and urban differences, how are the definitions different?* The topic is **significant** because understanding how the demographics of students in AT programs can assist instructors in addressing student learning needs. It can also guide instructors in working with varied groups of students from different locations, such as in Land Grant Universities, State Colleges and online courses taught at different locations.

The **methods** incorporated textiles classes for the sample- one class in a rural (R) Midwestern region and a second sample in an urban (U) city (NYC). These textiles courses were introduction classes that students took prior to taking most other fashion courses in their curriculum. The *Textiles* course was also the first class taken related to apparel quality in each respective program. Instructors were asked to complete an identical lesson (pre-planned together) that focused on the concept of textiles and fast fashion. A pre-lesson survey assessed students' understanding of: (1) *fast fashion*, (2) *definition of apparel quality*, and (3) *reasons why he/she buys and wear certain apparel*. A post survey was submitted after the lesson about fast fashion. The *surveys* had semi-structured questions, which prompted probing for more in-depth answers needed for qualitative data to understand students' experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000;). After the sessions, two researchers independently analyzed student responses for

repeated themes (van Manen, 1990). These themes were discussed until agreement was reached. Where needed, the frequency and percentage of students per theme were calculated. Sixty-nine students participated in the activity, 37 as part of an AT program in a R area and 32 participated in an U area.

Results were collected from an U group that consisted of students living in NYC 1-2 years (n=7; 21.8%) and over ten years (n=7; 21.8%). The majority of the students in the R group lived there over 10 years (n = 27; 73.0%). Only two (6.3%) of the U students spent less than $100 per month on clothing with most spending $100-500 and one spending as much as $2000. While 36 (97.3%) of the R group spent less than $100 per month and the maximum amount was $200. With regards to the pre-survey question "How can you classify garments according to pre and post the development of fast fashion?" students in the U area (n=27; 84.3%) and the R area (n=5; 13.5%) did not respond to the questions. The students in the U area who did answer the question responded accurately with statements, describing fast fashion as cheap, quick to make, and low quality. These responses were also found among the R students. However, the R group made inaccurate descriptions of clothing pre and post fast fashion. Common errors were fast fashion meant the garment was not home-made or was made from natural fibers (n=5; 13.5%). The most common miss understanding was fast fashion was prior to mass production (n = 10; 27.0%). Two R students stated the opposite of the truth that fast fashion was higher quality and more durable than apparel pre fast fashion. Other students accurately described parts of the definition of fast fashion, such as the poor fit, but did not detail the entire concept. Post lesson survey responses by both groups were accurate.

The groups defined quality in a similar manner with textiles used and garment construction as the most common response. However, the R group noted durability (n=20; 54%) and garment construction (n=17; 45.9%) were important and the U group emphasized textiles used (n=23; 71.8%). The R group noted price (n=29; 78.4%) and fit (n=13; 35.1%) were the most important considerations in purchasing apparel. The U group emphasized price (n=12;37.5%), textiles used (n=10; 31.3%), and fit (n=9; 28.1%). The R group noted additional aesthetic characteristics that influenced their purchasing including personal feelings, color, shape, and decoration. Style and occasion were also important to them. Both groups emphasized *comfort* in their decision to wear clothing (n= 35; 50.7%) and fit (n=19; 27.5%).

Discussion: The concepts of fast fashion and AT quality are critical for students enrolled in AT programs to learn. The responses to open ended questions focused on fast-fashion and apparel quality were different. Students studying in the R area described fast fashion *incorrectly* upon the start of the learning exercise. The results could be explained by the lack of retailers in the area, such as H&M that emphasize fast-fashion, in addition to the lack of exposure to luxury retailers, where U students are very familiar. As one U student noted, *"Aside from price, the brand [name] that is an important reason to purchase."* As far as apparel quality is concerned, the responses were similar between the two groups of students. The R students emphasized *durability* and *garment construction* to define quality. The U students emphasized *textiles* due to *exposure* to fabric shops and the ability to collect fabric swatches, nevertheless R students needed prompting for discussion of that garment feature. *Utility* was important to the R group as they sought garments that lasted long at a particular price. The R group was more sensitive to appearance characteristics of a garment when wearing. U students were extremely price sensitive and sought apparel with a designer appearance.

The results mainly have *implications* on teaching students in different regions. Providing more immersing experiences for R students may help them understand fast fashion and product variety in textiles (e.g. images of stores, online study, field trips). In addition, the U students could be taught by discussing their experiences with fast fashion and variety in textiles. Further research could examine the effectiveness of these teaching methods. In addition, the themes found could be the foundation for a quantitative survey to measure perceptions or degree of understanding fast fashion and quality among students living in different regions.

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