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Abstract

Through in-depth interviews, the study explored fashion industry professionals' viewpoints, on creativity, focusing on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed. Four creative, traits were identified, including different thought processes, determination, having an open mind, and, risk taking. About one-third of participants believed that creativity is innate, and therefore, some, people were born creative whereas others were not. Another third of participants maintained that, everyone has some creative potential that can be further developed. The remaining fashion, professionals distinguished artistic creativity from creative problem solving. Suggested strategies for, creativity enhancement and development included (1) practicing creative thinking strategies, (2), formal training, (3) diverse experiences and exposure to the world; and (4) creating a safe, yet, challenging environment.

Keywords

Fashion industry, Creative traits, Development strategies

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Industrial and Product Design | Place and Environment

Comments

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Fashion Industry Professionals' Viewpoints on Creative Traits and Strategies for Creativity Development

1. Introduction

Creativity has been studied from the diverse perspectives of business, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, and art, among others (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Creativity's multi-dimensional nature, which encompasses individual traits and behaviors as well as the interaction between creative individuals, their ideas, and society, makes it difficult to define and capture the phenomenon (Runco, 2004). According to creativity experts, human creative potential is a virtually limitless resource that defies racial, social, economic, and gender categorization ("Engineering Research..." 2006; Florida, 2002). Creativity can be cultivated, developed, and practiced (Michalko, 2006). The suggested ways in which to increase creativity vary, however. Popular press titles include strategies such as journaling, daily artistic and reflective activities, games, and heeding intuitive beliefs and feelings (Maisel, 2000; Makridakis, 2013; von Oech, 2003).

In the global and highly competitive fashion industry creativity is very important. According to Jennings (2011), "creativity is the backbone of fashion design" (p.13). Other researchers argue that regardless of the primary job focus, from creative design to sales to museum work, creativity, and especially creative problem solving, is essential in the fashion business (Karpova, Marcketti, & Barker, 2011). Despite its importance, there have been a limited number of studies on creativity within the fashion field. Danielson (1986) surveyed fifty-five contemporary fashion illustrators to provide insight into their creative processes to enrich classroom teaching on the subject. Eckert and Demeid (2001) analyzed the ways in which the design process was influenced by differing business models of knitwear companies. The

24 researchers examined the ways in which students and professionals used sources for inspiration
25 for knitwear design. A qualitative investigation that focused on British fashion designers
26 advocated for research on innovation in the creative industries (Malem, 2008). At the 2008
27 Apparel Executive Forum keynote presentation, Patty Devlin of Play, a consulting company,
28 urged designers to “seek a diversity of inspiration” by incorporating different perspectives in the
29 workplace, becoming comfortable with ambiguity, and promoting risk-taking or “passion in
30 action:” key aspects identified in the literature for enhancing creativity (Speer, 2008).

31 Professionals in creative industries observe, practice, exchange, adapt, and cultivate
32 creative strategies as part of their daily routines. Documenting, interpreting, and understanding
33 their experiences, views, and insights regarding creativity will help advance our knowledge
34 about this complex and important phenomenon. This study explored fashion industry
35 professionals’ viewpoints on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed.
36 Educators can utilize the information presented in the study to better understand the creativity
37 phenomenon as experienced by industry insiders and use the strategies mentioned to enhance
38 their students’ creativity. In the same vein, industry practitioners can use the research findings to
39 cultivate their own creativity as well as that of their employees.

40 **1.1. Traits of Creative People**

41 The research on the relationship between personality and creativity is well established
42 and has grown in popularity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feist, 1998; Furnham & Bachtier, 2008;
43 Selby, Shaw, & Houtz, 2005). Many personal characteristics have been associated with creativity
44 (Selby et al., 2005). One of the pioneering studies analyzed United States’ Air Force captains,
45 and determined that certain characteristics were correlated with creativity including a preference

46 for complexity, independent judgment in a group situation, dominance, and impulsiveness
47 (Barron, 1955).

48 Building on Barron (1955), MacKinnon (1962) assessed the relationship between
49 creativity and personality in well known, highly creative architects. He supported Barron's
50 findings by noting a strong correlation between creativity and preference for complexity. Other
51 important characteristics identified included motivation to achieve, flexibility in thought, self-
52 acceptance, and self-confidence. Due to the intense and somewhat arduous nature of creativity,
53 creative individuals must be passionate (Rentzulli, Koehler, & Fogarty, 2006; Selby et al., 2005).
54 This passion provides the much needed discipline, motivation, and focused energy needed in
55 creativity (Rentzulli et al., 2006; Amabile; 1989). Numerous other studies reported various traits
56 associated with creativity. These included divergent thinking, openness, and preference for
57 challenge (Amabile, 1989; Furnham & Bachtiar, 2008; Rentzulli, Sytsma, & Berman, 2000).

58 Researchers have argued that creativity requires steps beyond cognition. Sternberg
59 (1985; 2006) concluded that creative thinking was comprised of three skills: (a) seeing problems
60 outside of conventional boundaries, (b) differentiating between ideas worth pursuing and those
61 that were not, and (c) marketing one's ideas to others. Lubart and Sternberg (1997) established a
62 correlation between taking risks and being creative. However, they suggested this correlation
63 was present only in specific domains. For example, the correlation between taking risks and
64 levels of creativity was significant among artists, but not fiction writers. Despite many efforts
65 devoted to determining which traits can serve as predictors of creativity, there has been little
66 agreement on creative personal characteristics.

67 **1.2. Developing Creativity**

68 Since the 1990s, there has been increased interest in creativity training (Mumford, 2003).
69 Various strategies for creativity development have been proposed and tested (Bull, Montgomery,
70 & Baloché, 1995; Selby et al., 2005; Sternberg, 2006). Torrance (1987), in a two-part study,
71 evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies: (1) Osborn-Parnes Creative Problem Solving
72 program which included brainstorming and productive thinking, divergent thinking strategies,
73 questioning assumptions, and creative problem solving techniques; (2) interdisciplinary
74 approaches; (3) use of packaged materials (e.g., those by Purdue Creativity Program); (4) use of
75 media and reading to practice skills; (5) emphasis on practice through artistic endeavors; (6)
76 favorable learning environment; and (7) external motivation (e.g., rewards). Part one of his study
77 analyzed 143 studies of creativity training courses used with children from kindergarten through
78 grade 12. The most effective strategies included the Osborn-Parnes program and interdisciplinary
79 approaches. The least effective strategy was an attempt to create an ideal learning environment.
80 Part two of the study analyzed a total of 242 studies: 166 at the elementary and secondary levels
81 and 76 at the college/adult level. When applying divergent thinking to real life scenarios, such as
82 developing and evaluating new products, the college/adult level students had a much higher
83 success rate than grade school students. Torrance (1987) concluded that training and practice in
84 real-life problem solving improved creativity.

85 More recently, Bull et al. (1995) explored formal creativity training from an educational
86 perspective. After reviewing 67 creativity course syllabi, the authors surveyed 103 creativity
87 instructors and asked them to identify the importance of course criteria. The instructors
88 responded that general theories and models were of very little importance; rather, they
89 emphasized using humor, imagination, analogy/metaphor, and increasing student understanding
90 of creativity. One of the highest ranked criteria was having a safe environment where students

91 felt secure and free to explore their creativity. Other highly ranked criteria included eliminating
92 creativity blocks and creating a climate that fostered creativity.

93 Scott, Leritz, and Mumford (2004) outlined six methods for developing creativity: (1)
94 changing or improving the environment; (2) motivating through incentives; (3) building
95 expertise; (4) enhancing career development experiences; (5) facilitating group work and
96 interaction; and (6) training and education, which was the most favored. The most successful
97 training programs focused the development of training content on the core practices of
98 opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea evaluation (Scott et al., 2004).

99 Cropley (1997) and Nickerson (1999) disagreed on the length of time needed to develop
100 creativity. Cropley insisted that creativity could not be developed through short term
101 intervention. His strategy for teaching creativity relied on five principles: (1) building skills; (2)
102 practicing these skills through exercises; (3) encouraging novelty; (4) evaluating students'
103 progress and errors openly; and (5) giving a mixture of group and individual assignments. The
104 author stressed that students needed to learn and practice creative thinking skills over time.
105 Nickerson (1999) agreed that practice was necessary, but held that short term interventions were
106 successful when they focused on honing specific skills. Those skills could then be practiced
107 throughout a lifetime.

108 Scholars suggest that there are varying levels of creativity. Selby et al. (2005) identified
109 four levels of creativity: (1) not yet evident; (2) emerging; (3) expressing; and (4) excelling.
110 Similarly, Sternberg (2006) highlighted different types of creativity from “minor replications to
111 major redefinitions” (p. 95). Sternberg’s studies of elementary, middle school, and high school
112 participants, suggested that students performed better when instruction was tailored to each

113 child's ability level. It was noted that in order to be effective educators, instructors must
114 understand their own creativity (Selby et al., 2005; Sternberg 2006).

115 Identifying creative traits and nurturing them in students and young professionals today is
116 more important than ever (Florida, 2002). A National Science Foundation's report urged that
117 creative individuals within all disciplines will be central for continued U.S. prosperity and
118 security in the 21st century ("Engineering Research..." 2006). Recently, however, research
119 indicates that for the first time in decades, American creativity is declining (Bronson &
120 Merryman, 2010).

121 2. Method

122 To explore fashion industry professionals' views on traits of creative people and how
123 creativity can be nurtured in individuals, a qualitative methodology was used to obtain "rich" or
124 "thick" data (Esterberg, 2002). This approach allowed participants to talk about the topic in their
125 own words and describe their everyday experiences, ideas, and opinions (van Manen, 1990). To
126 address the purpose of the study, the authors developed an interview protocol consisting of open
127 ended questions. Following the interview protocol ensured a systematic approach to data
128 collection (Kvale, 1996). Participants were asked to talk about their professional preparation and
129 career path in the industry. Questions regarding traits of creative individuals and how creativity
130 could be developed and strategies for that purpose were also asked. Examples of questions from
131 the interview protocol included: "Please describe positions/jobs in your company that require
132 creative people? Could you give examples?", "What characteristics do these creative people
133 have?", "Do you think creativity can be developed? Do you think it can be taught? Why? How
134 can it be fostered?" Probing questions were used to encourage participants to provide additional
135 information. Prior the interview, each participant was informed that (1) the researchers were

136 interested in their personal opinions and viewpoints and (2) her/his responses and identities
137 would remain confidential, in that quotes and research results would not be linked to their or
138 their companies' names.

139 The research was approved by the institutional review board of a land-grant Midwestern
140 University. A purposive, snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit research participants
141 and ensure collection of relevant data (Esterberg, 2002). The authors contacted graduates of their
142 apparel program and invited them to participate in the study. The program has both design and
143 merchandising specializations, and both are in the top twenty fashion design and fashion
144 merchandising programs in the USA, according to the 2013 Fashion Schools' rating (2013a;
145 2013b). The program awards Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy
146 degrees and has a total of 500+ students. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked
147 to recommend other industry professionals to invite to participate in the research. Individual,
148 semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect the data. Each participant received the
149 interview protocol in advance so that they had a chance to review the questions prior to the
150 interview. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio taped. The length of the
151 interviews ranged from one to two hours. All interviews were transcribed to facilitate data
152 analysis.

153 A phenomenological interpretive approach was used to analyze the data. First, interview
154 transcripts were analyzed by the researchers individually through an iterative part-to-whole
155 process (McCracken, 1988). The analyses and interpretation resulted in the emergence of
156 significant themes that described participants' experiences and perceptions related to creative
157 people and creativity development (van Manen, 1990). Next, the researchers worked together to
158 compare, discuss, and finalize emergent themes into a consistent whole utilizing a back-and-

159 forth, part-to-whole process of interpretation (Spiggle, 1994). The data analysis process revealed
160 saturation, in which concepts became redundant, i.e., thoroughly explained and reiterated by the
161 interview participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, the researchers' stopped collecting data.
162 The final themes were shared with the apparel program's industry advisory board members, who
163 had no objections, nor further suggestions regarding the research results.

164 **2.1. Participants**

165 Twenty-eight fashion industry professionals were interviewed. Professionals came from
166 diverse company backgrounds, positions, regions of the country, and with a range of 2 to 30
167 years of experience in the industry. Half of the participants had been working in the industry
168 between 5 and 9 years. One quarter of the participants had been in the industry between 10 and
169 20 years, and another seven professionals had been working in the industry for between 21 and
170 30 years. Twenty out of the total 28 participants graduated from the apparel program with which
171 the researchers are associated. These participants graduated from the program between 2 to 25
172 years ago. Professionals represented small, medium, and large size firms located throughout the
173 United States. Half of the participants were from the Northeast region (New York City) that is
174 considered the center of the U.S. fashion industry (Rantisi, 2002). Ten professionals were from
175 the Midwestern region, where the apparel program is located. The rest of the participants were
176 from the South or Southwestern region.

177 In this study, industry was defined as a cluster of related businesses, including
178 manufacturing, distribution, auxiliary, research/consultant and educational institutions (Rantisi,
179 2002; Scott, 2006). We strived to recruit participants who represented a wide range of companies
180 and jobs/positions within the industry. Companies in the study were from mass market and
181 specialty retailers to manufacturers and apparel import intermediaries to designer's houses and

182 educational institutions. All companies were involved in some part of the apparel supply chain
183 from product design and development, production, distribution, wholesale, and retail. In terms of
184 jobs, participants represented both design and business sides of the industry. For example, five
185 participants were lead or associate designers and two were product development managers. Four
186 had a position of vice president (VP) of design or creative director/product development director.
187 One participant was VP of merchandising and two were VP of sales. Four professionals were
188 entrepreneurs. Three professionals were educators, all with significant (15+ years) fashion
189 industry experience.

190 Reflecting the gender distribution of most fashion programs, the majority of interviewees
191 were females; five participants (18%) were male. Due to stipulations of the companies and as
192 stated in the informed consent document provided to participants, no participant or company
193 names are utilized. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper. It should be noted that none of
194 the participants received formal creative thinking courses, workshops, seminars, or other
195 training. **This was appropriate for our research purpose: to explore fashion industry
196 professionals' viewpoints on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed.**

197 **3. Results**

198 Interpretive analyses of the interviews narrative resulted in eleven major themes. The
199 themes formed three topical areas: (a) traits of creative people, (b) origins of creativity, and (c)
200 strategies for developing creativity. The three topical areas explored fashion industry
201 professionals' experiences and viewpoints on characteristics of creative people and development
202 of creativity.

203 **3.1. Topical Area One: Traits of Creative People**

204 Participants consistently discussed four traits of creative people. These included: (a)
205 different thought processes; (b) determination; (c) having an open mind; and (d) risk taking.

206 *3.1.1. Different Thought Processes*

207 Participants insisted that, based on their experiences, creative people were typically set
208 apart by their different thought processes. As May, a vice president of sales for an apparel
209 manufacturing company, explained, “Creativity to me is thinking of things in a new way.” One
210 of the often used creative thinking descriptors was the ability to look at a problem from different
211 perspectives: “...looking at something in a different way” (Lana, chief officer, merchandising).
212 Another common response was deriving multiple, rather than just one, possible solutions to a
213 problem. This was perceived as critical to the creative thinking process: “You have to have that
214 mind where you want to think of ten ways to fix it” (Ella, a designer for a high-end fashion
215 company). Participants believed that creative people tended to have multiple and diverse inputs
216 (perceptions of a problem) as well as outputs (ideas or solutions) that led to evidence of their
217 creativity.

218 *3.1.2. Determination*

219 Another quality of creative people discussed by the participants can be described as
220 “determination.” Fashion professionals talked about an internal or intrinsic motivation that drove
221 creative people to not give up easily and to have passion and persistence. For example, “You
222 have to have that drive and that passion to want to figure things out and to be creative in that way
223 and to try hard!” (Ella, a designer). According to Lynn, a vice president of merchandising, “It
224 takes the willingness, the drive to be able to *want* to get it done.” In addition to passion,
225 participants believed that it was critical to have determination and persistence to see ideas
226 realized: “If I put my mind to something, I’ll follow through and do it. Some people are not that

227 way. I'm very self-motivated" (Jess, a designer). Another professional agreed: "I don't take 'no'
228 for an answer" (Lana, a chief officer, merchandising). Participants agreed that creative people
229 thrive in a challenging environment. They become bored with a routine and create challenges for
230 themselves. Moreover, they challenge people around them by constantly asking questions and
231 proposing new ideas. As Travis, a vice president of design explained, "You're challenging
232 everything, every status quo, at every level. I mean, I challenge everyone [I work with]. I
233 challenge production people all the time. I'm challenging merchants. I'm challenging
234 factories."

235 *3.1.3. Risk Taking*

236 New ideas are often associated with risk. Participants believed that willingness to take
237 risks is a characteristic of creative people: "Taking risks, trying something new, not being afraid
238 of [the] unknown" (Helen, a sales manager). This quality was frequently described as "pushing
239 the envelope." A certain degree of self-confidence was needed to be willing to expose yourself,
240 along with your ideas, to others' critiques: "You have to be willing to...just speak up your mind
241 and tell them what you think. That is kind of scary, but much appreciated in the industry because
242 if you have a great idea but you don't say anything, no one will know" (Alice, a senior business
243 analyst). Another professional stated lack of motivation and fear as a reason people do not take
244 risk. James, a creative director stated: "Why are you willing to risk? You have a good life. You
245 know, you have everything you need. Why risk everything you have?" Clara, a fashion educator,
246 summarized this characteristic, "The creative individuals are those that are not afraid to fail and
247 not afraid to have something to go wrong. ...I think to be really creative you have to be willing
248 to take risk."

249 *3.1.4. Having an Open Mind*

250 Participants noted that having an open mind was an essential trait of creative people.
251 According to Bob, an associate designer, “I think creativity is like welcoming all positions and
252 opinions on things and to not discredit people because their ideas are not the same as yours. So
253 creativity to me is open-mindedness.” Being open-minded also included characteristics of
254 adaptability and flexibility, “Some people are more flexible and have more open thought process.
255 So, they might do better in creativity” (Lana, a chief officer, merchandising).

256 Even after identifying specific traits and characteristics of creative individuals such as
257 different thinking processes, determination, risk taking, and having an open mind, the creativity
258 phenomenon remained something of a mystery to the participants. One participant expressed his
259 amazement with the wonder of creative thinking: “And they think about something in a
260 completely different way! I’m...just... ‘How in the hell did he think of that?’” (Travis, a vice
261 president of design). It was not easy for the participants to precisely state distinguishing
262 creativity traits. As a result, some participants relied on platitudes to define creativity, such as
263 “thinking outside the box” or “having a fresh eye.”

264 **3.2. Topical Area Two: Origins of Creativity**

265 This topical area explored fashion industry professionals’ viewpoints on the origins of
266 creativity—whether it was innate or if it could be acquired and learned. Participants’ opinions on
267 the topic formed three almost equal groups. Slightly more than one-third of the participants
268 believed that everyone can be creative (11 professionals). This group agreed that creativity is a
269 skill that can be learned, practiced, and mastered. In contrast, slightly less than one-third of the
270 participants viewed creativity as an inborn trait, meaning that some people are born creative
271 while others are not (9 professionals). The remaining professionals (8 participants) approached
272 the question depending upon how they defined creativity, as either a creative problem-solving

273 skill or an artistic talent. This group believed that creative problem-solving skills can be taught
274 much more easily than artistic creativity, which might be impossible for everyone to acquire. It
275 should be noted that all three groups were well represented by artistically talented professionals,
276 i.e. fashion designers, as well as professionals from the business side of the industry including
277 buyers and merchandisers.

278 *3.2.1. Everyone is Creative*

279 Eleven participants believed that all people have a creative potential. Accordingly, they
280 maintained that everyone can be creative through developing the way one thinks and practicing
281 creative thinking strategies: “I think creativity can be taught, to some extent. Some people are
282 more creative than others, but you definitely can learn it. You can learn, you know, to develop
283 your mind” (Clara, a fashion educator). Dave, a freelance designer, agreed, “Yes, it can be
284 taught, to an extent. I think there’s a natural ability to be creative, as well as self-developed, or
285 taught creativity.”

286 This group of participants believed that everyone who *wants* to be creative can learn
287 creative thinking skills through work and practice, “It does take a lot of practice and if people are
288 constantly challenged and have to stretch their brain” (Lana, chief officer, merchandising). In
289 addition, motivation and determination were cited as critical to the process of becoming creative;
290 even if the skills and behaviors might come easier to some individuals than others. According to
291 Kelly, a fashion educator, “You can teach creativity. It’s just harder for some. Some are very
292 visual, and very talented, and it comes very easily to them. And I think you can become a lot
293 better at it. It’s like a piano player. Some people can just sit down and play the piano, and others
294 have to practice.”

295 *3.2.2. Not Everyone Is Creative*

296 Nine participants believed that some people are naturally creative, while others are not.
297 When trying to explain the reasons behind the difference, participants used words such as
298 ‘intuition’ or ‘gut feeling’. May, a designer, explained this relevant to her creative design
299 domain: “[Creativity is] to have an intuitive sense, to have an intuitive understanding of what is
300 attractive or new.” She stressed that one can further enhance creativity if he/she had an “innate
301 sense of creativity to begin with.” Similarly, another professional maintained that creativity was
302 an innate trait, “You either have it, or you don’t, in a sense. You can teach people to use
303 resources that are out there to get ideas. But you have to have some of it just ingrained in you”
304 (Alice, a senior business analyst). In the same vein, Helen, a sales manager for a designer’s
305 house, offered another explanation: “I think you either have it, or you don’t. It’s not a formula. It
306 comes from your gut.”

307 These participants agreed that creativity could be developed, or enhanced in people who
308 are born creative. Consequently, they maintained creativity cannot be taught to people who were
309 born uncreative. As Sandy, a lead designer, noted, “I do think that, unfortunately, some people
310 are really not creative. Their minds just don’t really work that way. I’m not sure if you can truly
311 teach creativity. You definitely can develop it [if you have it].” Travis, a vice president of design,
312 went further and divided all people into three groups in terms of creative potential and
313 manifestation, “There’re some people who get it very quickly. There’re some who have it, and
314 they don’t realize they have it, and they have to tap into it and figure out how to dust off all
315 roadblocks that they have. And then there’re some people that just can’t do it. It’s just not in
316 their DNA. It’s not something that they can do.” This group maintained that people naturally had
317 different potential in creativity, “I think some people will never be creative because they just

318 can't be. In the same way some people can't think logically, or can't process something that's
319 happening that's not supposed to happen" (Tracy, a textile designer).

320 *3.2.3. Problem Solving versus Artistic Creativity*

321 Finally, eight professionals distinguished between creative problem solving and artistic
322 creativity. Consequently, this determined the group's view on teaching creativity, "Can creativity
323 be taught? It depends on what type of creativity. There are different types of creativity. There's
324 problem solving, and there's design" (Amber, an associate designer). Like Natalie, an apparel
325 store owner, these participants believed that not everyone can learn artistic creativity but problem
326 solving skills could be taught to anyone, "Yes, you can teach creativity, and it may not apply to
327 the creativity in the artistic aspect, but the entrepreneurial thinking, the problem solving type of
328 creativity."

329 These participants agreed that everyone is capable of learning and applying creative
330 problem solving strategies, "You can teach problem solving skills. Everybody can be shown that
331 there are different options and different way of thinking through things" (Lana, chief officer,
332 merchandising). However, these professionals also believed that artistic creativity required a
333 preexisting potential, and while everyone can take art lessons, the outcomes depended upon the
334 student's innate talent:

335 I think certain level of design creativity can be taught. After a while, you can learn the
336 taste level. But there's only a certain level. I think, only certain people can be designers.

337 Either you've got it, or you don't. (Amber, an associate designer)

338 Not everybody has that aesthetic or creative eye. I think everybody can think creatively if
339 you train them, but I'm not sure that everybody has that eye to just put things together:

340 color, balance, etc. And I think, probably, some of the aesthetic creativity can be taught,
341 although some of it seems to be innate to me. (Clara, a fashion educator)

342 **3.3. Topical Area Three: Strategies for Developing Creativity**

343 Participants discussed various ways and approaches to enhancing creativity. They formed
344 four themes, or strategies for developing creativity: (a) formal training; (b) practicing creative
345 thinking; (c) exposure to the world; and (d) safe, yet challenging environment.

346 *3.3.1. Formal Training*

347 Some participants agreed that creativity could be developed through formal training such
348 as courses or workshops which did not have to be related to one's profession or college major.
349 For example, Don, a vice president of sales, advocated for art courses for developing creativity,
350 "Definitely through art classes, you know, such as drawing, painting, even music. Something that
351 isn't related to the field you are in." Elizabeth, an associate designer, noted a creative fashion
352 design course she took in college helped increase her creativity "I thought that class was really
353 cool. It definitely made me think outside the box." Beyond college courses, formal training
354 might include short workshops or seminars offered on-site by employer or at professional
355 meetings. Amber, an associate designer, explained, "[At work], we have different seminars and
356 workshops all the time, where you can go and learn things."

357 *3.3.2. Practicing Creative Thinking*

358 Professionals commented that creativity could be enhanced by learning and practicing
359 creative thinking. One of the suggested strategies was dissecting a problem and breaking it down
360 into achievable parts. As James, a creative director, explained, "Once you get a problem, you
361 look at it and then you dissect it. You kind of slice it up and you figure out, "Ok, this is the one
362 thing I can tackle." As opposed to most people [who] see the whole thing and say, "I don't know

363 what to do!” They freak out and walk away. So, what I do is I look at the problem and I break it
364 down into steps. This is a creative process.” Kelly, a fashion educator, agreed, “The problem
365 actually might not be the most visible thing. The problem might be something that’s hidden
366 behind another situation. This ability to dissect a problem, figure out what’s important, and then
367 find the solution that meets the needs. That’s where the creativity comes in.” Another strategy
368 for approaching a problem was to look at it from different perspectives, which might lead to
369 unique and original solutions. Sandy, a lead designer, suggested, “Just working your mind
370 around a problem from lots and lots of different angles is really the way to do it.”

371 Participants agreed that coming up with multiple answers, or solutions, to a problem was
372 critical for creative outcomes. Lana, a chief merchandising officer, believed that students can
373 develop the skill of seeing different answers over time, as a result of practice: “Tell students to
374 sketch twelve blouses, all with different collars and different sleeves. They are probably going to
375 come up with the first six or seven pretty easily and the last five, it’s going to be like: “Ugh!”
376 Then next week it could be: Come up with twelve different high-heeled shoes. The more you do
377 it, the easier it gets since you’re able to stretch your mind and think of different things.” Kyla, a
378 director of product development, commented that while there are many ways to stimulate
379 creativity, it was important “...to foster an environment of thinking of things in a new way and
380 looking at different vehicles, always looking for options.” Amber, an associate designer,
381 summarized creative thinking strategies as follows, “It is not to look at black and white. It is
382 getting people to look outside the box. Don’t just come up with a straight answer. There are
383 multiple answers to whatever the question is.”

384 *3.3.3. Exposure to the World*

385 It was mentioned that various cultural, artistic, and other types of activities and events,
386 including travel, were critical for creativity development. These experiences could expand one's
387 knowledge and skills, help to develop characteristics of creative people, and be a source of
388 inspiration. Emma, a vice president of technical design, noted, "I think traveling is a great way to
389 kind of open your horizons. It's really important to understand other people and to understand
390 how people live and what they perceive as beautiful. This really just opens you to ideas.
391 Traveling is one, but also just looking around and exploring, you know, going to art museum
392 doing things that you wouldn't normally do, pushing yourself."

393 Participants suggested that exposure to stimulating and diverse environments could be
394 used by companies and educators as a way to enhance creativity. Elizabeth, an associate
395 designer, described how her company encouraged employees to explore various places as a
396 source of inspiration, "We have this thing called black-out week, where we basically have a
397 week to come into the office for an hour or two, and then go out shopping and around the city to
398 find inspirations: thrift shops, sitting in a park and sketching..." As James, a creative director,
399 summarized this strategy for increasing creativity, "The more exposure I have to the world, the
400 better. So, I'm constantly challenging myself to be more exposed."

401 *3.3.4. Safe, yet Challenging Environment*

402 Participants noted that educators can further help students develop creativity by providing
403 challenging yet safe environments. According to Abby, a freelance stylist, "Giving room to be
404 creative and not setting out very strict rules. You know, have high expectations, but maybe not
405 setting up very strict rules, separating more creative people from less creative and have different
406 demands for them, different expectations for different talents." Emma, a vice president of
407 technical design, discussed this from a business perspective: "[Company X] really pushed

408 everyone in the company to think outside the box and it was really amazing because we did
409 things we really didn't think were possible." Kris, a product development manager, added:
410 "When it's a little bit more challenging, I feel, it makes you a little more creative, to think
411 outside the box, to think of different ways to do things." Lana, a chief merchandising officer,
412 reaffirmed that developing creative thinking takes practice, hard work and the right environment:
413 "I think you can teach problem solving skills, which to me is creativity. I think it does take a lot
414 of practice and if people are constantly challenged to."

415 **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

416 In this study, twenty-eight fashion industry professionals shared their viewpoints and
417 experiences related to creative traits and strategies through in-depth interviews. Research
418 participants used a variety of descriptors to define creative people. As a result of the analysis,
419 four major creative traits emerged: different thought processes, determination, having an open
420 mind, and risk taking. Professionals disagreed on the origins of creativity. About one-third of
421 participants believed that creativity is innate, and therefore, some people were born creative
422 whereas others were not. Another third of participants maintained that everyone has some
423 creative potential that can be further developed. The remaining fashion professionals
424 distinguished artistic creativity from creative problem solving. Participants that believed
425 creativity could not be learned were primarily referring to artistic creativity. Those participants
426 that maintained creativity could be enhanced were referring to creative problem solving.
427 Participants suggested that formal training including classes and workshops could be effective
428 for cultivating creativity. It was noted that constant practicing of various thinking strategies—
429 such as approaching a problem from different perspectives, dissecting a problem into pieces to
430 solve them individually, or coming up with multiple solutions—would help enhance creativity.

454 between researchers and practitioners on the origins of creativity, whether all individuals can be
455 creative, and if it can be developed or learned.

456 Regardless of whether participants viewed creativity as primarily artistic expressions or
457 problem solving skills, they described the same traits typically displayed by creative people
458 (Figure). Professionals maintained that developing certain personality traits would advance one's
459 creativity. Therefore, creative traits serve as a predisposition to creativity, which is frequently
460 defined as a three-step process: problem or opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea
461 realization or implementation (Lemons, 2005; Mumford, 2003; Sternberg, 2006). For example,
462 being open-minded and flexible helps an individual approach a problem from various
463 perspectives, while being passionate and persistent helps an individual generate multiple ideas or
464 possible solutions. Consequently, being determined, internally motivated, and open to risk taking
465 might help produce a greater number of creative ideas as well as initiative to implement the
466 ideas. Both creative traits and creativity are not "either/or"—either you have it, or you don't,
467 rather they are on a continuum. Some people are naturally more willing to take risk; others might
468 be more flexible, motivated, and/or persistent. Therefore, creative traits may be strongly
469 manifested and developed for some but could need cultivation in others.

470 Interpretation of the industry professionals' viewpoints revealed findings that appear to
471 be applicable beyond the fashion industry. Participant perspectives indicated that creative traits
472 and strategies important in the fashion industry are similar to 'general' creative traits and
473 strategies and can be applied for creativity development in various industries. For example, the
474 creative traits discussed by the participants and suggested strategies to enhance creativity are not
475 unique to the fashion industry. This finding suggests that creative traits can be cultivated in
476 students and then applied in different domains. These results support the side of the continuing

477 debate that creative thinking is general rather than domain specific (Baer, 2012). Even though the
478 proposed framework of creative traits and strategies for developing creativity (Figure) is based
479 on viewpoints of fashion industry professionals, it appears to be transferable to other industries
480 and contributes to understanding how creative thinking can be developed in any individual. It
481 should be noted that the authors do not view the proposed framework as a complete and final but
482 rather as a next step toward mapping the phenomenon of creativity.

483 Rather than serving as a detriment, the universality of developing creativity can be used
484 by instructors in a wide array of fields to infuse creative thinking strategies within their courses,
485 whether they be in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields or the humanities.
486 Educators could use information regarding the creative traits and strategies to develop activities
487 and assessments for students to help increase their creative outputs. In a formal classroom
488 environment, instructors could provide opportunities for students to develop and practice creative
489 traits such as risk taking and flexibility or experiment with different thinking approaches/styles.
490 Employing various assessments and reflective assignments, educators might help students
491 understand that some might be more apt to creative thinking while others can intentionally and
492 systematically use creative thinking strategies to develop the skill.

493 Creativity is becoming increasingly important in not only the fast-paced and highly
494 competitive fashion industry, but economy and society at large (DiLiello & Houghton, 2006;
495 Ford & Gioia, 2000). Recent research suggests educational interventions are necessary for
496 enhancing American students' creativity (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). This study provides
497 relevant strategies to develop creativity. This research furthers our understanding of creativity by
498 providing a holistic perspective on origins of creativity (innate or developed), preconditions
499 (creative traits) as well as strategies for developing it. Creative thinking in individuals has been

500 linked to the ability to successful adaptations to the demands of daily life (Cropley, 1990).
501 Finally, the framework provides a starting point for better understanding the interplay between
502 individual traits and behaviors as well as the interaction between creative individuals, their ideas,
503 and society.

504 Prior to our research, no study had examined fashion industry professionals’
505 understanding of creative traits and strategies. Gaining knowledge of such understanding is
506 helpful for creativity researchers as well as for educators and industry practitioners. Future
507 studies might explore perspectives of professionals from other industries that are both ‘closer’
508 (e.g., interior/furniture or furniture design) and ‘farther’ away from fashion design (e.g., auto,
509 planes, or computer design). Emerged differences and similarities from such investigations will
510 allow for a more complete mapping of the creative traits and strategies across domains. Future
511 studies may examine the importance of organizational structure on creativity and the creative
512 person. Since vocational personality traits tend to cluster into occupational areas (Kerr &
513 McKay, 2012), future researchers could develop instruments to help students decide if a career in
514 fashion suited their personalities.

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