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Thanatophobia: Overcoming the Fear Through Fashion Design Concepts

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ABSTRACT The documentary film *Knowing Death* examines thanatophobia, or the fear of passing away. The main challenge in addressing Thanatophobia (Knowing Death) lies in its abstract nature. Furthermore, identifying death anxiety concretely and expressing it in a visual medium is a major challenge. Instead of literal representations of the subject, we've overcame this problem by utilizing designed images and sound metaphorically to elicit particular emotional reactions in the audience. While the topic of death anxiety is discussed through interviews, the emotional reactions reflect our own personal journey through it. This study utilized phenomenological approach combining interviews with analysis of artifacts and workshops in two phases. The study further sheds light on how clothing can address and cater to their unique requirements. In the modern world, branding and fashion have grown to be significant forces. The research adopted the Consumer Needs Model for Functional Expressive Aesthetics (FEA) as a framework for creating clothing that appeals to thanatophobic women. The study employed a sequential method, starting with an initial interview phase, followed by the creation of prototype garments, and concluding with a prototype evaluation survey administered to the research participants. phenomenological approach, combining interviews with analysis of artifacts and workshops, has been adopted

INDEX TERMS Death anxiety, fashion design, inner beauty, perception, prototype garment, thanatophobia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Examining through the perspective of Thanatophobia (the fear of dying or *Knowing Death*) is an essay film that documents authors' personal journey as they explore the diverse coping mechanisms for managing phobias. The film consists of four distinct "vignettes". The initial vignette delves into agoraphobia (fear of open or crowded places) by illustrating its impact on

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individuals. Subsequently, the following discussion vividly depicts the three primary coping mechanisms for phobias:

i. One such mechanism involves exposure, exemplified through the daily experiences of a mortician who confronts death and mortality on day-to-day basis.

ii. Another coping mechanism is exemplified by a religious leader whose philosophy of life revolves around his religious belief of an afterlife

iii. The third coping mechanism, known as 'ego integrity', is represented by an elderly woman who has personally confronted her mortality out of necessity.

Death anxiety encompasses a persistent dread of death or the process of dying, significantly disrupting one's daily life [1]. It is often mistaken for necrophobia, which entails a fear of death and deceased entities. Necrophobia encompasses a dread of all things associated with death, including cemeteries, funerals, dead animals, and corpses. In contrast, individuals with death anxiety primarily fear their own mortality [2]. Thanatophobia, or existential death anxiety as described in philosophical literature, specifically pertains to the fear of nonexistence that accompanies death. It is important to note that thanatophobia distinguishes itself from other forms of death anxieties, as they predominantly focus on the act of dying rather than the state of being dead or its absence. While death anxiety encompasses various subcategories, only one holds true relevance to this thesis [1].

Treating thanatophobia poses a challenge due to its deeply internal and personal nature as the subjective experience cannot be studied on a scientific level [1]. In broad terms, there are three approaches to address the underlying sources of phobias.

The first approach, known as exposure therapy, was historically the most prevalent. This technique gradually exposes individuals to their phobias, helping them recognize the unfounded nature of their fears [1]. For instance, a person with a snake phobia may begin by encountering non-threatening representations of snakes, such as fake or toy snakes, and progressively advance to observing snakes from a distance, eventually culminating in direct interaction with live snakes. However, given the impossibility of subjecting oneself to nonexistence, this technique is evidently unsuitable for existential death phobias.

The second technique involves phobic individuals altering their philosophical outlook regarding their phobias [3]. This approach proves particularly effective in treating non-object-based phobias, such as emotional deprivation disorder (the fear of hurting others' feelings) or certain forms of social obsessive-compulsive disorder [3]. By reshaping their understanding of the functioning of the world, individuals can eliminate the need for their fears.

The third technique, encompassing the most comprehensive approach, integrates ego integrity with elements of the previous two techniques [1]. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is utilized to address phobias and a range of cognitive and emotional disorders. CBT operates on the premise that logical reasoning alone is insufficient to effectively address cognitive dysfunctions [3]. While many phobia sufferers are cognizant of the irrationality of their fears, this knowledge often fails to alleviate the physical and psychological reactions their fears elicit. CBT focuses on enhancing individuals' awareness of their reactions to different stimuli [3]. Through training, patients learn to identify the underlying causes of panic attacks, enabling them to take preemptive measures when anticipating an attack. In the context of phobias, CBT aids patients in comprehending their phobia and the internal triggers that activate it, empowering them to manage their fear [1]. Essentially, individuals with phobias come to terms with both their own fear and the object of their fear.

A. PURPOSE

The primary objective of this research was to explore women perceptions of Thanatophobia and their perception of inner beauty. This study was motivated by the significant number of female participants, the increasing presence of women in the consumer market seeking female-specific apparel, and their inclination to invest in environmental-friendly products that contributes to their happiness. To address these needs and help individuals overcome Thanatophobia while discovering their hidden beauty, the researcher developed prototypes of ball gowns, cocktail dresses, drapery, coats, and experimental dresses. These clothing items were designed to encompass functional, expressive, aesthetic, and environmental features relevant to Thanatophobia. Previous researches [4]–[6] has shown that factors such as function, expression, and aesthetics play a significant role in determining a woman's preference for clothing. To evaluate these aspects, the study employed Lamb & Kallal's scale [7].

The research adopted the Consumer Needs Model for Functional Expressive Aesthetics (FEA) as a framework for creating clothing that addresses the requirements of expression, functionality, and aesthetics. The model was adapted to consider the specific needs of individuals with Thanatophobia, including their fear of death, fear of loss, emotions related to happiness; and a blend of their present and past experiences. Initially developed for designing clothing for individuals with special needs, the modified FEA model enabled the researcher to develop products that appealed to females experiencing Thanatophobia. In order to capitalize on the expanding market segment of environmentally conscious, content, and self-assured women, manufacturers and retailers should offer clothing items that cater to the diverse range of women's needs.

Previous studies have suggested a potential link between dressing appropriately increased happiness and improved behavior among women [5], [8], [9]. This study aims to examine whether incorporating suitable clothing components can enhance the overall experience for participants. Given the limited research on women's attitudes towards Thanatophobia clothing, this study focuses specifically on women to determine if their needs are currently being adequately addressed. Additionally, the study aims to validate the inclusion of an environmental garment component in the existing model and respond to the growing demand among women for consumer goods that promote happiness, self-assurance, and the ability to confront their fears.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

i. What are the essential expressive garment elements that female participant with Thanatophobia desire when exploring their hidden beauty in the face of darkness?

ii. What are the crucial expressive garment elements those female participants with Thanatophobia desire when exploring the beauty of nature during dark times?

iii. What are the significant expressive garment elements that female participant with Thanatophobia desire while coping with the fear of losing someone?

iv. How do environmental elements influence the choices of female participants with Thanatophobia?

Furthermore, the study aimed to determine the applicability of incorporating an environmental garment element into the original Consumer Needs model for Functional Expressive Aesthetics (FEA) [7]. If the inclusion of an environmental garment element is found to be applicable, the study sought to determine the optimal placement of this element within the model relative to the other elements.

C. OBJECTIVES

The study employed a sequential method, starting with an initial interview phase, followed by the creation of prototype garments, and concluding with a prototype evaluation survey administered to the research participants. With the research questions in mind, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

i. Gather insights on women's perceptions and opinions regarding Thanatophobia, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of women choices, specific needs, and preferences in clothing.

ii. Establishing a comprehensive overview of women's desires and requirements for clothing based on their specific thoughts. Thus, enabling the transformation of these insights into a final prototype garment.

iii. Identify the expressive environmental garment elements desired by females experiencing Thanatophobia.

iv. Develop five prototype garments, including jackets and pants, a ball gown, drapery, cocktail dresses, and experimental dresses, along with corresponding accessories that integrates the expressive garment elements identified by the female participants. by applying the Functional Expressive Aesthetic (FEA) consumer needs model proposed by [7].

D. ASSUMPTIONS

The study operated under the following assumptions:

o While recognizing that women with Thanatophobia are not a completely homogeneous group, it was assumed that they would exhibit commonalities in their preferences and dislikes regarding features of clothing related to their Thanatophobia thoughts by using FEA model [7].

o Women with Thanatophobia have unique requirements and desires when it comes to clothing, which may differ from the general population or other specific consumer segments. Hence the current consumer trends lack specific focus on addressing the preferences of the thanatophobic women.

o The inclusion of expressive and environmental garment elements in clothing options can have a positive impact on the well-being, confidence, and satisfaction of women with thanatophobia thoughts. Moreover, it will result in improved clothing options that cater to their specific preferences and provide a sense of empowerment.

o By addressing the specific concerns and preferences of women with Thanatophobia thoughts, clothing manufacturers and retailers can tap into a niche market and meet the growing demand for garments that support the emotional well-being and self-assurance of these individuals.

E. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study's scope and limitations encompass the following aspects:

o Participant Selection: The study focused exclusively on female participants residing in Pakistan, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other geographic locations or gender groups.

o Environmental Considerations: While the aim was to develop environmentally friendly garments, the study was constrained by financial and temporal limitations. Therefore, the researcher worked with raw materials commonly used in the apparel industry, rather than starting from scratch with entirely eco-friendly materials and processes.

o Economic Factors: The impact of a poor economy on participants' responses regarding price-related questions or statements might introduce bias into the study. Economic conditions could influence participants' perceptions and preferences, potentially affecting their feedback.

By acknowledging and addressing these scope and limitations, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of women with Thanatophobia in Pakistan while recognizing the contextual factors that might impact the research findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Epicurus's perspective on the fear of dying suggests that death is beyond our comprehension as living beings. Although we cannot experience death, we often fear the unknown and worry about what will happen after our demise. Death holds a significant place in our thoughts and fears, both personally and in how it affects the living [10]–[12].

Despite being a topic seldom openly discussed, death has a profound impact on our collective consciousness. Studies indicate that a substantial percentage of Americans, around 68%, experience some form of death phobia [12]. Our discussions on death tends to focus on its implications for the living, such as the dying process and the impact on our loved ones. The absence of language to articulate the concept of literal nothingness contributes to this emphasis on death as a process within life [12].

While death plays a prominent role in philosophy, existentialism, theology, and other relevant disciplines; however, true expertise on the nature of death remains elusive. Speculation is inevitable since we cannot truly grasp the essence of death [12]. In the aforementioned film, death has been depicted in various ways, ranging from humor to more compassionate portrayals, exploring its impact on both the dying and the living [13]–[14]. However, movies primarily focus on death as an integral part of life, rather than delving into the experience of being dead or the nature of death itself.

The documentary series *Time of Death* serves as a model for how movies approach the subject, showcasing the challenges faced by terminally ill patients and their families during their final days. It delves into the psychological and physical aspects of dying, leaving loved ones behind, and ensuring the well-being of families. While discussions on death itself are limited, the series highlights the significance of familial relationships [12].

In contrast, *Knowing Death* takes a unique approach by exploring the intangible themes of coping with death and after-life. These concepts lack concrete actions and necessitate distinct editorial strategies to evoke specific emotions and moods. Through its format, imagery, sound design, and musical choices, the film aims to guide the audience in examining the fear of dying [12].

The literature discussed above provides valuable insights into the fear of death and its impact on individuals. Epicurus's perspective challenges the notion of fearing death by highlighting its incomprehensibility and

emphasizing that we cannot experience it. This understanding aligns with the objective of the study, which aims to explore the specific needs and desires of women with Thanatophobia regarding their clothing choices. By understanding their perspectives and fears surrounding death, the study seeks to shed light on how clothing can address and cater to their unique requirements. Additionally, the literature emphasizes the significance of discussions on death from the perspective of the living; and the impact it has on our relationships and daily lives. This underscores the importance of considering the emotional and psychological aspects of clothing design for individuals with Thanatophobia. Thus, by examining the literature surrounding the fear of death, the study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of women's thoughts and preferences related to Thanatophobia and clothing.

III. METHODOLOGY

Prior studies in the field of fashion have predominantly adopted qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews, to explore women's clothing choices [15]–[19]. While these investigations have revealed relevant insights, they have provided limited understanding of the role of fashion in the context of aging and identity experiences among mature women. Few studies have delved into the interaction between clothing and memory [20], [21]. Nonetheless, some noteworthy craft and design projects have touched upon emotional aspects, such as Wallace's Dress Box and Stead's study on integrating technology with fashion to evoke and represent emotions. A phenomenological approach, combining interviews with analysis of artifacts and workshops, has been adopted by a few researchers [22], [23].

This innovative methodology facilitates theoretical and practical research, aiming to expand knowledge through intergenerational dialogue and associated outcomes. However, the integration of these methods remains limited. Hence, our study follows a three-phase framework (Fig. 1) and includes multiple case studies of women aged 18-30 in Peshawar. The research, design, and dissemination of findings constitute the sequential stages, with particular emphasis on workshops and interviews in the initial phases, as detailed below.

A. WORKSHOP (I): "UNDERSTANDING"

In the initial phase of our research, our main objective was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the clothing and fashion-related concerns

expressed by Thanatophobic women. To accomplish this, we organized a workshop with five participants (as shown in Table I), with one researcher acting as the facilitator. The workshop spanned three hours in duration.

TABLE I

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Name*	Age	Occupation
Anna[1,2]	20	Student
Hannah[1,2]	24	Student
Hamail[1,2]	26	Teacher
Hania[1,2]	18	Student
Aira	30	Teacher

*Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' anonymity.
[1]Participants who expressed their interest in being interviewed
[2]Participants interviewed

The participants were initially encouraged to introduce themselves and engage in an open discussion regarding their individual concerns regarding the fear of death. This step aimed to facilitate the exploration of the complexity of their experiences (as depicted in Figure 2). Interestingly, most participants voluntarily expressed their issues without any specific prompting from the facilitators.

B. INTERVIEWS

The second phase of the research commenced with a series of five in-depth interviews conducted with selected participants. From the Workshop (I) attendees who expressed their interest in being interviewed, random selection was employed to determine the interviewees (see Table I). These semi-structured interviews were designed to foster rapport and deepen the understanding and trust between the researcher and informant, leading to comprehensive and accurate information, as suggested by Kumar [18]. The interviews were carefully crafted to allow each participant to delve into their unique experiences at length.

During these conversational interviews, which lasted approximately 60 to 80 minutes, audio recordings were made with the participants' consent, and verbatim transcripts were generated. The interview schedule encompassed 16 open-ended questions covering various aspects of women's experiences

with clothing and fashion. The aim was to gain insights into the participants' shopping habits, their expectations for the future of fashion, and the significance of fashion in their lives. Additionally, participants were invited to recall specific instances when they experienced strong positive or negative emotions regarding their appearance.

The meticulously transcribed interviews were subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to illuminate the cultural context through the participants' personal histories and experiences. This analysis serves as a foundation for the development of fashion prototypes. Thus far, the interview data has revealed intriguing contradictions in older women's expectations of the current fashion and clothing system, as well as underlying tensions in their perceptions of it.

C. MAKING/DESIGN PROCESS OF PROTOTYPE

The following processes show that how the researcher convert the thoughts of a Thanatophobical woman into prototypes of garments or design.

1) BALL GOWN PROCESS

FIGURE 1. Ball gown making process

2) COAT PROCESS

FIGURE 2. Coat making process

3) COCKTAIL PROCESS

FIGURE 3. Cocktail making process

4) DRAPERY PROCESS

FIGURE 4. Drapery making process

5) EXPERIMENTAL PROCESS

FIGURE 5. Experimental making process

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. WORKSHOP: FINDINGS

As stated in the Introduction, our study aims to explore how women's clothing can be effectively designed to meet the physical and emotional needs of Thanatophobic individuals [19]. To achieve our research objectives, it is crucial to examine the potential for communication and message sharing between the research participants (wearers) and designers. This study follows the three areas of design research outlined in [24]: understanding the phenomenon, developing ideas, and offering solutions.

The workshop served as a means to comprehend the phenomenon by delving into the experiences and interpretations of the participants. The design process is often described as "endless" [25], highlighting that unlike solving mathematical problems, designing does not have a predetermined endpoint. Instead, it is characterized by overlapping loops that involve ongoing analysis and reflection over time intervals. [26] and [27] emphasize the importance of considering both the long-lasting physical and emotional aspects in order to create enduring products.

In the proposed research model, these concepts are adapted and integrated, with continuous evaluation of the outcomes informing design practices through testing and sampling emerging solutions. The Workshop played a crucial role in providing designers with insights into the significance of objects in a participant's life from their perspective, inspiring design themes and ideas [28]. It served as a direct introduction to the practical work of creating prototypes that aim to address the primary design needs and preferences expressed by the participants. Visual information, such as photos and images, was collected and organized in mood and ideas boards to facilitate the translation of gathered insights into tangible design concepts.

B. PERSONAL TRAJECTORIES

One prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the influence of personal journeys on the participants' current interest and involvement in fashion. Each participant shared unique personal histories that greatly shaped their perspectives. For example, one woman's experience with significant health issues influenced her preference for clothing that could conceal physical changes in her body. Another participant discussed the impact of losing a loved one, which had a profound effect on her clothing

choices. She also shared the loss of a trusted and supportive fashion advisor. These individual paths highlight the importance of considering personal narratives when designing for women, especially when the aim is to achieve a sense of equilibrium—a feeling of emotional resonance between the wearer and the design. Recognizing these personal journeys becomes crucial in creating designs that not only meet physical needs but also establish a deep emotional connection with the wearer.

C. INTERVIEWS: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Following the workshop, the researchers proceeded with conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with women, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological aspects related to their clothing and fashion experiences. The interviews uncovered various tensions and contradictions concerning the participants' fashion behaviors and practices. Notably, all participants expressed a strong sense of generational identity, which greatly influenced their expectations regarding their relationships with designers and the value they placed on the design process. Building upon this exploration, our intention is to engage the participants as co-designers and potential wearers, fostering transparency and accessibility in our role as designers. This strategic approach involves frequent user testing of products before production, promoting emotionally resilient design. It challenges conventional commercial fashion design and production methods, aligning more closely with bespoke or couture practices.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the participants possessed a keen awareness of current fashion trends, but always in relation to their individual body types. This highlights the need for novel fashion design methodologies and solutions that consider wearers' unique perspectives and physical characteristics while also accounting for current cultural contexts. Rather than concealing or falsely portraying emotions, many women expressed an interest in clothing that enhances the way they present their bodies. Lastly, it is crucial to acknowledge that each interviewed woman had distinct life experiences, leading to diverse value systems and expectations regarding clothing and fashion. To achieve success, the design process must carefully incorporate these individual trajectories while staying within the framework of the proposed research.

D. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The researcher had initial concerns regarding the potential success of addressing Thanatophobia due to its abstract nature. Writing on such a concept can be challenging, as it innately requires navigating complex and intangible ideas. In order to overcome this obstacle, we've devised a concept that relied heavily on the women interviews as the primary text. While the intentions of the designers are commendable, the ultimate measure of success lies resides in the fact that whether the audience finds it engaging

As an essay film, Thanatophobia explores a topic that lacks explicit actions to depict visually. To tackle this issue, we've employed images as metaphors that aimed to evoke specific emotional responses in the audience. These emotional reactions were rooted in our own experiences with death anxiety; whereas, the interviews provided a platform for discussing the topic itself as a research subject. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of Thanatophobia by combining symbolic imagery and thoughtful discussions.

In conclusion, the research on Thanatophobia in the context of fashion design has revealed significant insights into the intersection of personal experiences, emotions, and clothing. By employing interviews and visual metaphors, the study successfully navigated the challenges of addressing an abstract concept in the design field. The exploration of participants' perspectives and their unique journeys highlighted the importance of considering individual trajectories and the impact they have on clothing choices and fashion preferences. This understanding has valuable implications for the development of empathetic and inclusive fashion design practices that cater to the specific needs and desires of individuals, particularly in relation to their emotional well-being and self-expression. As designers continue to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and practical design outcomes, the integration of personal narratives and emotional connections can further enhance the development of fashion that resonates with wearers on a profound level.

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