

RESEARCH

Open Access



Constructing cultural identity through weaving among Ri-Bhoi women weavers: a symbolic interactionist approach

Rebecca Maria Dias^{1*} , Jennifer Paff Ogle² and Sonali Diddi³

*Correspondence:
rmdias@radford.edu

¹ Assistant Professor,
Department of Design,
Radford University, 232
McGuffey Hall, Radford, VA
24142, USA

Full list of author information
is available at the end of the
article

Abstract

With this interpretive study, we sought to understand how weaving as an activity contributed to constructing women handloom weavers' cultural identity in the region of Ri-Bhoi, a district in Meghalaya, India, by exploring weavers' experiences through changing tides of modernization in the handloom industry of the region. We adopted a lens of symbolic interaction to consider the ways in which interactions within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context contributed to meanings about the women's weaving activities and their cultural identities. An ethnographic approach was implemented using participant observation, field notes/journaling, and informal and formal interviews to collect relevant data. Analyses revealed four themes representing the value that Ri-Bhoi women weavers attached to various aspects of their weaving tradition, which in turn, supported their cultural identities: (a) maintaining the tradition of weaving through acquisition and exchange of knowledge, (b) securing social support from family and community, (c) maintaining the tradition of weaving through creation of textiles that symbolize tribe and culture, and (d) achieving a sense of fulfillment (i.e., joy, happiness, and pride). Further exploration revealed that the modernization of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry increased engagement of women in weaving and their passion to preserve their tradition, which further strengthened their connection to weaving. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Handloom, India, Modernization, Symbolic interaction, Weaver, Women

Introduction

The North East Region of India (NERI) comprises eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—and constitutes 8% of the country's geographical area and 61% the country's handloom weavers (Boruah and Kaur 2015; Ramswamy and Kumar 2013). The handloom sector has been and still is the major source of livelihood for rural tribal women in NERI (Devi 2013; Ramswamy and Kumar 2013). 78% of the NERI handloom industry workforce is dominated by women weavers (Boruah and Kaur 2015; Ramswamy and Kumar 2013). Weaving is culturally significant to NERI women, as women who weave contribute to the household

income and hold a higher social status as compared to women who do not weave (Devi 2013).

Although researchers have sought to describe the handloom industry of NERI and its potential for growth and change (e.g., Devi 2012; 2013; Ramswamy and Hmangaihzuali 2016; Singh et al. 2008), they have not considered women weavers' connections to the indigenous art of weaving. However, understanding these connections may be valuable, as textile traditions may be intimately bound with the development of individual and community attitudes and beliefs and cultural identity (Forney and Rabolt 1986; Kaur and Gale 2002). Cultural identity can be understood as a part of a person's self-concept that evolves from his/her/their involvement or role in the society, constituting values and beliefs that are shared among different members in that society (Tajfel 1978). Thus, with this work, we seek to understand, from the perspectives of women weavers, themselves, how involvement in the handloom industry contributes to women weavers' cultural identities in the region of Ri-Bhoi, a district in the state of Meghalaya, NERI. We adopt a lens of symbolic interaction to consider the ways in which interactions within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context contributed to meanings about the women's weaving activities and their cultural identities. Our use of symbolic interaction theory as a lens to frame our interpretations serves an example of crossing disciplinary boundaries and the tangible ways in which a social psychological theoretical perspective can add value to cultural studies.

In recent years, the handloom industry of India has seen exponential growth both domestically and internationally in terms of export value and domestic demand (Government of India 2010). Government, non-profit, and international organizations have facilitated this growth by providing schemes and funding to advance looms, provide raw materials, and nurture skill development (Devi 2013; Government of India 2018; Mamidipudi and Bijker 2012). As the handloom industry is in a state of flux, constantly evolving through the influence of modernization, it also is important to understand how the effects of modernization give rise to different weaving practices and traditions, which in turn, may be related in various ways to women weavers' cultural identities. Hence, this research also will consider how modernization of the handloom industry has unfolded in Ri-Bhoi, specifically, as well as the interplay between the changes of modernization, weavers' experiences of the weaving tradition, and weavers' cultural identities.

Literature review

Handloom industry in India

The handloom industry is one of the largest unorganized economic activities in India, employing close to 4.3 million workers and contributing towards the sustenance of India's rural and semi-rural population (Devi 2013; Ghouse 2012; Government of India 2015). Approximately 73% of the total handloom workforce belong to socially and economically disadvantaged classes, and hence, the handloom industry provides a source of income and livelihood to vulnerable and weaker sections of society (Boruah and Kaur 2015; Government of India 2015; Ramswamy and Hmangaihzuali 2016). In comparison to the Indian powerloom industry, the handloom industry is less capital intensive, is eco-friendly, uses less power, and has grown and sustained itself by transferring skills from one generation to the other (Government of India 2015). The Indian handloom industry

also is mainly decentralized, with the majority of its production taking place within private homes (Bortamuly and Goswami 2015; Ghose 2012).

NERI has the highest concentration of handloom units in India, which account for 69.28% of the 2.4 million total units in India (Government of India 2010). Weaving in NERI is mostly manually operated (Devi 2012), and 67.2% of the total handloom workers are self-employed and work independently (Government of India 2010). The industry is predominantly home-based, with 99.7% of working looms situated within weaver homes (Government of India 2010). Although the Handloom Census of 2010 recorded that NERI had the highest number of working looms in India, it had the lowest rate of production, which could suggest that there is untapped potential for growth within the NERI handloom industry (Government of India 2010).

In most parts of India, weaving is associated with the male gender role. In NERI, however, 99% of the adult handloom workforce is dominated by women (Devi 2012; Government of India 2010; Ramswamy and Hmangaihzuoli 2016). Weaving skills are passed on from mother to daughter and are considered an important criterion for a woman's marriage (Devi 2012; 2013). In certain NERI tribes, women weave intricate textiles to express their love to their partners (Devi 2012). However, some studies have revealed a lack of interest in weaving among younger generations of women who may be more inclined to participate in agricultural activities, leading to increased purchase of ready-made garments among these women and their families (Devi 2012; 2013; Singh et al. 2008).

Modernization in the handloom industry

In recent years, the exports of Indian handloom products have seen immense growth, almost doubling from \$169 million in 2010 to \$303 million in 2015 (Government of India 2015). Handloom products also have seen increased demand and sales within domestic markets due to their unique traditional design patterns and superior fabric quality (Government of India 2016). The potential for additional growth has drawn interest from multiple organizations and has prompted efforts to upgrade the handloom industry. For example, the Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme, developed by the Ministry of Textiles, funds artisans to replace their traditional looms with automated ones (Government of India 2015). Moreover, competition from the powerloom industry and increased market demand have pressured the handloom industry to diversify its product lines and to adopt new technology for production (Government of India 2015).

In NERI, the introduction of technology and the increase in demand for products have led to modifications in the textile production process in a few northeastern states (Boruah and Kaur 2015; Devi 2013; Karolia and Ladia 2012). For instance, such changes have prompted the shift from hand spun cotton, silk, and wool yarns to mill spun acrylic and viscose yarns in two tribes in Meghalaya (Karolia and Ladia 2012). These adaptations are perhaps not surprising, as research suggests that weavers in NERI are quite open to adopting new technology in their weaving practices in order to compete with other crafts and with the powerloom industry (Liebl and Roy 2004; Singh et al. 2008; Wood 2011).

Modernization of local arts can profoundly change not only the product, but also the social and cultural structure of the community (Scrase 2003). In Indonesia, modernization of the traditional textile industry into large, commercialized manufacturing

processes led to the dissolution of approximately 410,000 traditional artisan jobs in weaving and associated crafts like dyeing (Scrase 2003). On the other hand, modernization of traditional textiles from Otavalo, Ecuador helped revitalize the community by opening new markets and opportunities among artists, merchants, and shopkeepers in the community (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002). Thus, modernization of textile industries is intertwined with varying social and cultural phenomena.

Cultural identity

Culture can be understood as a complex whole that includes values, beliefs, traditions and other habits that are learned and exchanged among people living within a specific society (Ennaji 2005). As culture is learned, it has a strong influence on how individuals perceive themselves, the world, and their place in the world, which ultimately contributes to the development of personal and shared identity (Ennaji 2005). Cultural identity is a part of the self or personal identity that reflects shared core values of the society that individuals belong to (Tajfel 1978). Hence, cultural identity refers to those meanings that individuals develop as they participate in society, taking on different statuses and playing different roles; it encompasses values, beliefs, and worldviews shared by members of a specific cultural group (Dressler 2017; Gleason 1983; Weaver 2001). Cultural identity is not a fixed construct, but rather, constantly evolves through social, economic, and political changes (Ston, 1962). This allows individuals to construct multiple identities, or sub-identities, that aid in forming the self (Forney and Rabolt 1986; Stone 1962; Weigert et al. 2007).

Textiles play an important role in establishing and expressing personal identity, which, in turn, signifies social statuses and roles that help build cultural identity (Kaur and Gale, 2002). Handwoven textiles have been found to visually communicate various roles, such as gender, social class, and status (Eriksen 2005; Forney and Rabolt 1986; Schofield-Tom-schin and Littrell 2001). NERI handwoven textiles represent tribal culture and contain elements of legends, rituals, myths, ceremonies, festivals, and the physical environment (Chakravorty et al. 2010). For example, in Tripura, a state in NERI, all religious ceremonies begin with the worship of the *Riha*, a handwoven breast cloth for family elders, and in Assam, *Ghomsa*, a handwoven cotton shawl is used to welcome guests on any occasion as a sign of respect and honor (Devi 2013). To date, however, researchers have yet to understand how weaving these traditional garments—which are essentially linked to tribal culture—may influence or contribute towards the weaver identity, or the way in which weaving may set a context for or be related to women's cultural identities.

With this work, we sought to understand Ri-Bhoi women weavers' cultural identities associated with weaving through the lens of symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interactionism (SI) can be understood as the reciprocal relationship through interaction between people and their social environment to create meaning and order within society (Aksan et al. 2009; Carter and Fuller 2015). Within the SI perspective, meanings are viewed as “physical attachments” levied on objects, events, and phenomenon emerging from social interaction of group members that help to direct responses thereby creating a feedback loop of evaluation for both the participant and the observer (Aksan et al. 2009; Blumer 1969). Symbolic interactionism focuses on “subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their world from their unique perspective” (Carter and Fuller

2015, p. 1). Central to SI are these four principles: (a) people behave based on the meanings objects hold for them, (b) interaction unfolds within a given socio-cultural context in which physical and social objects and situations are interpreted on the basis of socially constructed meanings; (c) meanings are produced through social interactions within society; and (d) meanings are perpetually constituted and reconstituted through meaning-making processes during interaction with others (Blumer 1969).

Symbolic interaction theory has been used to explore various aspects of sociology, exploring fields of cultural studies (Dingwall et al. 2011; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) and collective behavior and social movement (Lofland 1996; McPhail 1991; Stryker et al. 2000), thereby advancing research and developing theories on identity and social roles (Burke and Stets 2009; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Empirical and theoretical studies, specifically in the field of clothing and textiles, have unearthed the importance of dress and appearance in constructing and shaping identity (Kaiser 1983; Pratt and Rafaeli 1997; Niinimäki 2010; Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) argue that dress functions as a means of communication during social interaction and can help to influence and establish a person's self-identity as well as to locate the identity of others. That is, during social interaction, one's dress and appearance can reveal a social position of both wearer and observer within the interactional setting, promoting and reinforcing self-identity (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). Social psychologist, Stone (1962), also highlighted the influence of one's appearance, which includes various pieces of clothing, as an important element that communicates and establishes identity within a social interaction setting.

The literature reviewed above illuminates how handwoven textiles and dress can be used to establish identity. Less work, however, has adopted a social psychological lens to consider the meaning of creating textiles or dress in women artisan's lives. In their exploration of contemporary women textile handcrafters in the US, Johnson and Wilson (2005) uncovered a deep relationship between handcrafting activities and the artisans' sense of self and their social role, highlighting how "both the creation and use of the objects brought meaning to the lives of the women who created them" (Johnson and Wilson, 2005, p. 126). Similarly, Riley (2008)—who conducted an exploration of the experiences of British weavers, spinners, and dyers—discovered that textile artisans developed an enhanced sense of self through the process of textile making. However, little work has explored the lived experiences of textile artisans/weavers within the Indian handloom industry, which, as noted before, is an important part of the Indian economic system, employing millions of workers across the country. Especially within the region of NERI, where weaving is considered to be a feminine pursuit (Devi 2012; Government of India 2010; Ramswamy and Hmangaihzuoli 2016), understanding women's unique perspective on weaving can help to unearth how traditional indigenous knowledge related to weaving has changed and/or been preserved across time.

The district of Ri-Bhoi, Meghalaya, has received very little attention in terms of its handloom industry, and hence, was of particular interest in the present work. An initial visit to the Ri-Bhoi region in 2018 exposed some of the unexplored traditions of weaving steeped in culture within this region that are still being practiced to this day. Thus, with this work, we sought to answer the following research questions: How do Ri-Bhoi women handloom weavers develop a sense of cultural identity through weaving? That

is, what experiences related to the tradition of weaving support Ri-Bhoi women's cultural identities? How do interactions among women weavers within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context contribute to meanings related to women's weaving activities and their cultural identities? And, how has the modernization of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry set a context for the development of women weavers' cultural identities through weaving?

Methods

An ethnographic approach and grounded theory analytical techniques were adopted. Multiple methods of data collection were employed—including participant observation, field notes/journaling, and informal and formal interviews—fostering triangulation and helping to ensure the collection of valid and verifiable data (Willis 2007).

Research team

Our research team comprised 1 female graduate student and 2 female faculty members with expertise in social and cultural aspects of textile handicrafts and qualitative research methods. The 1st and 3rd authors were born and raised in India and have formal training in weaving. The second author was born and raised in the United States. The 1st author assumed responsibility for data collection efforts; all authors collaborated on the data analysis.

Case selection and participants

To identify sites for data collection, we worked with a local designer from the state of Meghalaya. This designer connected us to a tribal chief within Ri-Bhoi who served as a key informant for the study, providing critical contextual information that shaped our understanding of the data and guiding us to four villages within Ri-Bhoi—Umjong, Korstep, Umtumur, and Mawryngkang—where weaving was prevalent. From these villages, we recruited a purposive sample of 22 female weavers for participation in formal, semi-structured interviews. Sampling of participants for formal interviews continued until saturation of meanings was achieved (Urquhart 2013). Nine additional female weavers participated in brief, informal interviews. Observations also were made of selected informal and formal interview participants' weaving environments. Participants for both informal and formal interviews were recruited based on their active participation in weaving, with an aim of including women across varying ages.

Participants in informal and formal interviews ranged in age from 18 to 90, with a mean age of 45. All but four participants identified their primary occupation as farmers or cultivators; these four participants identified weaving as their primary occupation and engaged in weaving full-time, as they were diagnosed with medical conditions that prevented them from working in the fields. The participants who identified as cultivators spent most of their day in fields with their husbands and sons, whereas their daughters stayed at home to care for the elderly and the young. Ri-Bhoi women start working in fields around 15 years of age. Apart from working in the fields, they also undertake most household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the young and old, gardening, and collecting firewood. Throughout the remainder of this report, participants

are referred to by code identifiers; code identifiers for participants in formal interviews begin with “F,” and code identifiers for participants in informal interviews begin with “I.”

Data collection procedures

Data were collected over a period of three weeks. The first week of data collection involved daily visits to the four villages, field observation, and informal interviews. During the last two weeks of data collection, we stayed in each village over a period of three to four days, engaging in field observation, taking in-depth field notes, and conducting formal, semi-structured interviews.

Observational data collection

Weavers were observed over three weeks of immersion in the field. We visited the homes of 28 weavers to observe them in their natural environments. As the majority of the women weavers were farmers and worked in the fields during the day, weaving practices were observed only during some hours in the morning and in the evening. Observing women weavers helped us to understand how weavers balanced their time between weaving and managing household chores. Apart from observation in home settings, we also witnessed a few special religious ceremonies and occasions in the village. Being a part of these celebrations helped us to understand how traditional textiles are used in their cultural context. Field notes were recorded during each of the visits with expansion of notes and journal entries completed at end of the day.

Interview data collection

Both informal and formal interviews were conducted in Khasi, the local dialect, with the assistance of translators from each village. Conducting interviews that allow participants to remain in their own environment can yield less “sanitized or idealized” results as compared to those conducted in more formal settings (Murchison 2010, p. 104). Hence, most interviews (informal and formal) were conducted in the homes of the participants.

Informal interviews were brief and conversational in nature and were not audio-recorded or transcribed. Key meanings to emerge from informal interviews were, however, recorded in field notes/journal entries. Conducting the informal interviews served several key functions, allowing us (a) to develop a close relationship and rapport with the participants in a nonobtrusive manner¹, (b) to uncover new topics of interest that may otherwise have been overlooked, (c) to refine the protocol for the semi-structured interviews, and (d) to identify an ideal sample group for the semi-structured interviews (cf, Bernard 2005).

Formal, semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol that included open-ended questions exploring participants’ experiences with weaving, and specifically, the significance of weaving to their cultural identity. Questions addressed participants’ weaving practices, the role and meaning of weaving in participants’ lives, and participants’ perceptions of the way in which modernization has changed the handloom industry in Ri-Bhoi. Participants were encouraged to be candid in their responses

¹ Engaging in observation also contributed to the development of natural rapport with participants.

and were assured that there were no “right or wrong answers.” Most formal interviews lasted 20–50 min. After receiving oral consent from participants, all formal interviews were audio recorded. Reflexive journaling was used to support data collected from the informal and formal interviews; through journaling, we reflected on the research process and recorded observations about emerging themes and concepts.

Data analysis procedures

Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative method that seeks interpretive understanding of participants’ realities and that is often invoked to explore participants’ lived experiences within their natural settings (Charmaz 2000). In the present work, this approach was used to identify meaningful concepts, or themes, that could illuminate how weaving contributed to Ri-Bhoi women’s cultural identity in a shifting Ri-Bhoi cultural context.

Prior to analyzing the data, all formal interviews were transcribed verbatim in English². Transcripts, field notes, and journal entries were studied in-depth, repeatedly, to gain an overall impression of the data set. Through this process, key concepts were identified and were grouped together under more abstract categories (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Examples of categories included, motivation to weave, meaning associated with weaving, and background of weaving. Next, categories were developed into a coding guide that was applied to the data through a process of “open coding” (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Here, each unit of text was interpreted for meanings represented by the categories included within the coding guide. Throughout the open coding process, the researchers continued to search the data for new meanings. Next, “axial” and “selective” coding processes were adopted to search for relationships and connections within the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Lastly, relationships identified through axial and selective coding were considered more deeply; data that had been broken down via coding processes were put back together in new ways to conceptually represent participants’ lived realities.

Varied measures were taken to establish trustworthiness and dependability of data analysis. The authors met throughout the coding/analysis process to explore meanings identified within the data set until mutual understanding was achieved. Additionally, a researcher with background in textiles and apparel checked the application of the coding guide to the data. Interrater reliability was 96.4% and was calculated by dividing the total number of agreements in coding decisions by the total number of coding decisions made. Disagreements in coding were negotiated prior to calculating interrater reliability.

Results and discussion

Emergent themes

Participants’ experiences were situated in the context of the wide range of changes evidenced in the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry since the early twentieth century, when Christian missionaries invaded the region (Dikshit and Dikshit 2014). As explained by the

² Translators posed the researchers’ questions to participants in Khasi, the local dialect, and then translated participant responses into English (i.e., during the interview session, as part of the audio recording), making English language transcription possible.

tribal chief, these missionaries eventually converted the majority of indigenous tribal people from their native religions to Christianity. According to the chief and selected participants, this conversion almost completely eradicated the practice of weaving from Ri-Bhoi, as woven clothing and textiles had heretofore served a religious purpose in Ri-Bhoi culture:

When we were non-Christian, we used that cloth in... some religious ritual[s] and all. But then when we became Christian, then all those who are weaving also, they stop. (F19, age 90).

Beginning around 2010, however, the tribal chief of Ri-Bhoi partnered with selected community members and the Directorate of Sericulture in Meghalaya to implement a variety of government schemes intended to revive Ri-Bhoi weaving. These schemes have effectively contributed to the evolution of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry from a traditional industry (i.e., one that used very basic floor looms and handspun, homegrown cotton and silk yarns) to a more modernized industry (i.e., one that uses frame looms and fine, mill spun, synthetic yarns). Support offered through these schemes has included the enrollment of women weavers in “Self-Help Groups” (SHGs) that furnish weavers a yearly supply of synthetic yarns, that grant weavers funds to purchase new looms or other weaving equipment, and that provide funds to build weavers sheds for their looms.

In this modernized Ri-Bhoi weaving context, there seems to be a shared understanding that weaving is an important part of women’s lives as well as their *cultural identities*. Participants spoke with pride about their ability to weave traditional garments that represented *who they were in the context of their social group* – that is, that represented their *culture*:

I feel satisfied, [with my weaving] because it depicts my culture, my own culture. So, I feel proud that I know how to weave... (F1, age 43).

In addition to weaving garments that served as symbolic badges of identity, the *act* of weaving was regarded by participants as part of their identities, inasmuch as they were revered as guardians of traditional cloth, preserving the practice of weaving for future generations. The role that Ri-Bhoi women played as guardians of traditional cloth helped to establish their cultural identities; these identities were gradually instilled in women through cultural practices as well as through shared cultural values and beliefs that privileged the role of weaving in women’s lives and that valued the place of weaving in Ri-Bhoi culture:

...I’m happy to see my children, still know [how to weave], take care, and restore their culture... that we will never forget our identity, who we are. And I’m happy that this should be done from generation to generation. (F22, age 49)

In this section, we consider the ways in which Ri-Bhoi women weavers’ cultural identities were bound to their weaving activities by certain themes and shaped by the aforementioned changes to the Ri-Bhoi cultural context. Themes identified represent value that Ri-Bhoi women weavers attached to various aspects of their weaving tradition, which in turn, supported their cultural identities and included: (a) maintaining the tradition of weaving through acquisition and exchange of knowledge, (b) securing

social support from family and community, (c) maintaining the tradition of weaving through creation of textiles that symbolize tribe and culture, and (d) achieving a sense of fulfillment (i.e., joy, happiness, and pride).

Maintaining tradition of weaving through acquisition and exchange of knowledge

Exchange of weaving knowledge among weavers has played a key role in preserving weaving skills and traditions within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context. However, across time, acquisition of weaving knowledge has evolved somewhat, owing to various changes within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context and handloom industry. In particular, participants shared that, traditionally, girls learned how to weave by observing their mothers, grandmothers, and/or siblings. Young girls would sit beside their elders and watch how they wove intricate designs on textiles as F1 shared, “Yes, I watch(ed) while my mother [was] weaving... I [got] my weaving from my grandmother, from my mother, so that’s how I [kept] going”. When these girls got married, they were entrusted with the duty of weaving clothes for their families. This cycle of exchanging knowledge ensured the continuity of weaving within Ri-Bhoi. F6 described her experience learning to weave,

...When I was of young age, my mother used to weave. Then...my mother[’s] thread I used to take...and then I used to weave...Just making you know, just playing... (F6, age 67).

When traditional weaving practices waned in the region under the influence of Christianity, selected weavers sought to revive these practices by passing along their knowledge to other women in the community. F19, who at age 90 was identified to be the oldest weaver among all participants and who was acknowledged as the sentinel of traditional weaving in her village, described her efforts to restore traditional weaving practices in this time of decline:

For some time, we completely stopped [weaving], then me, I am still continuing, once in a while...Then, the king [the tribal chief], he started reviving the culture...dress, and all. Everybody interested to weave, I am teaching...to help whoever is interested to do it. (F19, age 90).

Initially, after the government initiatives had been introduced, women who were interested in learning to weave taught themselves through trial and error or sought assistance from older women in the community, such as F19, as their mothers did not possess the knowledge to teach them:

*I learned by myself only. I taught myself. No one taught me. (F16, age 40).
[I learned to weave by] watching others weaving and I saw and I learned from there...I see from others...My mother, she never [used to] weave. (F12, age 46).*

As such, when familial socialization was not possible, teaching the self or observing others in the community became the new means of acquiring knowledge about weaving. In this way, practices of socialization were adapted to accommodate the shifting landscape of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry. Slowly, as interest in weaving expanded across the early twenty-first century with the assistance of the SHGs, mothers again

began to mentor their daughters in the traditions of weaving, sharing this key aspect of tribal culture across generational lines.

SI theory proposes that human beings make sense of their social situations by adapting their behaviors and actions to fit with the actions of the other (Blumer 1969). In the case of Ri-Bhoi women weavers, watching and interacting with other women—whether family elders or other community members—has helped to establish weaving as a socially accepted and recognized activity for women. As social interaction plays an important role in establishing an individual's identity (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992), the acquisition and exchange of weaving knowledge among Ri-Bhoi women weavers through social interaction has helped to constitute and shape their cultural identities. In turn, weaving has become more culturally significant and valued.

Securing social support from family and community

Social support is conceptualized as “an individual's perception of general support or specific supportive behavior (available or acted on) from people in [one's] social network, which enhances [one's] functioning...” (Malecki and Demaray 2003, p. 232). Social support can take multiple forms, including (a) emotional support, which consists of providing some form of trust and love, (b) instrumental support, which consists of practical support, such as spending time with someone in need and/or providing materials or money, and (c) informational support, which consists of providing knowledge and guidance (Malecki and Demaray 2003).

Across time, various and evolving forms of social support from family, friends, other community members, and SHGs have played an important role in sustaining the weaving activities of Ri-Bhoi weavers. Before the decline of weaving practices and the introduction of government schemes, weavers received informational support through exchange of knowledge from their family elders during the learning process. At this time, informational support was the most prominent form of support received from family elders (i.e., mothers and grandmothers) to teach and maintain weaving traditions within the family. Today, however, weavers go beyond their family ties to gain informational support (i.e., knowledge about how to weave) from friends and other community members. Additionally, weavers who were part of SHGs spoke about providing informational support to other weavers by educating non SHG weavers about the benefits of joining SHGs:

By making [non SHG weavers] understand, if you join this group [i.e., the SHG] you'll get the scheme. You will get like that [points to loom and thread]. About how to weave. You will get training and all. (F17, age 37).

Hence, today, weavers receive varying forms of informational support from not just family, but from other community members, as well.

Participants also expressed how, in the contemporary Ri-Bhoi context, family, friends, and other community members provide them with emotional support by recognizing and appreciating their work:

Yeah, my mom, she said, “Ahh, how do you know [how to weave]?” She...appreciates me. (F8, age 26).

Yes, they encourage me...someone is interest[ed] in weaving in [my] household. (F21,

age 22).

Appreciation from community members sometimes also led to special orders for woven products, yielding sales and additional income for weaver households. F8 described the support and encouragement she received from her mentor, other weavers, and community members:

Out there, my teacher also, my colleagues also said "AHHHH!!! You are a very smart girl. If you get little time also...you make [clothes] for me, [and] you make [clothes] for me? (F8, age 26).

Weavers also received emotional support by joining SHGs, which helped them to “get friends—other people who can also weave” (F11, age 41), thus creating a social support system for women interested in weaving. Emotional support from others played an important role in preserving the very tradition of Ri-Bhoi weaving insomuch as such support prompted participants to continue to hone and practice their weaving skills:

They say to me that it is nice to be weaving like this, so that [weaving] will remain our tradition after long time. (F11, age 41).

Today, in addition to emotional support, weavers also receive instrumental support, mainly from family members, who buy yarns and raw materials needed for weaving. Sometimes, weavers also received help from their husbands to build the frame looms they received from government schemes (i.e., SHGs):

The SHG only give one small piece of the frame. Everything else I made by [my]self, with the help of my husband. (F7, age 38).
[My husband] used to make that one also [i.e. the shuttle loom]. He built the loom for me. I told him that I wanted a loom and he built it for me. (F10, age 28).

And, participants of diverse ages identified “time” as a key form of instrumental support provided to them by family members. F17 spoke of how her family members gave her a “chance to weave, and time to weave” (age 37). F14, one of the older participants in the sample, appreciated the instrumental support provided by her children:

They [i.e. family members] give time for me [to weave]. My daughters, they buy yarns for me, whenever I ask to buy yarns. And they give me time.. some time.. They understand, because of my age, it's time for me to do work [i.e. weaving]. (F14, age 63).

Thus, over time, family, friends, community members, and SHGs provided varying forms of social support to weavers that, in turn, facilitated weavers' continued participation in and functional and emotional investment in the craft of weaving, reinforcing the importance of weaving in Ri-Bhoi women's lives, and presumably, shaping their cultural identities. Identity theorists Burke and Reitzes (1981) have argued that social interaction and validation from members in the community can help to enhance a sense of self-meaning and self-definition, thereby reinforcing an identity based on a particular role in which one is engaged. Moreover, positive reinforcement from within one's social group, through varying forms of social support (emotional, informational, and instrumental) can protect physical and psychological well-being and nurture a sense of control, and belonging, thereby improving life satisfaction and happiness (Taylor and Stanton 2007;

Thoits 2003, 2011; Turner and Lloyd 1999). In this way, social support from diverse others has the potential to bolster the role of weaving in the lives of Ri-Bhoi women and to establish for them a meaningful cultural identity in relation to this role by reinforcing the shared cultural value accorded to weaving (i.e., by those providing social support).

Maintaining tradition of weaving through creation of textiles that symbolize tribe and culture

Within the contemporary Ri-Bhoi cultural context, participants discussed the way in which traditional handwoven textiles symbolically represented various aspects of self (Eriksen 2005; Forney and Rabolt 1986; Schofield-Tomschin and Littrell 2001), serving as badges of identity. In this vein, F2 and F6 explained how motifs and colors incorporated into their traditional woven clothes were representative of the region and tribe they belonged to:

Main thing is, by this cloth, that is the identity for us. We are from whom [sic], which particular tribe, from particular kingdom [sic]. We have got our own style of weav[ing]... design, so and so. That depict[s] us, that we are from that particular area. (F2, age 28).

By [wearing] these clothes also, if we go to Shillong³...peoples will recognize that we are from Ri- Bhoi, that we are Khasi⁴, from here. (F6, age 67).

Such textiles were worn for special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, religious rituals, and other cultural celebrations. For instance, F3 mentioned a cultural celebration called 'Sajer', where people from different tribes in neighboring villages gathered to honor their cultural traditions, including their food, clothing, and dances:

There is some function... we call that, Sajer. We...dance once a year... in that occasion also, we...wear only this, our own cloth only. (F3, age 80).

Beyond serving as visual markers of tribe and culture, traditional handwoven textiles also were used as gifts and tokens of honor. Women who wove traditional textiles gifted them to close friends and family members. Gifting handwoven textiles was considered to be a precious offering, as F3 shared:

...I want[ed] to learn [to weave] because umm, if somebody died...the clothes I [can] give [to the family]...It's a great honor. (F3, age 80).

In their accounts, older participants also acknowledged symbolic meanings associated with traditional textiles used in religious rituals observed prior to the conversion of the Ri-Bhoi people to Christianity: F19 explained:

That kind of special cloth... non-Christian time, they put for girls in family...they want to entrust, all the religious duty to her. The one who'll take the responsibility for how to perform those religious ritual like, when to do sacrifice and all. It is empowerment to a girl....Then they put that special lungi [a type of wrap skirt] with

³ Shillong is the capital of Meghalaya. Weavers sometime travel to Shillong for state festivals.

⁴ The Khasi are a group of indigenous ethnic people that belong to Meghalaya. The people of Ri-Bhoi, known as The Bhois, are a sub group of the Khasi tribe,

some gathering, with all the elders, after that, they want to do some offer[ing], some sacrifice. (F19, age 90).

According to F19, when Christian Missionaries invaded Ri-Bhoi, they spurred a change in use of traditional textiles, “After converting to Christian[ity], then they don’t take care” shared F19, as the same religious rituals were no longer practiced, and the traditional textiles were “thrown here and there and all.” Today, with government intervention and active participation from women in the community, women weavers are actively preserving some of these textile traditions by educating others in the craft of weaving:

...now we are weaving, and our challenge is also to teach the children. Teaching is very important because we know now [how to weave]. Before there was a break [when not as many people where weaving]. But we do not want again that break [sic]. We want weaving to continue. (F1, age 43).

Weavers from all villages expressed the importance of teaching weaving to the younger generations, noting the significance of doing so to ensuring the growth and continuity of the weaving tradition within the Ri-Bhoi community:

The main thing is to not stop weaving. We have to continue it. And for the children... we have to teach them, so that our tradition will be remain, and develop. Not to stop. (F17, age 37).

By ensuring the continuity and preservation of weaving practices in Ri-Bhoi, women weavers are providing a physical product that symbolizes Ri-Bhoi peoples’ culture and identity.

Stone (1962) proposed that appearance may sometimes take priority over communication via discourse to establish identity during social interaction. Moreover, dress has the ability to communicate identity as it can “announce social position of wearer to both wearer and observer within a particular interaction situation” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, p. 5). As such, through the creation of traditional textiles, Ri-Bhoi women weavers successfully communicate their tribe and culture to themselves and others, thereby establishing a sense of identity. Additionally, the act of weaving traditional textiles that serve as visual markers of Ri-Bhoi culture, which is linked to women’s identity, has evolved to include the act of preserving the craft of weaving, and more broadly, the Ri-Bhoi culture:

The future is... to encourage people here to weave... So, my main objective is to restore the culture, the mindset in the people that they should love to weave. (F22, age 49).

Achieving a sense of fulfillment (Joy, happiness, and pride)

Women weavers from all four villages shared a common love and passion for weaving, which encouraged and motivated them to establish weaving as a daily activity. In their eyes, weaving was not just a duty for women; rather it carried a sense of pride. Weaving established a sense of responsibility within participants, as they regarded themselves as keepers of the tradition and they contributed to society by creating textiles and garments

that depicted their culture. The capacity to symbolize their culture by creating traditional textiles and clothing brought immense joy and pride to the participants:

I feel satisfied [weaving] because it depict[s] my culture, our own culture. So, I feel proud that I know how to weave. (F1, age 43).

I am very proud. They are asking, my friend and all, how [do] you know? Without nobody teaching you [sic] to weave. They appreciate me. You [have] no mother, no father, but I know how to weave. (F15, age 60).

Ri-Bhoi women shared that the sense of fulfillment related to weaving extended beyond the mere knowledge and ability to weave traditional textiles. With the introduction of modern techniques of production and easy access to raw materials, traditional textiles, which are symbolic representations and visual markers of the Ri-Bhoi culture, could now be sold to others in Ri-Bhoi who do not know how to weave. By selling their traditional textiles and having other Ri-Bhoi community members wear and appreciate their hand-woven cloth, weavers developed a sense of pride, joy, and happiness:

I feel very happy if people will wear [my woven products]. And not only happy, I will keep a good smile for what I have done [sic]... when [I am] going for wedding[s], I see people wear my clothes. So, my nose become[s] big! [i.e., she becomes proud]. I feel happy! (F22, age 49).

...when I see everybody putting and they [are] us[ing] for function and all, I feel very proud, I'm happy! (F19, age 90).

Selling their handwoven traditional textiles not only enhanced happiness and engagement in weaving, but also provided additional financial support to the weavers' families. In turn, this motivated weavers to teach younger generations to weave, thereby ensuring the continuity of the art and the weaving community's livelihood. A few weavers specifically noted feeling extremely happy and proud to see children weave and to continue the tradition of weaving:

I feel happy. This is our cloth. When I sees [sic] it in the market, I feel happy. I feel good....That they [i.e. young children] too know how to make the clothes. Not just the mother[s] know. All the children, they also know. That's why I feel happy. (F14, age 63).

...I am happy to see my children, still uh, knowing, tak[ing] care, [and] then... restor[ing] our culture. That we will never forget our identity, who we are. And I am [very] much happy that this should be done, generation to generation. (F22, age 49).

Joy, happiness, and pride that arose from the above activities can be linked to an underlying passion towards weaving that the women shared. Vallerand et al. (2014), who studied the effect of passion on the self, uncovered a deep connection between engaging in passionate activities and the perception of the self. In particular, the researchers discovered that individuals highly value activities they are passionate about, which prompts high investment of time and energy, and hence, supports self-concept. Moreover, engaging in passionate activities also has been linked to higher self-esteem, life-satisfaction, and overall well-being (Carpentier et al. 2012; Osborne and Taylor 2010). As symbolic interaction theory reminds us, the process of social interaction helps people define and

establish meaning towards their social role to create a sense of identity (Askan et al. 2009), which in turn directs action (Blumer 1969). The perception of the self, arising from meaning negotiated during social interaction, can be strengthened through validation from other members in the social group (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone 1962). This validation reinforces one's claim to an associated social role (Solomon 1983). Ri-Bhoi women weavers received validation of their social roles as weavers from other community members who wore and bought their textiles, thereby enhancing emotions of joy, happiness, and pride, thus heightening their position within society and their identity. Moreover, validation also elevated Ri-Bhoi women weavers' social role to "keepers of tradition," preserving traditional clothes and culture among the tribe, further strengthening weaving as constituting to their cultural identity.

Conclusion

With this work, we sought to explore and understand how weaving contributed to constructing Ri-Bhoi women weavers' cultural identities through social interaction in a shifting handloom industry context that has included the evolution of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry from a traditional industry to a more modernized industry in the last two decades. As a result of immersion in the field and analysis of the collected data, we identified four themes illuminating how women weavers in Ri-Bhoi developed a close connection to weaving, which helped to shape and mold their cultural identities, namely, (a) maintaining the tradition of weaving through acquisition and exchange of knowledge, (b) securing social support from family and community, (c) maintaining the tradition of weaving through creation of textiles that symbolize tribe and culture, and (d) achieving a sense of fulfillment. From our interaction with the participants, it was evident that women weavers in Ri-Bhoi deeply valued weaving. Engaging in weaving not only helped women to build special skills that directly supported their cultural traditions – for example, by assisting them to develop the ability to weave garments with motifs that were representative of their tribe and culture – it also helped them to establish a sense of purpose by providing them a means through which they could contribute to their society. That is, by teaching their friends, neighbors, and children in the community to weave, Ri-Bhoi women weavers ensured the preservation and continuation of weaving traditions so that the next generation of women would be able to contribute to the Ri-Bhoi society by weaving culturally significant garments that are valued by all members of the Ri-Bhoi community. Women weavers' success in their ability to create and preserve these culturally significant garments arose within a context of social support and appreciation from different members in the community. And, women weavers described experiencing an overwhelming sense of joy, happiness, and pride from their capacity to contribute to their society and culture through their weaving activities. Moreover, women weaver's success in establishing themselves as traditional handloom weavers within the Ri-Bhoi cultural context arose from meaning developed through social interaction with others in the Ri-Bhoi community. As the self is a "cumulative result of socialization" (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, p. 5), Ri-Bhoi women were successful in constructing cultural identities as 'weavers', even through changing tides of the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry. Women weavers established meaning towards weaving from a reciprocal relationship they shared with others in the Ri-Bhoi community who validated and supported their

role as weavers. Validation and support from various members of the community, especially socially similar others within reference groups, and audience members, can help promote positive self-evaluation of role performance thereby enhancing self-esteem and self-worth (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Thoits 2011). Thus, in a very salient way, weaving as an activity provided women weavers in Ri-Bhoi with a significant role within the community, thereby contributing to their sense of self and their cultural identities by affording them a palpable means by which to participate in and contribute to their society, to preserve their culture, and to nurture their spirits and souls (cf, Dressler 2017; Gleason 1983; Hogg et al. 1995; Weaver 2001).

It also is important to acknowledge how the changes of modernization in Ri-Bhoi set a context that shaped women weavers' experiences of the weaving process in rather significant ways. For example, weavers acknowledged the influence of modernization upon the ways in which new weavers were socialized into weaving practices as well as the types of social support needed and received (and from whom). Similarly, weavers spoke about the ways in which shifts in the Ri-Bhoi handloom industry had prompted changes in the use of traditional textiles as well as a newfound commitment to preserving local textile/cultural traditions. As discussed, these experiences of the weaving process were intimately intertwined with participants' cultural identities, or their ways of seeing themselves as "weavers" within Ri-Bhoi society (cf, Tajfel 1978).

From a theoretical standpoint, understanding weavers' perspectives through the social psychological lens of symbolic interactionism has added insight to the current literature of how dress, appearance, and the creation of textiles and dress can have a significant impact on the construction of self. Our analyses revealed that, along with weaving, the act of creating textiles and dress, social interaction, role identification, and social validation have together played a significant part in establishing a sense of cultural identity among the women weavers of Ri-Bhoi. Thus, in the context of our work, SI has illuminated the importance of the social world in understanding culture and has underscored the notion that people and their creative art-making should be studied jointly and within their social context (cf, Kaiser 1997).

It is important to note the limitations of this study. The first major limitation was a language barrier. As the researchers were not well versed in the local dialect of Khasi, translators were required throughout the data collection process. This posed a barrier to communicate original ideas and thoughts as both the researchers and the participants were limited by the translators' fluency in both Khasi and English. Second, data were collected over three weeks. Longer immersion in the field or a longitudinal study may be beneficial to understand an evolving handloom industry and the people involved in it. Furthermore, because cultural identity is established through shared values and beliefs among all members of the community (Sapir 1938), it is imperative that future work also consider the perspectives of non-weaving members of society, including those of men and children. Moreover, exploring how the local political and economic systems could influence the weaver community could add valuable insight. Examining other tribal communities in NERI to compare and contrast cultural diversities among tribes in the region also might provide valuable information, as findings related to the weaving traditions of one tribe cannot be generalized to another. Hence, further research in this field

is necessary to provide a deeper understanding of these tribal communities and their traditional values.

From a broader perspective, documenting weaving traditions practiced among these indigenous populations is important to catalog a historical timeline of traditional handloom cultures and their practices. There is little research that focuses on people in tribal communities in NERI, and most empirical research has focused its attention on initiatives that have been put in place to support and help weavers and handloom workers (Bortamuly and Goswami, 2015; Boruah and Kaur 2015; Chakravorty et al. 2010; Devi 2012; 2013). However, there is a lack of information that investigates the weavers' perspectives. Although work highlighting these initiatives is important as it provides support for the NERI handloom industry, understanding the weavers' perspectives is equally important, as weavers are the backbone of the handloom industry. The present work is one of the first empirical studies to analyze women weavers' identities and their experiences with weaving in not just Ri-Bhoi, but in NERI. Uncovering and understanding weavers' perspectives can provide important information regarding initiatives that may be most effective to support and preserve their cultural traditions.

Moreover, as our global fashion industry is awakening from its unsustainable reliance on fast fashion (Boström and Micheletti 2016; Pedersen and Andersen 2015), companies have been steering towards innovative fashion business models that focus on sustainable initiatives such as circular economy (Moorhouse and Moorhouse 2017; Niinimäki 2017), shared and collaborative consumption (Belk 2014; Moorhouse and Moorhouse 2017; Pedersen & Netter, 2015), slow fashion (Fletcher 2010; Pookulangara and Shepard, 2013; Todeschini et al. 2017), and fair trade (Jones and Williams 2012; Shen et al. 2012). As such, recognizing traditional textile making techniques from indigenous tribes who have successfully sustained and managed their resources and ecosystems by cultivating social systems that are nature based, and that honor complex interdependence of all life forms within their regions (The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA] 2020), can provide indigenous artisans a unique position in supporting the global fashion industry with one of a kind, sustainable products.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to sincerely thank all members of the Ri-Bhoi community who helped in the successful completion of this study, including the Tribe Chief and his family, all translators, and other members of the community who opened their homes to accommodate the first author during her visit.

Authors' contributions

RMD originated the research idea. All authors contributed to the conceptualization of the study. RMD performed the data collection. Guided by SD and JPO, RMD conducted the data analyses. RMD developed the original draft of the manuscript, and all authors contributed to further writing, editing, and review. All authors have approved the submitted version (and any substantially modified version that involves the author's contribution to the study); and have agreed both to be personally accountable for the author's own contributions and to ensure that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work, even ones in which the author was not personally involved, are appropriately investigated, resolved, and the resolution documented in the literature. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data used and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This research was conducted under the approval and supervision of Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB Approval No: 101-19H).

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author details

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Design, Radford University, 232 McGuffey Hall, Radford, VA 24142, USA. ² Professor, Department of Design and Merchandising, Colorado State University, 114G Nancy Richardson Design Center, 522 W. Lake Street I, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1574, USA. ³ Associate Professor, Department of Design and Merchandising, Colorado State University, 324 Gifford, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA.

Received: 25 February 2020 Accepted: 13 July 2020

Published online: 15 September 2020

References

- Aksan, N., Kısac, B., Aydin, M., & Demirbukan, S. (2009). Symbolic interaction theory. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(1), 902–904. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.160>.
- Belk, R. (2014). You are what you can access: Sharing and collaborative consumption online. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(8), 1595–1600. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.10.001>.
- Bernard, H. R. (2005). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Altamira: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bortamuly, A. B., & Goswami, K. (2015). Determinants of the adoption of modern technology in the handloom industry in Assam. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 90, 400–409. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.04.018>.
- Boruah, R. R., & Kaur, S. (2015). A study on the analysis of the economics of weavers' cooperative societies in Assam. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(1), 1–3.
- Bostrom, M., & Micheletti, M. (2016). Introducing the sustainability challenge of textiles and clothing. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 39(4), 367–375. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-016-9336-6>.
- Burke, P. J., & Reitzes, D. C. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44(2), 83–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3033704>.
- Burke, P., & Stets, J. E. (2009). *Identity Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia.isa*, 1(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/205684601561>.
- Chakravorty, R., Dutta, P., & Ghose, J. (2010). Sericulture and traditional craft of silk weaving in Assam. *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, 9(2), 378–385.
- Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded theory. Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Carpentier, J., Mageau, G. A., & Vallerand, R. J. (2012). Ruminations and flow: Why do people with a more harmonious passion experience higher well-being? *Journal of Happiness studies*, 13(3), 501–518. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9276-4>.
- Colloredo-Mansfeld, R. (2002). An ethnography of neoliberalism: understanding competition in artisan economies. *Current Anthropology*, 43(1), 113–137. <https://doi.org/10.1086/324129>.
- Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York, NY: Scribner.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Devi, C. V. (2012). Exploring the Lives of Manipur's Women Weavers. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152151101900102>.
- Devi, C. V. (2013). Handlooms for livelihood in north-eastern region: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Rural Development*, 32(4), 427–438.
- Dikshit, K. R., & Dikshit, J. K. (2014). North-east India: Land, people and economy. *Springer*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7055-3>.
- Dingwall, R., Nerlich, B., & Hillyard, S. (2011). Biological determinism and symbolic interaction: Hereditary streams and cultural roads. *Symbolic Interaction*, 26(4), 631–644. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2003.26.4.631>.
- Dressler, W. W. (2017). Culture and the individual: Theory and method of cultural consonance. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315164007>.
- Eliasoph, N., & Lichterman, P. (2003). Culture in interaction. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(4), 735–794. <https://doi.org/10.1086/367920>.
- Ennaji, M. (2005). Multilingualism, cultural identity, and education in Morocco. *Springer*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/b104063>.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2005). Keeping the recipe: Norwegian folk costumes and cultural capital. *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 2004(44), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.3167/092012904782311308>.
- Fletcher, K. (2010). Slow fashion: An invitation for systems change. *Fashion Practice*, 2(2), 259–265. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175693810X12774625387594>.
- Forney, J. C., & Rabolt, N. J. (1986). Ethnic identity: Its relationship to ethnic and contemporary dress. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 4(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X8600400201>.
- Ghouse, S. M. (2012). Indian handicraft industry: Problems and strategies. *International Journal of Management Research and Reviews*, 2(7), 1183–1199.
- Gleason, P. (1983). Identifying identity: A semantic history. *The Journal of American History*, 69(4), 910–931. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1901196>.
- Government of India (2018) Guidelines for the NER Textile Promotion Scheme. Ministry of Textiles. https://www.texminic.in/sites/default/files/Textiles_NERTPS_Guidelines.pdf. Retrieved 10 Sept 2018.
- Government of India. (2016). Report on market research for promotion of India handloom brand. Ministry of Textiles, National Handloom Development Corporation. <https://handlooms.nic.in/writereaddata/2534.pdf>. Retrieved 25 Jan 2019.

- Government of India. (2015). Notes on Handloom Sector. Ministry of Textiles, Office of the Development Commissioner (Handloom). <https://handlooms.nic.in/writereaddata/2486.pdf>. Retrieved 10 Sept 2018.
- Government of India. (2010). Handloom census of India 2009–10. Primary handloom census abstract. Ministry of Textiles, Office of the Development Commissioner (Handloom). <https://handlooms.nic.in/Writereaddata/Handloom%2520report.pdf>. Retrieved 9 Sept 2018.
- Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127>.
- Johnson, J. S., & Wilson, L. E. (2005). "It Says You Really Care": Motivational factors of contemporary female handcrafters. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 23(2), 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X0502300205>.
- Jones, A. R. W., & Williams, G. (2012). Perception of fair trade labeling and certification: three case studies. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 16(2), 246–265. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13612021211222851>.
- Kaiser, S. B. (1983). Toward a contextual social psychology of clothing: A synthesis of symbolic interactionist and cognitive theoretical perspectives. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 2(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X8300200101>.
- Kaiser, S. B. (1997). *The social psychology of clothing: Symbolic appearances in context*. New York: Fairchild Books.
- Karolia, A., & Ladia, B. (2012). Traditional textiles and costumes of Karbi and Biate tribes of Meghalaya. *NISCAIR-CSIR*, 11(2), 309–316.
- Kaur, J., & Gale, C. (2002). *The Textile Book*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Liebl, M., & Roy, T. (2004). Handmade in India: Traditional craft skills in a changing world. *Poor People's Knowledge: Promoting Intellectual Property in Developing Countries*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-5487-6>.
- Lofland, J. (1996). *Social movement organizations: Guide to research on insurgent realities*. New Brunswick: AldineTransaction.
- Malecki, C. K., & Demaray, M. K. (2003). What type of support do they need? Investigating student adjustment as related to emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 18(3), 231–252. <https://doi.org/10.1521/scpq.18.3.231.22576>.
- Mamidipudi, A., B. S., & Bijker, W. (2012). Mobilising discourses: Handloom as sustainable socio-technology. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(25), 41–51. www.jstor.org/stable/23215032
- McPhail, C. (1991). *The Myth of the madding crowd*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315133270>.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Moorhouse, D., & Moorhouse, D. (2017). Sustainable design: Circular economy in fashion and textiles. *The Design Journal*, 20(1), S1948–S1959. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2017.1352713>.
- Murchison, J. (2010). *Ethnography essentials: Designing, conducting, and presenting your research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Niinimäki, K. (2010). Eco-clothing, consumer identity and ideology. *Sustainable development*, 18(3), 150–162. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.455>.
- Pedersen, E. R. G., & Andersen, K. R. (2015). Sustainability innovators and anchor draggers: A global expert study on sustainable fashion. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 19(3), 315–327. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-08-2014-0059>.
- Pedersen, E. R. G., & Netter, S. (2015). Collaborative consumption: Business model opportunities and barriers for fashion libraries. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 19(3), 258–273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-05-2013-0073>.
- Pookulangara, S., & Shephard, A. (2013). Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions- An exploratory study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20(2), 200–206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2012.12.002>.
- Pratt, M. G., & Rafaeli, A. (1997). Organizational dress as a symbol of multilayered social identities. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(4), 862–898. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256951>.
- Ramswamy, R., & Hmangaihzuai, J. B. (2016). Promotion and distribution of handloom products in tribal clusters in north east India. *IUP Journal of Entrepreneurship Development*, 13(1), 47–58.
- Ramswamy, R., & Kumar, N. J. (2013). Women weavers in Mizoram: Sustaining livelihood through cluster development. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(3), 435–452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971521513495292>.
- Riley, J. (2008). Weaving an enhanced sense of self and a collective sense of self through creative textile-making. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 15(2), 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2008.9686611>.
- Roach-Higgins, M. E., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). Dress and Identity. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 10(4), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X9201000401>.
- Sapir, E. (1938). Why cultural anthropology needs the psychiatrist. *Psychiatry*, 1(1), 7–12.
- Schofield-Tomschin, S., & Littrell, M. A. (2001). Textile handcraft guild participation: A conduit to successful aging. *Clothing and Textile Research Journal*, 19(2), 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X0101900201>.
- Shen, B., Wang, Y., Lo, C. K. Y., & Shum, M. (2012). The impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase behavior. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 16(2), 232–245. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13612021211222842>.
- Scrase, T. J. (2003). Precarious production: Globalisation and artisan labour in the Third World. *Third World Quarterly*, 24(3), 449–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659032000084401>.
- Singh, A., & Singh, R. K., Adi Women Community (2008). Gekong-Galong—Traditional weaving technology of Adi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, 7(1), 87–92. <https://nopr.niscair.res.in/handle/123456789/577>
- Solomon, M. R. (1983). The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(3), 319–329. <https://doi.org/10.1086/208971>.
- Stone, G. P. (1962). Appearance of the self. In A. M. Rose (Ed.), *Human behavior and social processes: An interactionist approach* (pp. 86–118). New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Stryker, S., & Serpe, R. T. (1982). Commitment, identity salience, and role behavior: A theory and research example. In W. Ickes & E. S. Knowles (Eds.), *Personality, roles, and social behavior* (pp. 199–218). New York, NY: Springer. **10.1007/978-1-4613-9469-3_7.**
- Stryker, S., Owens, T. J., & White, R. W. (Eds.). (2000). *Self, identity, and social movements* (Vol. 13). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tajfel, H. E. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Taylor, S. E., & Stanton, A. L. (2007). Coping resources, coping processes, and mental health. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 3, 377–401. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091520>.
- The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (2020). The indigenous world 2020. https://iwgia.org/images/yearbook/2020/IWGIA_The_Indigenous_World_2020.pdf. Retrieved 12 May 2020.
- Thoits, P. A. (2003). Personal agency in the accumulation of multiple role-identities. In P. J. Burke, T. J. Owens, R. T. Serpe, & P. A. Thoits (Eds.), *Advances in identity theory and research*. Boston, MA: Springer. **10.1007/978-1-4419-9188-1_13.**
- Thoits, P. A. (2011). Mechanisms linking social ties and support to physical and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146510395592>.
- Todeschini, B. V., Cortimiglia, M. N., Callegaro-de-Menezes, D., & Ghezzi, A. (2017). Innovative and sustainable business models in the fashion industry: Entrepreneurial drivers, opportunities, and challenges. *Business Horizons*, 60(6), 759–770. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.07.003>.
- Turner, R. J., & Lloyd, D. A. (1999). The stress process and the social distribution of depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 40(4), 374–404. www.jstor.org/stable/2676332
- Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*. London: Sage.
- Usborne, E., & Taylor, D. M. (2010). The role of cultural identity clarity for self-concept clarity, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(7), 883–897. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210372215>.
- Vallerand, R. J., Houlfort, N., & Forest, J. (2014). Passion at work: Determinants and outcomes. In M. Gagne (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of work engagement, motivation, and self-determination theory* (pp. 85–105). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weaver, H. N. (2001). Indigenous identity: What is it, and who really has it? *American Indian Quarterly*, 25(2), 240–255. www.jstor.org/stable/1185952
- Weigert, A. J., Teitge, J. S., & Teitge, D. W. (2007). *Society and identity: Toward a sociological psychology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Wood, S. (2011). Sustaining crafts and livelihoods: Handmade in India. *Sustainability in Craft and Design Enquiry*, 3, 1–6.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Submit your manuscript to a SpringerOpen[®] journal and benefit from:

- Convenient online submission
- Rigorous peer review
- Open access: articles freely available online
- High visibility within the field
- Retaining the copyright to your article

Submit your next manuscript at ► [springeropen.com](https://www.springeropen.com)
