



“Interpret”: An Adaptive and Gender-Neutral Line for People with Vision Loss

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Mentor Statement

This ensemble was designed as part of a senior capstone product development collection focusing on marginalized consumers with adaptive apparel needs. Students utilized user-centered design methods to develop their designs. The ensemble was one of eight looks designed by the student for this project. The mentorship process began with a discussion and review of adaptive apparel and marginalized consumer groups. The purpose of the mentorship relationship consisted of guiding the student through market and brand research, design methods, and processes. Throughout the process, the student received formative and summative feedback. The student engaged in the product development process in three phases. Phase I included research and development of preliminary designs and consisted of a target market, trend, inspiration report, a concept board, working drawings, a preliminary line critique and selection, and user selection. Phase II included design-focused patternmaking and fit sample development. Phase III finalized the designs through a final production sample, final design report with full technical package development, and final line critique. The student engaged with a user throughout the design process to gather feedback for the design. This project was selected due to the alignment with the brand, H&M, the engagement with the user, the quality of the design and sewing work, and the unique and innovative approach to adaptive apparel for a marginalized consumer.

Design Statement

The number of people in the United States who are blind totals 1.02 million, with vision impairment, the number is 3.22 million people in the United States. It is estimated that by 2050 the population of blind or vision impaired individuals (BVI) will double to 2.01 million and 6.95 million, respectively (CDC, 2019). While much progress has been made when providing adaptive apparel for people with disabilities, adaptive apparel focused on accommodating the needs of BVI individuals remains largely ignored in the mass-market segment of the apparel industry. BVI individuals can find garments that include braille tags that help consumers shop for apparel and websites that are accessible and help BVI individuals select apparel. However, access to apparel in the mass-market consumer segment remains elusive for the BVI.

Statement of Purpose

Therefore, for this study, an adaptive design was created to respond to the needs of BVI individuals within the mass-market apparel segment. The designer focused on a design that would fit within the brand culture of H&M, a fast-fashion trend-focused mass-market apparel brand. Inspiration for this design came from the designer's research into adaptive apparel that accommodates the needs of BVI individuals. The designer focused on addressing a few critical issues, including proper apparel identification for the BVI by size, color, pattern, and category. In addition, the designer focused on features that would make it easy to find garment openings and pockets. Further, the designer implemented a user-centered design approach and incorporated the user into every phase of the design process. Thus, the insight provided by the user, who was VI, inspired the overall design. The strength of this design is the ability to offer mass-market basics with a stylish flair that includes access for an ignored but substantial population of consumers.

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

The ensemble consists of a down vest, a Henley knit long-sleeve shirt, and drawstring waist and ankle jogger pants. The designer chose neutral **colors** to allow the user to mix and match the ensemble with other items in their closet. In addition, the designer decided to add a light natural contrast to the vest to accommodate the BVI consumer. Research indicates that it is easier for BVI individuals to see when light colors are placed on a dark background (Waller, n.d.). The **shape and fit** of the ensemble were designed for a natural, gender-neutral fit. The designs allow extra room in the chest, shoulders, and hips to accommodate gender non-conforming consumers. The jogger pants also include a drawstring waist and ankles to adjust for fit. The designer was able to fit the pants on herself and her father, showcasing the correct gender-neutral approach to work and shape. Further, **texture** was incorporated into the ensemble through the use of fabric. A linen-like material was chosen for the pants, and the same fabric was incorporated into the vest, allowing for a tactile experience for the consumer. Finally, the designer could marry function and fashion by incorporating QR codes and braille. The QR codes are functional, allowing the consumer to scan the code and, through a website, audibly hear descriptions of the garment and see other available garments that would coordinate. The addition of braille to the garment tags and graphics enables the consumer to use braille to gather information and serves as a trendy visual for the garment. The braille is located at key areas of the garment to indicate to the user which part of the garment they are touching to assist them better when getting dressed.

Process, Technique, and Execution

The designer used a user-centered design approach to gather insight and engagement from the user, Jasmine. Jasmine is VI and was interviewed during the initial design development and final design production stages. After gathering initial data from Jasmine, the designer created working drawings and a concept board. These data were shared with Jasmine, and her feedback was incorporated into the final design conceptualization. The initial line consisted of twelve garments. Designs were narrowed to one complete design look for the fit and final production samples. The designer utilized flat patternmaking to develop the designs for the garments. Measurements of a Men's size 40 dress form were the foundation for the patterns. The fit sample allowed the designer to make adjustments to fit and style. For example, during the fit stage, the designer adjusted the chest size for both the shirt and the vest and through the armholes of both garments to provide a better, more gender-neutral fit. This design provides an example of how function and fashion combine to create a user-centered design that demonstrates an adaptive approach to apparel design. This approach may offer alternative ideas to the apparel industry and other apparel design students to accommodate the needs of other marginalized consumers.

Cohesion

This design demonstrates a compelling blend of design elements and principles to create an adaptive apparel design that accommodates the needs of a VI consumer. Further, this design exhibits mass-market style and construction details appropriate for the budget to moderate price point of H&M.

Originality and Innovation

Originality and innovation are demonstrated through braille and QR codes to accommodate the needs of the VI consumer. Providing adaptive design details allows the design to meet the needs of a larger consumer population. Similar techniques are not evident in the current marketplace.

References

CDC. (2019). <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/risk/burden.htm>

Photos

