

Motherhood: A Visualization of Internal Tension

Caroline Schumm, Iowa State University
Mentor: Eulanda Sanders, Iowa State University

Contextual Review and Concept

Artists and designers have been portraying mothers and motherhood for centuries, with the Madonna & Child considered by many as the most quintessential portrayal of motherhood (Finkel, 2018; Lanigan, 2019). Many of these portrayals are expressed from the lens of a child to the mother or the idea of “motherly love” (Finkel, 2018; Lanigan, 2019; Yotka, 2020). Despite the various depictions of motherhood, few depict the polarity of emotions and experiences of being a mother.

The idea of motherhood represented in the media is viewed as the “ideal” and shapes the way society views motherhood and mothers, setting the tone and messaging of modern motherhood (Sullivan, 2014; Chae, 2014). Since the 1950s the motherhood narrative has been one of perfection (Chae, 2014). After the 1980s, the widely accepted narrative of motherhood is that mothers must be educated, affluent, domestic queens, but now with added pressure to be titans of industry (Sullivan, 2014; Chae, 2014). Women gain a sense of identity from motherhood, but at the same time feel that they have lost their identity or who they are to the many roles and responsibilities that come with being a mother (Astbury, 1994). Motherhood could be said to be a world of contrasting ideas, thoughts, and experiences (Miller, 2007). Every mother experiences motherhood differently, however the common theme that emerged from research (Miller, 2007) was that new mothers internalize society’s narrative of motherhood and how the “ideal” mother should act and look. Specifically, when confronted with the reality of motherhood, mothers were left to either accept their experiences or reject them and try to have the “ideal” motherhood experience that is portrayed in mainstream media.

Purpose

The purpose of this design was to conceptualize the internal conflicts that a mother might experience during motherhood, specifically the myriad of struggles and joys. The researcher, as a new mother, has herself struggled with the internal tension between believed expectations and lived reality. Motherhood: A Visualization of Internal Tension is a visual representation of the researcher's own felt internal tensions as a new mother. The researcher was purposeful in selecting a design and techniques that would visually portray the duality of emotions in motherhood (Chae, 2014; Miller, 2007; Sullivan, 2014).

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

The end wearable art ensemble visually portrays the struggle but also the beauty that is innate in motherhood. It includes a crown, veil, and gown. At the top of the ensemble the model dons a bright golden crown, similar to how the Virgin Mary is portrayed in the Madonna and Child (Finkel, 2018; Lanigan, 2019), but her face is covered by a black veil, representing a loss of

identity (Astbury, 1994). The leather straps and fitted skirt constrain the models movement, representing the constraints that mothers feel in their daily lives. The sheer bodice is highlighting the model's breasts, representing both the life-giving nature of motherhood, and society's idealized representation of mothers as goddesses or saints (Finkel, 2018). At the base of the skirt are handcrafted flower petals that add a balancing "pop" of color and delicateness representing the joy and love felt and given by mothers to their children. All techniques used within the ensemble were purposeful. Soft delicate fabrics were used with melted, singed ends creating the ethereal feeling of the flowers. A slashing technique with bright colors seen under the frayed edges of the black satin was used to represent the polarity of emotions experienced within motherhood.

Process, Technique, and Execution

Crown. The crown was constructed out of 50 wooden skewers adhered to a ¾" wide headband. The skewers and headband were spray painted metallic gold. Atop of each golden skewer the researcher adhered gold glass seed beads and added metallic gold twigs and leaves. For the final piece of the crown the researcher hand constructed 8 black chiffon flowers that were placed on top of the golden skewers.

Blusher. The blusher veil consists of two layers of black tulle. The tulle was gathered at a 10:1 ratio to create a full blusher, and hand stitched onto a 4 inch hair comb. The researcher then hand beaded black crystal beads on the blusher to finish it.

Gown. The mermaid style gown was created through traditional flat patterning and couture construction techniques. A first sample was created and adjusted as needed for fit and design adherence. For the skirt a stitching and slashing technique (Pingki et al., 2017) was used on each of the 7 panels creating the fitted skirt. To create the slashing, scrap fabrics, including a number of gold, ivory, and pink satins, gold and copper organza, and a variety of blue and purple silky satin prints were layered between the outer and inner shells. The scrap fabric was laid out with the dark blues and purples at the top descending to bright yellows and golds at the bottom. The researcher then sewed a pattern using free motion embroidery through all layers of fabric for each panel piece. All layers of fabric except the last layer were slashed through between the stitch lines to create the textile surface design. The full bottom of the skirt is double layered with a bottom layer of black satin with a ¼" circle hem and top layer of black chiffon that the researcher purposefully did not hem. Flower petals and beads were hand stitched down to the top chiffon layer of the skirt. The flower petals were created out of the same scrap fabric used for the stitching and slashing technique. To create the petal appearance, the researcher used two different techniques. The first technique used a four step process: (1) cut the scrap fabric into varying circle sizes (2" diameter to 5" diameter) and (2) slash into the circle towards the center without cutting all the way through, (3) fold fabric in half twice creating a triangle, and (4) place fabric triangle into a flame to singe the ends and create the appearance of a petal. The second technique omitted steps two and three, the full fabric circle was placed into a flame to singe the edges. The bodice of the gown was draped. The straps are made of faux leather while the bodice is black chiffon. Black crystal beads were hand beaded onto the left side of the bodice mimicking the beads on the blusher. The lining has gathered tulle to create a more pronounced mermaid silhouette. The closures on the gown include an invisible zipper at center back and a 1" x 2"

swatch of velcro on the faux leather strap at center back.

Contribution and Innovation

This design evokes an emotional response from viewers, allowing them to visually see the tension, polarities, and beauty that are inherent in motherhood. *Motherhood: A Visualization of Internal Tension* builds upon and extends current research related to motherhood by emphasizing and centralizing the feelings and experiences a new mother feels. Further it incorporates couture techniques with non-traditional materials and surface designs to create an innovative wearable art ensemble.

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