



## Altered

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### Contextual Review and Concept

A traditional US wedding can create around 400 lbs. of waste (Harrison, 2008). Production and disposal of formal wear in the wedding industry, namely bridal attire, contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and the roughly 10 million tons of textile waste that ends up in landfills per year (EPA, 2016). Bridal alterations, which occur after purchase and before use, allows the wearer to customize their dress and includes everything from wedding gowns to wedding party gowns (bridesmaid, mother of the bride/groom, etc.) and other formal special occasion dresses. Alterations can range from adjusting side seams, bust seams, shoulder seams and hem to adding a bustle, corset back, embellishments and modesty panels (Silvennoinen, 2018). The most common gown alteration is shortening the hemline because many mass-produced bridal gowns are made to accommodate a wide array of consumers' heights (Silvennoinen, 2018). Shortening the hemline or "hemming" consists of cutting and removing excess fabric from the bottom portion of the dress to allow the wearer to walk with ease. Unlike other hemmed garments, bridal gowns come in a variety of silhouettes that consist of between two to seven or more layers of fabric all of which are removed during the hemming process. I was inspired to create this design because of the large amount of alterations waste, specifically hems, I observed while working in a bridal alterations department at a chain bridal store. Most of the gowns hemmed were either A-line or ballgown silhouettes that needed approximately three to five inches removed from each layer resulting in a massive amount of waste from a relatively small amount of wedding gowns.

### Purpose

The purpose of *Altered* was to 1) investigate hemming waste created during bridal alterations and 2) explore methods of repurposing these materials with the intent of lessening the amount of solid textile waste produced by the bridal industry. While use of alterations waste was not found, previous designers have used fabric scraps to create new garments (Eike, 2016; Stannard, 2017). Additionally, designers have also explored ways of reusing, repurposing, and upcycling post-consumer wedding attire to create something modern and new (Chen, 2014; Moretz, 2013). Over a three-month period I collected roughly 120 bridal (white, ivory and champagne) and 6 special occasion dress hems (light and dark blue) that were at least 3" in width and between 1.5 and 3+ yards in length. Over 75% the dresses I hemmed were between five to seven layers meaning the current design was constructed from only 20-25 gowns. In peak alterations season (May-September) the department I worked in altered around 25-30 dresses weekly. Furthermore,

since formal gowns consist of many layers of different fabrics my collection included: polyester satin, chiffon, light weight and heavy weight lining, crinoline net, tulle, mesh, organza, lace, and taffeta. In keeping with the purpose, the under dress was a discarded A-line wedding gown that was deconstructed, altered and remade.

### **Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact**

The overall design of the dress was inspired by topographic images of a hurricane moving over ocean water. The curvilinear layering and placement of different fabrics create a compelling texture that emulates continuous swirling water and provides visual interest that moves the viewers eyes across the ensemble with ease. The placement of blue within the white swirls also moves the eye throughout the design and provides a feeling a calmness like that of the “eye” of a hurricane. Finally, the asymmetrical hem and organic silhouette create informal balance and unity that maintains a high level of interest from all perspectives.

### **Process, Technique, and Execution**

The underdress was created first. I purchased a size 12 A-line wedding dress from a second-hand store for \$10. The skirt was removed from the bustier at the waist and then all side seams were removed until there was a front/back bodice and front/back skirt. Several embellishments including 45 brown covered buttons from the center back, a brown beaded sash from the waist and ruched overlay from the front were removed. The neckline was cut down and new boning was added for additional support. The gown was reconstructed to fit a size 6 female dress form. The 126 hems were separated first into fabric specific piles and then by width (3-4”; 5-6”; 7”+). The skirt was created by combining groups of different fabrics such as organza, tulle, and satin and machine sewing them together along the raw edge. Eight smaller hems were set aside for the bustier. After combining all layer sets, the hems were pinned onto the underdress until the desired shape was achieved. Each hem was machine sewn individually onto the skirt until all hems were attached. The bustier was created by draping pieces of satin from the removed underdress hem to the form and drawing various panels for the hem strips to be attached too. Patterns for made from the draped pieces and the remaining hems were cut into 1.5”-2” strips and attached to each individual panel which allowed for easier sewing. After each panel was complete, they were hand stitched to the bustier.

### **Contribution and Innovation**

This design contributes to existing work surrounding the use of textile waste and provides a new and innovative approach to utilizing a form of waste that has not been previously explored. Since the current design only utilized dress hems and bridal gowns can include a plethora of other alterations, future designers should investigate additional areas of bridal waste as well as explore other segments of alterations such as men’s formal wear or casual wear.

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