

Gender Neutral Fashion Line

Gender nonconforming individuals are not represented by mainstream fashion, which primarily seeks to serve cisgender people and enforce a rigid binary in clothing. Therefore, navigating the cisnormativity¹ of mainstream stores can be potentially traumatic for trans and nonbinary people due to dysphoria² and social pressure. “Clothing today, far from being superficial, remains a powerful and integral part of a person’s social and gender identity. That’s why wearing the ‘wrong’ gender’s clothes can be painful for those who don’t feel their sex and gender match—even very young children” (Bain, 2015). In the interest of “passing”³, many trans and nonbinary people will buy clothes that fit their identity better than their body type or even personal style in order to affirm their gender identity. Gender neutral clothing, and this project in particular, seeks to provide clothing that affirms their gender identities that is also designed to fit their bodies and style. Trans and nonbinary people deserve, just as any consumer, to have fun with their fashion and showcase their personal style without the stress of binary selections.

Many gender neutral brands exist currently, but many issues still remain, especially with those created as one-offs by popular labels. “Things that many already considered ‘gender-neutral’ in the first place, and in most cases, they’re menswear staples that were embraced by [women] over the years,” meaning that masculine elements are considered unisex in many collections (Mar, 2016). Jo B. Paoletti, in her book *Sex and Unisex*, demonstrates that, “it’s mainly women who are buying unisex garments, not men” (Chrisman-Campbell, 2015). This split highlights the fact that masculinity is favored in society over femininity and therefore is more likely to be considered neutral, the norm. Williams highlights the sexism inherent to these brands in her 2015 article: “Why does ‘gender neutral’ have to mean ‘without any traditionally

¹ The assumption that all people are cisgender.

² Conflict between a person's assigned gender and the gender with which they identify.

³ To be recognized visually, in social terms, as the gender of identification.

feminine signifiers’? Because girl clothes are for girls. Boy clothes are for *everyone*” (Williams, 2015). Most mainstream gender neutral lines that attempt to get on the gender nonconforming bandwagon represent the conventionally masculine as neutral, which makes their clothing lines aesthetically unsuccessful and shows that they don’t care enough about trans and nonbinary issues, which should be the driving force behind gender neutral lines, enough to try and understand them. Another important issue that this project will address is the lack of stylish yet affordable clothing options. Brands that push limits, such as Nicopanda, Selfridges, TILLYandWILLIAM, and 69, are out of the price range for the average consumer (Mar, 2016).

Research Question

The research question that will be used to guide this project is: **How can fashion that is inclusive towards gender nonconforming, trans, and nonbinary individuals be produced affordably, while addressing the specific needs of this target market?**

Goals and Methodology

Some of the unique wants and needs of nonbinary and trans wearers were identified through a survey of around 50 participants in Fall 2017 Studio II (taught by Dr. Linsey Griffin). Therefore, this project seeks to build off of that collected data through in-depth interviews with design and market-based criteria. Qualitative analysis of the interviews will be used to develop a mini line of samples in a variety of styles and/or colorways. A/B testing (a form of market and design research that seeks to include users in the design selection process) will be conducted through a nation-wide survey of LGBT networks to finalize these designs. From there, a business

model will be researched and chosen to fit the needs of this project so that a line of designs can be produced in the future.

Timeline

This project includes four phases. In Phase One (3 weeks long), interview questions will be developed based on literature, previous survey responses from surveys developed on this topic in Studio II and other courses, and Dr Griffin's input. A pilot interview will be conducted to test the questions, questions will be refined, then participants will be recruited through Twin Cities LGBT networks (online and in LGBT centers on campus). Phase Two (2 weeks long) will involve interview conduction in a public area (campus building or coffee shop), where participants will also be given a gift card as thanks for their time and input. In Phase Three (4 weeks long), interview data will be analyzed and synthesized, then reviewed in conjunction with previous survey data. Themes will be determined alongside trend/market research. The data and trend research will be translated into designs and design details for testing. Phase 4 (3 weeks long) will include the development of A/B test survey from designs and color research. A survey including these A/B test garments will be distributed nationally.

References

Bain, M. (2015, April 26). *Sex and gender aren't perfectly binary. Why should clothes be?*

Retrieved from Quartz: <http://qz.com/381790/sex-and-gender-arent-perfectly-binary-why-should-clothes-be/>

Chrisman-Campbell, K. (2015, April 14). *A Brief History of Unisex Fashion*. Retrieved from The

Atlantic: <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/04/when-unisex-was-the-new-black/390168/>

Mar, G. D. (2016, April 1). *5 gender-neutral brands that are defying the fashion industry*.

Retrieved from The Metropolist: <http://www.themetropolist.com/style-shopping/style-latest/5-gender-neutral-brands-that-are-defying-the-fashion-industry/>

Williams, A. (2015, September 11). *Everybody in dresses: Why does gender neutral clothing always mean 'boy' clothes for girls?* Retrieved from The National Post:

<http://news.nationalpost.com/life/everybody-in-dresses-why-does-gender-neutral-clothing-always-mean-boy-clothes-for-girls>