Unicorn Colors

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Contextual Review and Concept. American culture's overt sexualization of women has now been passed on to young preteen girls (American Psychological Association, 2007). Girls are increasingly confronted with this sexualized culture as it has made its way into the clothing that is designed for and marketed to them. Previous research has revealed that a significant amount of the clothing targeted at girls aged 6-14 exhibits sexualizing characteristics that emphasize sexualized body parts or have attributes associated with sexiness (Goodin, Van Denburg, Murnen, & Smolak, 2011). The 9-14 year old apparel consumer segment, known as tweens, (Lindstrom, 2004) is unique as they are navigating many physical changes that affect their relationship with clothing (de Klerk & Tsepepis, 2004). The limited amount of published research on their clothing design preferences revealed that tween girls have high expectations regarding functional design characteristics and comfort and experience dissatisfaction when shopping for apparel (de Klerk & Tsepepis, 2004). Garments that make girls feel self-confident has also been reported as a highly important psychological clothing selection factor (Daters, 1990).

Despite research indicating the importance of functional design elements and comfort, much of the clothing available to tweens does not reflect this, especially in semi-formal wear. Although creative scholarship often features semi-formal and formal attire for women there are few examples exploring the market needs of girls (e.g. Maqsood & King, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this project was to design a semi-formal ensemble that meets the functional, aesthetic and expressive needs of a tween girl attending a semi-formal dance that does not contain design attributes associated with sexiness or emphasize sexualized body parts. Tween semi-formal attire should be perceived as fun, comfortable, and appropriate for dancing with friends.

Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact, and Process. The FEA consumer needs model and apparel design framework (Lamb & Kallal, 1992) guided the development of this ensemble. The ensembles' functional, expressive and aesthetic needs were assessed through conversations between the designer and tween, which included the tween showing the designer examples of the current semi-formal options available in the tween's size range. The designer then looked further into the current selection of semi-formal wear available to tween girls. That examination revealed much of the current selection emphasized sexualized body parts (e.g. breasts) and often

had attributes associated with sexiness including low necklines or being fitted through the hips. Additionally, the clothing currently available was not functional for girls as they cannot easily dress and undress due to center back zippers and hard to reach back neck closures.

The most desired *functional* design criteria were that the ensemble has a) closures that she could reach, allowing her to dress and undress independently, b) pockets large enough for her cell phone, c) ability for environmental temperature changes; and d) no requirement for adapting typical behavior when she dances or sits down. *Expressive* design criteria was not to attract any sexual attention to her body, as her only interest was to spend time with friends. *Aesthetic* needs were color selections that were inspired by current tween fashion trends colors and textures associated with the popularity of unicorns.

Unicorn Colors consist of 3-pieces, which included a short sleeve jacket, sleeveless blouse, and culottes in a stretch fabric. All garments were made out of a stretch crepe back satin that was both comfortable against the skin and moved easily with the body. Additionally, each garment in the ensemble had specific functional design components. The blouse was designed to easily be pulled on and off over her head. It also was reversible to allow her to turn the blouse inside out if anything was spilled on the garment. The culottes were designed with inseam pockets large enough for a cellphone and with front pleats to add fullness to increase range of movement and provide the illusion of the shorts being a skirt. The waistband fits flat against the front of the body with an elastic in the back to ensure comfort for many hours of dancing. The jacket was incorporated into the design to accommodate changes in the temperature experienced by the wearer from cool evenings to dancing, which causes the body temperature to rise. Knowing that the wearer did not want to keep up with any extra items, a feature was incorporated into the jacket that allowed it to transform into a small purse. *Expressive* needs were met as the tween felt self-confident as she was appropriately dressed for her age. *Aesthetic* needs were met in the color selection and the design features on the blouse yoke, straps, and jacket back.

Technique and Execution. Flat pattern techniques were used to draft the pattern pieces for all three garments. Pattern manipulation was used to create the style lines that comprised the bodice and jacket yoke. A hidden inseam pocket was integrated near the bottom of the lining of the jacket. This allowed the jacket, when folded in thirds both vertically and horizontally, to be tucked into the pocket that then turned inside-out, transforming the jacket into a small bag with a shoulder strap. A prototype for each garment was created and tested with functional, expressive, and aesthetic concerns addressed.

Cohesion, Design Contribution, and Innovation. The creation of this ensemble used the FEA framework as a guide to integrate tween design preferences cohesively with semi-formal attire. The design extends the existing research on tween consumer clothing needs, which have been under-explored by proposing a new design solution for semi-formal attire. Additionally, and possibly most importantly, it sheds light on the apparel wants and needs of tweens and brings awareness to the sexualization of tween girls' clothing which is rampant in the current market's semi-formal selection.

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