

CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY- A REFLECTION OF THE ADOLESCENT MIND

Sana Aziz | SUM 19-018

Beaconhouse National University

Submitted to: Nadia Ghawas

Artistic Development and Psychology

2020

Author's Note:

This paper has been submitted as part of the requirements for the Master's in Art Education Program at the Mariam Dawood School of Visual Arts and Design, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. This investigation has provided me with a Critical Insight into the Minds of my students, allowing me to reflect closely on my Pedagogical Practice and provided a platform on which to construct further inquiry and develop effecting teaching strategies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
EXAMINATION OF STUDENT WORK	8
CONCLUSION	18
REFERENCES	20

INTRODUCTION

My interest in Art Education stems from an experience that spans over eight years at Beaconhouse National University where I have been teaching multiple courses at the Department of Textile, Fashion and Jewellery, at the School of Visual Arts and Design since 2012 including supervising the Final undergraduate Thesis. Although some courses I teach are specifically skill oriented; focusing on conventional and unconventional techniques and processes, most lay emphasis on conceptual development and encourage students to investigate and challenge narratives through research and material exploration often resulting in non-representational forms and striking interdisciplinary practice.

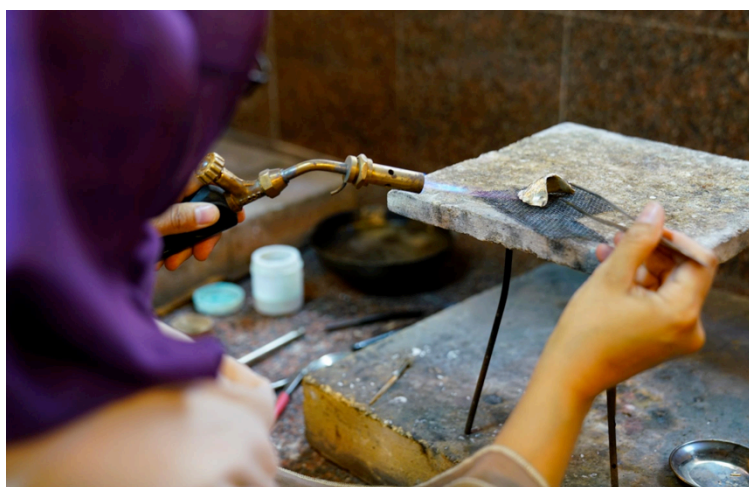


Figure 1 Faiza Khursheed - Jewellery Making Process

Students from the department of Jewellery and Accessory Design have successfully put forward visually striking and conceptually rich Thesis' each year. The work produced is diverse and imaginative, which is largely due to the student directed nature of the course. As late adolescents or young adults, students bring with them a unique understanding of the world based on their prior experiences, whether it stems from their family structures, their

social interactions, cultural influences or their previous educational backgrounds. If viewed through the paradigm of constructivist learning, we can assume that since, no two students will have the same prior experiences, the new meaning they create as the course contents unfold, is inadvertently also different. This becomes an exciting feature of the course, as the outcomes produced each year are just as diverse as the minds present in the classroom that academic year.

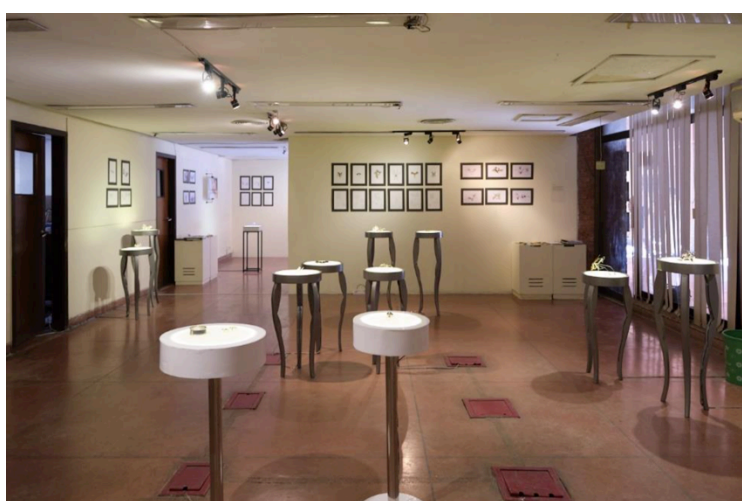


Figure 2 Thesis Display 2020, BNU.

Although, the late adolescents in my class have started forming their view of the world, their mind remains impressionable and their ideas are still evolving. They transition from voicing opinions in binaries, to thinking in fluid terms, experiencing moments of doubt and questioning as they are exposed to new perspectives and ways of thinking, through interaction and dialogue with their peers and facilitators as well as being exposed to an abundance of thought-provoking Art work both produced locally and internationally. This transition in their thought echoes the ideas put forth by the *Epistemological Reflection Model* by **Baxter Magolda (1922)**, who after studying college students, suggested Four ways of knowing in which people transition from believing they know for certain, to feeling uncertain and

eventually forming new ideas by integrating information from diverse perspectives. It becomes evident that it is not just the adolescents view on Art but also their view of the world at large that is being shaped during this time, and that their experience at the university plays a significant role in molding the ideas they may hold for life.

As the students make new meaning, they exercise two key concepts put forward by **Piaget**, pertaining to constructivism, namely, Accommodation and Assimilation. Assimilation occurs when students modify and restructure new ideas so they may incorporate them into their existing schema. Accommodation on the other hand is when they restructure their current understandings in order to make room for the new information. In either case they successfully manage to shift from previously held beliefs to adopting new outlooks. This is for example reflected in the significant change that the student's form over the duration of the course, regarding their perception of jewellery that drifts from being seen merely as wearable objects for adornment to complex narrative Art pieces.



Figure 3 Student Outcomes - Mixed Media, 2014, BNU.

Learners are offered complete freedom in regard to material exploration, scale and wearability and are encouraged to fully exhaust experimental possibilities before moving to final

outcomes. In doing so they begin to understand the possibilities and challenges of the respective materials first and hence make well-informed technical decisions later. Figure 3 above, exhibits the outcomes from one project in which each student explored a given theme using their own choice of materials.

Although, for a few students material exploration truly opens up an avenue of inspiration and ideas, however it is observed, that most students struggle at this experimenting stage, as they are often only motivated by the idea of working towards fixed outcomes instead. After studying theories of Cognitive Development of Children, it makes me question whether a reason for the student's lack of motivation towards material exploration in higher education classrooms is in fact a result of their earlier classroom experiences which failed to instill an interest in this aspect of creativity. **Smith (1993)** in her essay *Experience and Art; Teaching Children to Paint*, emphasizes the need for teachers to focus on process over outcomes, and perhaps if this idea is practiced more thoroughly in all local schools across Pakistan, instead of the privileged few, students would enter universities with a more enthusiastic approach to material exploration.

In addition to material exploration, students are encouraged to investigate topics that are contextually relevant or hold personal significance to them, as that often results in a more meaningful experience for them and unfold as more visually powerful outcomes. This approach leads to deeper understandings, when applied to both a children's classroom as suggested by **Smith (1993)**, and a classroom full of adolescents and young adults, as added by **Kohlberg and Gilligan (1971)**. Using the paradigm of Constructivist Pedagogy to guide the teaching strategies adopted, the course aims to facilitate the late adolescents and young

adults towards a path of self-discovery through their respective artistic practices with the help of structure and sequential lesson planning.

The following section will examine thesis works produced under my supervision over the last six years, and identify trends that reoccur in terms of the narratives being addressed by late adolescents. Identifying these common themes in their art will indicate the factors that may be influencing their thought process and their Artistic practice at this stage in life.

EXAMINATION OF STUDENT WORK

We have established that the teaching strategies adopted while facilitating the Final Thesis, are ones that encourage students into directing their own unique trajectories. However, beneath the seemingly different visual forms that emerge at the end, some underlying factors that appear to play an active role in influencing how adolescents think remain shared. Among these factors are Culture, Context and Experience, as suggested by theorists **Labourie Vief** and **Goldberger (1980, 1984)**. As illustrated in the following works, a prior educational background appears to have directly influenced my students' interest and sense of aesthetic in their Thesis.



Figure 4 Faiza Khursheed - Brooch; Silver, Steel, Thread. 2018, BNU.

Faiza Khursheed, a graduate of 2018, combined the prior knowledge gained from her time at the Textiles department with her new interest in Accessory Design. The thesis gave her the opportunity to explore jewellery as form of adornment and creative expression, however her previous inclinations towards material and aesthetics are evident in the new work which thus becomes an amalgamation of her past and present.



Figure 5 Faiza Khursheed - Brooch; Silver, Thread. 2018, BNU.

With complete freedom in deciding which materials and processes she could use, Faiza still chose to build on her existing expertise, merging the skills previously learnt like stitching, with the new metal-smithing technique's acquired such as forging as seen in Figure 6.



Figure 6 Faiza Khursheed - Making Process; 2018, BNU.

Similarly, Anas Asmat, a graduate of 2019, switched to Jewellery Design as a discipline after previously having struggled whilst being enrolled in a Physics Programme. His distinction worthy work showcased complex mechanisms and movements and kinetics hidden behind the facade of simple wearable objects.



Figure 7 Anas Asmat - Ring; Silver. 2019, BNU.

This collection of work was particularly challenging to produce in terms of technical fabrication, and contrary to other students, Anas required minimum direction from his supervisors as he himself showed exemplary problem solving abilities. As I reflect back, keeping in view the stages of development by **Piaget**, I contemplate whether Anas' advanced learning and critical thinking is an indicator of his position on the Formal Operations, or furthermore, perhaps it is the attainment of the subcategory of Piaget's Formal Operations identified by **Arlin (1975, 1984)** as the Problem Solving Stage.



Figure 8 Anas Asmat - Neckpiece; Silver, Thread. 2019, BNU.

It is worth noting that the two students featured above had switched to Jewellery Design as their major and excelled in their Thesis after struggling to develop an interest or good grades in their prior disciplines. While at the time, I did not give it much thought, I now understand these students experiences much better after studying the Theory of Multiple Intelligence by **Gardner (1992)** which suggests the individuals may possess eight different forms of intelligence, including Musical, Visual-Spatial, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalistic, Logical, Linguistic and Kinesthetic.

Another recurring theme identified through my inspection pertains to notions of beauty and self-identity, which becomes particularly evident in the work of female adolescent students. Their concerns regarding their physical image are a result of a multitude of factors influencing them outside of the classroom, including the unrealistic expectations set by the idealized female representation across digital and print media, peer pressure and of-course, society's deeply ingrained ideologies about beauty stemming from our nations colonial past that still subconsciously dominate our ways of thinking. To add to this burden, the adolescents are still adapting to the biological and psychological changes their bodies are transitioning through since the onset of adolescence.

Shafaf Butt, a graduate of 2015, used her Thesis work as an opportunity to comment on the struggles of women in their quest for 'beauty'. The work, as seen in Figure 9 and Figure 10 re-define aspects of wearable jewellery and is both paradoxically beautiful and painful to look at. Shafaf conducted extensive primary and secondary research to develop her understanding, before linking it back to her as own personal struggle growing up in order to make the work contextually relevant to both herself and a wider audience.



Figure 9 Shahfah Butt - Mouth Piece; Silver.
2015, BNU.

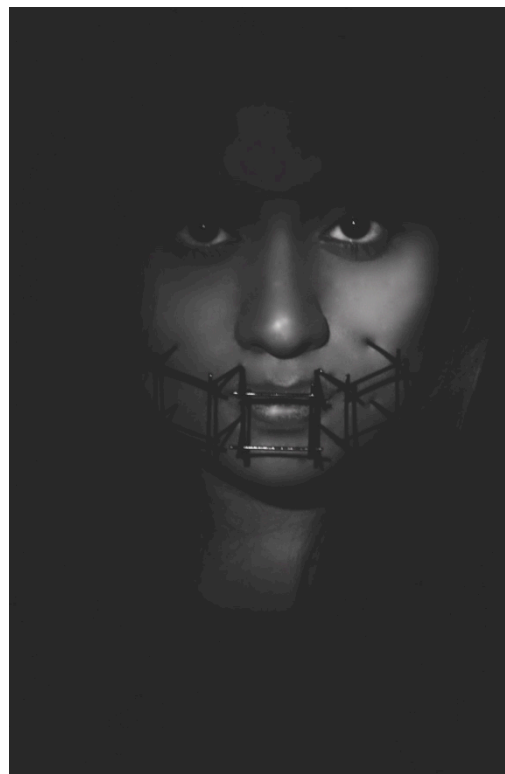


Figure 10 Shahfah Butt - Mouth Piece; Silver.
2015, BNU.

In their graduate work produced in the years 2015 and 2019 respectively, Mariam Shah and Aleena Taufeeq explored similar themes concerning the unrealistic standards of beauty that women are expected to conform to globally. However, they narrowed down their area of investigation to the attainment of the perfect smile.

While Mariam chose to build on her general observations of people around herself, Aleena took her own struggle with extensive dental procedures, including wearing braces for four years during her early teenage years as the driving force behind her work. Both students deliberately chose materials and forms that embody a grotesque feel and almost cause the viewer to feel uncomfortable or even repulsed. This aspect is further exaggerated with the powerful photography, which enhances the notion that 'one must experience pain for beauty'.



Figure 11 Mariam Shah - Interactive Piece; Silver, Plaster. 2015, BNU.

While supervising these students I held the opinion that these works were intentionally designed to provoke. However, after reading the essay titled *'Developing Minds; Representing Experiences'* by **Burton (1981)**, I revisit these collections using different lens. It appears now that these late adolescents, perhaps never intended to shock with the dark nature of their work, but were merely representing the contents of their mind, which at the time may have been somewhat influenced by the disturbing nature of their observations and experiences.

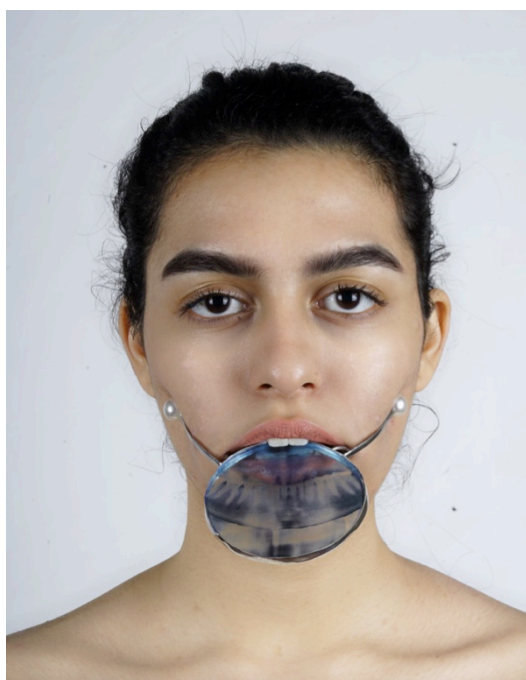


Figure 12 Aleena Tafteeq - Mouth Piece; Silver, Xray. 2019, BNU.



Figure 13 Aleena Tafteeq - Mouth Piece; Copper, Polymer Clay. 2019, BNU.

Yet another student who touches upon the theme of beauty is Fizza Haroon, a graduate of 2016 who took her Thesis as an opportunity to open up about her struggles with weight loss and her experience of being bullied as a child because of it. Her creative journey across the duration of the course provided her with a safe space where she could share some of her insecurities and vulnerabilities and in doing so, reinvent herself as a stronger, more independent young adult. While supervising works like these, my role as a facilitator becomes ever more reliant on listening and dialogic activity. It is imperative to foster an environment where learners feel comfortable in sharing their ideas, voicing their concerns and critically examining their own thinking patterns in order to take the path of self discovery.



Figure 14 Fizza Haroon - Brooch; Silver. 2016, BNU.



Figure 15 Fizza Haroon - Interactive Objects; Silver. 2016, BNU.

The examples discussed above sufficiently reflect, that some of the dominant concerns female adolescents harbor are in regard to their physical appearance, and that these struggles can become a source of exploration and inspiration within the classroom, fueling creative strategies of making, as long as the facilitator creates an inclusive environment where the learners feel nurtured and welcome in sharing their thoughts and ideas.

The third recurring theme that my research has identified is to do with Nature and the outdoor environment. It appears that late adolescents begin to reminisce over their younger childhood days of outdoor play. Technology appears to have taken over most of our lives and student's busy routines often leave them with little time to explore the natural world as they used to. In addition, external factors such as security concerns have also contributed to this diminishing trend. Creative practice, however allows adolescents to revisit and explore the natural world once again through form and material exploration.



**Figure 16 Hafsa Salman - Objects; Silver,Fabric.
2015, BNU.**

Hafsa Salman embraced the malleable nature of Silver by forging it in distinct ways to create striking forms that mirror the organic structures found in and around the sea. In 2015, her thesis enabled her to explore her fascination with the natural world that was rooted in her childhood memories, and enhanced by the mystical imagery of the sea she had been observing ever since through movies and documentaries.

Childhood memories associated with one's interaction with nature become the source of inspiration for many adolescents in their Art practices. It provides them with a narrative which is familiar, yet paradoxically distant. An exploration of this theme thus enables adolescents to revisit their past and bring it forward into their current practice, which helps them bridge the gap between their past and present identities. This is particularly evident in the works produced by Mahnoor Azhar, a graduate of 2016, as seen in Figure 17. Mahnoor's work described stories of her childhood that centered around outdoor interactions with her father who was an avid gardener and regularly involved Mahnoor as a young child in his gardening activities. It is evident through her work, that it is these childhood interactions with her natural surroundings that shaped her aesthetic sensibilities, and provided her with a deeply nurtured understanding of organic materials.



Figure 17 Mahnoor Azhar - Brooches; Silver. 2016, BNU.

Some years later, in 2019, Maham Ijaz explored a similar theme, which yet again showcased organic materials taken directly from the natural world. The work, which celebrates preciousness with the use of Silver accents, probes the wearer to interact with nature by making it wearable, thus bringing the outdoor world, which is often now neglected, inside and physically close to the body.



Figure 18 Maham Ijaz - Necklace; Silver, Pumice Rock, Grass. 2019, BNU.



Figure 19 Maham Ijaz - Necklace; Silver, Organic Materials. 2019, BNU.

CONCLUSION

The examination of works produced across a period of six years, at the Jewellery Department within the Mariam Dawood School of Visual Arts and Design, under my supervision as the thesis instructor, reflects a focus on interdisciplinary practice and material exploration.

Furthermore, it is evident that the work produced each year continues to challenge conceptions of Jewellery as a wearable art form that is merely for adornment. Instead, Jewellery is transformed into a medium of expression parallel to any other narrative Art form that has the ability to communicate the inner conscience of the maker and simultaneously probe the viewers into forming their own subjective perceptions.

As highlighted in this essay above, Thesis works can provide an insight into the concerns and interests of the adolescent mind. Vulnerabilities that perhaps they do not feel comfortable in communicating orally can be narrated through contemporary, non-representational forms of Art. Parents and families, who feel disconnected with their teenage children, can observe their children's creative practices to determine the inner feelings of the child in order to provide support and guidance accordingly. For example the female students whose work reflects their underlying concern with their physical appearance can be nurtured by their families and peers into adopting a more positive attitude towards their bodies.

The diversity in terms of the forms produced over the years, as illustrated through the works shared in this essay, reflect my constructivist approach to instruction. Within the broader framework defined by the course outline, students are given complete freedom in directing their studies. The success of the course can be largely credited to the student-centered approach to teaching, and my adaptive teaching strategies that foster student's differentiated learning needs and interests.

Re-visiting the student works after being introduced to the profound Theories of Cognitive Development has provided me with a richer understanding of my student's mind and interests and probed me to reconsider my Teaching philosophy. This Essay also presents itself as a platform on which I may continue to build further inquiry in the years ahead in order to continually devise Teaching Strategies relevant to the ever evolving needs of the Students and the Time. The essay has enabled me to introspect and probed me to adopt a more nurturing and empathetic approach towards my students with special attention towards the Art of Listening and Observation as the Adolescent years are indeed a time of Identity Crisis, or to quote **Erikson (1968, p.96)**:

“ A Turning point of increased vulnerability and heightened potential”

After studying theories of cognitive development, particularly those based on adolescents, it becomes increasingly evident that the Art school must become a place for self-discovery and that it is the responsibility of each instructor to create an inclusive environment where students feel welcome to share their unique stories, inner dilemmas and creative expressions. The undergraduate class-room must become a safe space where adolescents can, revisit aspects of their past, consider prospects for their future and perhaps most importantly, discover how these factors shape their unique identities in the present moment.

REFERENCES

- Baumgartner, L. M., Caffarella, R., & Merriam, S. B. (2007). Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide.
- Burton, J. M. (1981). Developing Minds: Representing Experiences: Ideas in Search of Forms. *School Arts*, 80(5), 58-64.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis* (No. 7). WW Norton & company.
- Gardner, H. (1992). *Frames of Mind; The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books
- Kohlberg, L., & Gilligan, C. (1971). The adolescent as a philosopher: The discovery of the self in a postconventional world. *Daedalus*, 1051-1086.
- Smith, N. R., Fucigna, C. E., Kennedy, M. A., & Lord, L. (1993). *Experience and art*. Teachers College Press.