



Visible: Trans Positive Apparel

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Measurements: Bust: 35”; Waist: 32”; Hip: 36.”

Context: Clothing for transgender people can promote gender expression, decrease social stigmas, and improve body image during periods of transition. This ensemble was created for females who are transitioning to male (FTM) and is the first design concept from a larger research study that employed user-center design methods to pinpoint specific apparel ideas for the FTM community. Apparel, versus medical procedures, can be easily controlled and modified to express gender identity. Past researchers, such as Reddy-Best & Pedersen (2015) have explored relationships between clothing and gender expression for trans people, particularly related to clothing worn in the work environment. The purpose of the overarching research project and the resulting design scholarship was to identify and conceptualize apparel needs of FTM so they may comfortably express their gender identity. Designing “genderless” clothing is not a new concept in the fashion industry particularly in a time when the LGBTQ rights movement is becoming more visible (cite). For example, Hood by Air plays has challenged binary views of gender sine starting their collection in 2010 (Nnad, 2016). However, only a handful of apparel brands (all of which are online), design clothing specifically for FTM (Ryan, 2015). And so, the aim of this design was to propose a concept that was developed in close collaboration with transmen which proudly and visibly represents their gender identity and meets their symbolic and functional apparel needs.

Design Process: Sixteen transgender men, between the ages of 19-25, participated in a user-centered design process called Photovoice (Catalani & Minkler, 2010) where participants take photographs and use the images as a catalyst for conversations about sensitive topics. The research process followed five steps: 1) initial meeting; 2) take photos; 3) meet to discuss photos; 4) share with a larger audience through a photographic exhibition, and 5) meet for a follow-up focus group to discuss preliminary design ideas. Results from steps 1-4 showed that FTM use apparel to manage appearance by emphasizing biceps and shoulders and de-emphasizing breasts and hips to achieve the westernized “ideal masculine body shape.” To defeminize their breasts, participants wore a compression tank top, called a chest binder. FTM individuals purchase men's clothing and experience fit issues over the hips in both shirts and pants. Participants also found pant, shoulder, and sleeve lengths all too long. In step 5, the participants reviewed a variety of male and female garment flats and masculine and feminine textile prints compiled by the designer from WGSN.com, a trend forecasting website. Participants marked the flats and prints which they “would wear” or “would not wear” and those that were “masculine” or “feminine.” It was important to clarify perceptions of masculinity and femininity because many participants consider themselves gender fluid and present themselves as both masculine and feminine concurrently. The researchers observed that the garment silhouettes with the most “would wear” marks were also marked masculine, but the most favored textile prints were marked feminine. This sample of transmen preferred masculine garment designs and expressed femininity through textile prints. The designer created *Visible* by synthesizing favorable ideas, silhouettes, prints, and details identified by the participants from step 5.

Garment Creation Process: Garment patterns were created by first purchasing a men’s shirt and jeans from Target (a store where all of our participants shopped) in a size appropriate for an *Alvanon* Missy size 6 dress form. The dress form was outfitted with a binder and padded in the upper chest and waist to

represent an FTM body. The fit of the shirt and jeans were critically evaluated on the dress form. The shirt fit well in the shoulders and chest but was too small around the hips, and the bottom buttons would not button. The cut of the jeans did not accommodate for fuller hips and butt and pulled in the back crotch and thigh area. First patterns were drafted to match the sample garments, then modified based on the fit assessment. For the shirt, 2-in. of ease was added to the hip in a relatively straight line from the underarm to the shirt hem. Some curve at the side seam was retained as this was already a feature of the fit of the sample shirt. For the pant, the researcher used block patterns that were previously developed to fit the *Alvanon* dress form to draft a new front and back rise and add ease to the hip and thigh. For the top, Muslin samples were created to test fit before creating the final garments. The test garments fill the dress form well while presenting a masculine silhouette. All pattern manipulations were completed on the new FTM blocks.

Aesthetic and Functional Details: Many of the aesthetic details like the boldy feminine textile print, classic white button-down shirt overlay, pleat detailing at the shoulder and knees, and piecework also provide a functional purpose. For example, pleating the shoulder and underlining in the yoke make a structured shoulder without noticeably altering the hand feel of the garment (e.g. cannot feel shoulder pads which are atypical for men's clothing). The tossed print design distracts the eye and can help camouflage body silhouette. The overlay is a symbolic nod to binary gender expression and also drapes away from the body to create straight lines, a much-preferred shape by our participants. The pleating below the knee on the pants balances and distracts from curvy hips. Functional details that are not immediately evident are also hidden throughout the design so the wearer can modify the fit of the garments to meet their preferences. The bottom of the pants are lined with about 6" of coordinating print fabric, so wearers can roll the cuff of their pants to adjust the length, while still looking finished. Inside the pant and shirt, there are 1-in. seam allowances with a line of stitches at .5-in. on the seam allowance. This is so the wearer can remove the first line of stitches for more ease through the waist, hip, and leg without destroying the garment. The stitches are color coded and would be communicated to the wearer in the product description. Lastly, the collar and shirt cuffs are detachable through hidden buttons that attach to a mandarin-style collar and cuff facings. Wearers can purchase a different collar and cuff styles to personalize their garments. The cuffs can be removed and the sleeve length easily shortened (probably by a tailor), and the wearer could purchase a coordinating collar with extended tabs per their fit preference.

Contribution: Overall, the garment features and aesthetics of *Visible* represent both the symbolic and functional requirements of transmen. Thoroughly researched, this design scholarship conceptualizes many apparel features specific to FTM so transmen may proudly express their gender identity and promote transgender awareness and visibility.

References

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