



Handwashing Sequins: A Comparison of the Inclusion of Design Characteristics Impacting Ease of Care and Durability in Girls' and Boys' Lower-Body Garments

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Garment ease of care and durability are important parts of larger frameworks of apparel evaluative criteria. Such frameworks (e.g., Hsu & Burns, 2002) help us understand consumers' apparel consumption. Apparel care requirements repeatedly have been shown to impact consumers' purchase intention (Beaudoin, Moore, and Goldsmith, 2000; Eckman, Damhorst, & Kadolph, 1990; Ha-Brookshire & Norum, 2011), and garments that are easy to care for are preferred over those that require more time or expense to care for, such as ironing, or dry-cleaning. Similarly, durability has been an important apparel evaluative criterion for consumers (Beaudoin, Moore, & Goldsmith, 2000; Forsythe, Presley, & Calon, 1996). Durability means the garment will maintain good condition for a long time. The materials selected by garment designers largely impact garment ease of care and durability. Additionally, some construction techniques can enhance garment durability in selected areas. These design choices result in *design characteristics* that positively or negatively impact garment ease of care and durability. While ease of care and durability are important to the design of childrenswear, there has not been a previous investigation of the frequency of inclusion of *design characteristics* that positively or negatively impact these factors.

Ease of care. Clothing for children undergoes harsh treatment through daily activities such as art (e.g., spilled paint), outdoor play, and eating (Jaffe and Rosa, 1979), which results in the need for frequent laundering (Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, & Hughes, 2013). Therefore, it is prescribed that childrenswear should be easy to maintain at home (Jaffe and Rosa, 1979; Joseph-Armstrong, 2010). Design characteristics that can improve ease of care at the product design level include the selection of fabrics with applied finishes (Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, & Hughes, 2013), including shrink-resistant, wrinkle-resistant, and stain-resistant (Brown & Rice 2014). Handwash-only fabric in childrenswear is a design characteristic that makes care difficult, resulting in the garment being incorrectly laundered, leading to shrinkage or fading that reduces longevity (Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, & Hughes, 2013).

Durability. Durability is an essential component in fabric and trims for childrenswear due to frequent laundering (Keiser & Garner, 2008) and active lifestyles that result in high levels of clothing stress and strain (Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, & Hughes, 2013). Durable materials ensure that garments will last longer, reducing household spending and environmental impact. The selection of seams and design features such as reinforced knees are vital as they are subject to the most stress during dressing and active play (Perry, 1999). Fabrics such as twill, a

firmly woven fabric (Fashionary, 2018), are durable to accommodate this stress (Perry, 1999). Many trims such as foil, rhinestones, or sequins (Fashionary, 2018) are design characteristics that do not enhance durability as they may quickly be rubbed or broken off.

Method

Online product descriptions for 1069 (584 girls; 485 boys) lower-body garments (e.g., skirts, skorts, leggings, shorts, jeans, athletic pants, casual bottoms) from the two largest childrenswear specialty retailers and the two largest discount department stores in the United States were evaluated (Kalyani, 2019; O'Connor, 2018; O'Connor, 2019). The text of the product descriptions regarding design characteristics negatively and positively impacting care and durability were analyzed. This research is part of a more extensive study examining the functional design characteristics found in the design of girls' and boys' lower-body garments.

Findings

Ease of care. Overall, children's lower-body garments were only somewhat aligned with the prescribed design characteristics needed to ensure ease of care. Design characteristics such as fabric treatments, including resistance to shrinkage, wrinkling, and stains, were found, yet less than a quarter of the children's garments included a treatment that improved ease of care for caretakers. Significantly fewer options were available for girls, with boys having over twice as many lower-body garment options with each treatment. Additionally, only five occurrences of wrinkle resistance treatment were found in garments only available to girls, including skirts, skorts, leggings, and jeggings. Over 25% of girls' garments were designed with negative ease of care characteristics that impact the ease of care and reduce pant longevity (Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, & Hughes, 2013). Alarming was the significantly higher rate at which these negative characteristics appeared in skirts and skorts, with several having more than one negative characteristic (e.g., sequins and handwash). Stark differences were found between the girls' and boys' garments related to laundering instructions, with 72 girls' garments requiring hand washing and zero boys' garments requiring this.

Durability. Analysis revealed that few children's pants were made with twill fabric or reinforced knees, which is found to increase the durability of childrenswear (Perry, 1999); however, these characteristics were more common for boys' garments than girls' garments. The positive design characteristics, including twill fabric and reinforced knees, occurred in more than three times as many boys' garments than girls', exposing a stark discrepancy in the inclusion of positive durability design characteristics among the gendered clothing segments. The majority of the girls' garments analyzed were found to have at least one negative design characteristic that impacted durability in the form of non-durable embellishments, which had even higher occurrences in skirts and skorts. Findings exposed that girls' garments designs were not aligned with children's apparel design literature that non-durable trims shorten garment lifespan (Keiser & Garner, 2008; Cooper, Hill, Kininmonth, Townsend, and Hughes, 2013). It is important to note that no boys' garments included sequins, foil, or rhinestones. However, most concerning

was that where most girls' garments included a negative durability design characteristic, not one of the boys' garments was found to include any negative durability characteristics.

Implications

Designers should include more design characteristics that positively impact durability and ease of care in children's lower body garments and stop including design characteristics that negatively impact durability and ease of care. Further, designers should be attentive to choosing design characteristics that make girls' and boys' clothing equally durable and easy to care for. Such efforts may improve consumers' purchase intention and evaluation of childrenswear lower body garments. Improvements can also support sustainability by extending garment lifespans. Because designers do not work in a vacuum, it is key that change initiates from the company's upper levels. Thus, future research may investigate how apparel firms select major change initiatives and successfully implement them. Researchers have many opportunities to advance the theoretical and practical knowledge needed to effect these changes.

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