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Backward Bunny

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Statement of purpose. This project aimed to provide non-binary individuals with an outfit designed for enjoying nightlife confidently, reflecting a key aspect of Gen-Z culture and social interaction (Nofre, 2023). The goal was to create an ensemble that offers comfort and self-expression, ensuring people who identify as non-binary can feel themselves in their clothing, which is an important part of building self-identity and self-esteem (Daters, 1990). Each garment piece was designed to show or hint at the body underneath the garment while distorting the silhouette in a different way. The outfit drew inspiration from the sea bunny, a miniature, fluffy, hermaphrodite sea slug, shown in Figure 1a, blurring the lines of gender-specific fashion and showcasing sustainable design principles. Too often, with genderless clothing, designers make clothes larger and completely hide the body underneath gray and black athleisure. With this ensemble, the body is the highlight, and the use of bright yellows was meant to both draw the eye towards details as well as communicate awareness.

Aesthetic properties and visual impact. This layered outfit combines contemporary and sustainable elements, various textures, and subtle patterns, all highlighted by the careful placement of vibrant colors. The underlayer piece was machine knitted using a soft white yarn, and various gray dots were added via natural dyeing, reminiscent of the pattern on the sea bunny. The knit top was engineered so that there would be no visible seams when the arms were down to allow for a smooth drape and a fully fashioned constructed look. The lacing yarns that start at the neck swirl around the body, hugging the chest and the waist, finally bringing it around to the back and pulling up the sleeve to reveal the bicep. While wearing the jacket, the yellow yarns draw the viewer's eyes to the neckline, while the puffer jacket's thick black lining draws the viewers' eyes back down to the innovative pants. The top is pulled up at the waist to reveal a small part of the stomach. Extra fabric was added at the sides of the pants about seven inches down the waist, giving the buttocks a tighter fit while distorting the silhouette of the legs to show off an erogenous zone and keep the legs, an important part of gender recognition, obscured (Xuelong et al., 2008). The back of the pants drape in a cascading pattern that makes the legs look longer. The cuffs sit low around the ankle, a design inspired by details in Erdem's Pre-Spring 25' collection (Moralioglu, 2024). The puffer jacket completes the look by pulling and expanding the silhouette with both form and horizontal channels that pull the look sideways. The bright yellow of the jacket, inspired by the bright genderless colors of the sea bunny, keeps the viewer's attention and makes it a statement piece for any club outfit.

Process, technique, and execution. The use of sustainable materials and methods as well as innovative pattern-making techniques drove the design process of this outfit. The pants were flat-patterned using the cut-and-spread method with a leg curve inward, adding extra fabric to the side seams just below the seat of the pants (Figure 1b). The pants were constructed using three layers of fabric, all purchased from Fabscrap, a textile reuse center. The outer two layers were a sheer voile, the middle of which was dotted using a pin's head and ink, and the inner layer was a shirting weight fabric. The pants waistline was constructed like a Peter Pan collar, to give the top edge of the pants a skirted look. Underneath the waistline fold are inseam pockets constructed from the lining creating "hidden" pockets. The base layer top was knitted on a Silver Reed SK860 machine as a single panel, fully fashioned piece, that folds and closes with only side seams, dyed using pomegranate and iron dye frozen into cones then left out to melt on the top of the fabric. Alum and turmeric dyeing were employed for the yellow yarn, which was then woven through the top (Figure 1c) (Vashishtha, 2017). For the

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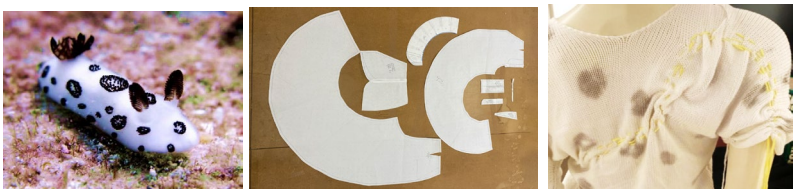
jacket, recycled pillow stuffing was encased in horizontal channels between a waterproof outer layer and lining. Because the silhouette of the body and face are key to distinguishing binary gender identities, the designer chose to alter the body's natural silhouette using each garment and create new shapes along a gender- fluid body (Tariq et al., 2009). The entire outfit was designed with versatility and mass market feasibility in mind, allowing it to be worn in multiple ways to suit different gender expressions.

Cohesion. The concept of gender- fluidity was carried all throughout the design process, from the selection of materials and colors through the pattern-making details, diversity of garment types, and edge finishing details. The subtle patterning of the sea bunny replicated on the base layer offers just a hint of a rather neutral playful pattern, to guide the viewer's eyes inside the oversized jacket, where a myriad of details has been designed to communicate the complexity and unique treats of self- identity.

Originality and innovation. This outfit stands out for its unique approach to gender-fluid fashion, combining innovative design techniques with sustainable practices. The reversible pants and knit top offer versatility rarely seen in traditional fashion, while using natural dyes and recycled materials highlights a commitment to fashion sustainability. Inspired by the sea bunny, the outfit challenges conventional gender norms and provides a fresh perspective on nightlife fashion for non-binary individuals. Through this project, the aim was to create awareness and contribute to the evolution of inclusive and sustainable fashion, ensuring everyone can find clothing that makes them feel confident and authentic.

Mentor 1 statement. This design is part of a mini collection that combines work from a senior capstone course and a knitwear course. The capstone course mentor chose to sponsor this student because of the diversity and complexity of garments they chose to tackle, along with the added challenge of incorporating sustainable dyeing practices, various garment assembly techniques, and gender-fluid design. The student created the design after researching trends, markets, and traditional dyeing methods. They successfully balanced their inspiration into a market-ready functional and expressive ensemble for an underserved consumer segment that celebrates diverse identities, contributing to the current fashion design dialog.

Mentor 2 statement. The knitwear course mentor worked closely with this student to help translate the gender-fluid concept into a machine knitted piece for the base layer. The student's passion and outstanding dedication for knitwear design was nurtured through relentless sessions of experimentation with various yarns, knitting stitches and natural dyeing techniques. The resulting piece is playful and current through its distressed look, even though it is a fully fashioned and carefully engineered, stitch by stitch garment, with an added surface design for non-binary body adaptability. The dyeing technique suggests a one-of-a-kind look, by random placing of the dyeing spots, further enhancing its sustainable design approach in the context of mass production.



(a) (b) (c)

Figure 1. (a) Sea Bunny (Ballard, 2022), (b) Flat pattern pieces for pants, and (c) back surface design detail of knitted base layer.

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