Empowered to Beach
Addie K. Martindale
Georgia Southern University
Keywords: Gender, pockets, swimwear, tween

Contextual Review and Concept. The tween years have been defined as ages 9-14 years (Linstrom, 2004) which is a period of time in which girls' bodies go through significant changes as most experience puberty during this time. These bodily changes can be both exciting and intimidating and often appearance specifically clothing selection becomes a highly important element for successfully traversing this time (De Klerk & Tsepepis, 2007). This can be especially challenging as garments being marketed to these girls often focus on decorating the body to make it attractive for viewers which often emphasizes sexualized body parts (Goodin, Van Denburg, Murnen, & Smolak, 2011; Wood, 1994) leaving girls little time to adjust to their changing bodies before experiencing sexualization by others (American Psychological Association, 2007). On top of this, girls often face additional clothing challenges in the area of functional design characteristics and comfort that have been found to cause dissatisfaction when shopping for clothing (De Klerk & Tsepepis, 2007). Girls' clothing often lacks functional design elements such as pockets that restrict their independence and mobility (Diehm & Thomas, 2018: Wood, 1994).

Considering all of these factors, swimwear selection can be extremely challenging for tween girls who have been found to have concerns about the unwanted sexual attention that clothing can bring (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2010). Swimwear which exposes much of the body in part for functional reasons to increase mobility in water can expose girls to unwanted attention directed at their changing bodies that they are not emotionally ready for. This work was both inspired by the previously indicated knowledge that garments that make girls feel confident are the most important psychological factors for their apparel selection (Daters, 1990) and frustration with the lack of research and creative scholarship on functional design needs of tweens. Therefore, the purpose of this design scholarship was to develop an empowering functional swimsuit that addresses the functional needs of tween girls through a user-centered approach that promotes self-confidence and independence.

Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact, and Process. A user-centered design approach (Watkins & Dunn, 2015) was taken for the development and execution of this swimsuit design as it focuses on the end-users needs, desires, and limitations throughout the design process. This five-stage design process has been proven to be quite useful to reveal key insights for developing activewear in areas comparable to swimsuit design (e.g. Morris, Park, & Sarkar, 2017). During the first stage, the designer researched the context of swimwear selection which included evaluation of swimwear available to tweens on the market and then interviewed a prospective tween user. The user showed the designer her existing swimsuits and explained the aspects that she both liked and disliked about the suits. Additionally, a discussion of where the suit would be worn (e.g. beach, pool, waterpark, lake) was discussed as well as the activities the suit would be worn for (e.g. swimming, walking, running, climbing). Next in the second stage, a list of the requirements of the suit was established: a) high neckline, b)leg openings that would stay securely in place, c) a two-piece style to accommodate easy dressing and undressing d) a pocket

or pockets to hold a cell phone when participating in activities not submerged in water and e) a pocket to carry small essentials. In the third stage, sketches were developed based on the first and second stages and shown to the user. A prototype was developed and tested in the fourth stage. This took place in multiple environments including the beach, lake, and swimming pool. During the fifth stage, the designer observations of the wearer and the user-provided feedback on the design were evaluated. The satisfactory components were kept and adjustments were made based on the user's feedback which included lengthening the waistbands and adjusting the suit bottom pocket.

Technique and Execution. The two-piece swimsuit was created using flat pattern making methods and was constructed in chlorine resistance nylon spandex fabrics. Youthful bright colors were chosen to highlight the wearer's energy and color blocking was strategically done to draw the viewer's eye to the girl's face making her personality, not her body the focus. The swimsuit consists of two pieces, a tank-style top and high waisted full cut bottoms. The color-blocked top features a high front neckline, princess seams, two front pockets, and crossover back. The two blue inseam pockets are large enough to carry items such as keys, money, a tampon, a hotel key, or an ID. The pocket depth and tension created by the close fit of the top to the body keep the items secure. The swim bottom features a color-blocked three panel front with a pocket on the right side and banded leg openings to keep the swimsuit from riding up while wearing. The pocket can be used internally in the suit between the outer fabric and the lining, or the pocket can be pulled out. When the pocket is used externally it can accommodate either a cellphone or a water bottle. Both the swim top and bottom have a convertible waistband that was designed to allow the wearer to easily adjust the height by folding or unfolding the fabric based on her desire for modesty. When both bands are unfolded the two pieces come together to cover the entire midsection. The functional design elements of the swimsuit empower the wearer to swim, run, splash, and play in the sun without any concern about how to keep up with her essentials or worrying about if any part of her body is being unwantedly exposed.

Cohesion, Design Contribution, and Innovation. The functional design needs of girls have been long overlooked by the apparel industry and under-researched by academia. This research extends the sparse existing research on tween apparel consumers by demonstrating the effectiveness of user-centered design to create girls swimwear which is functional and age-appropriate that can boost self-confidence and foster independence. In order to fully empower girls, apparel designers have to pay just as much attention to functional design needs as they do on design aesthetics.
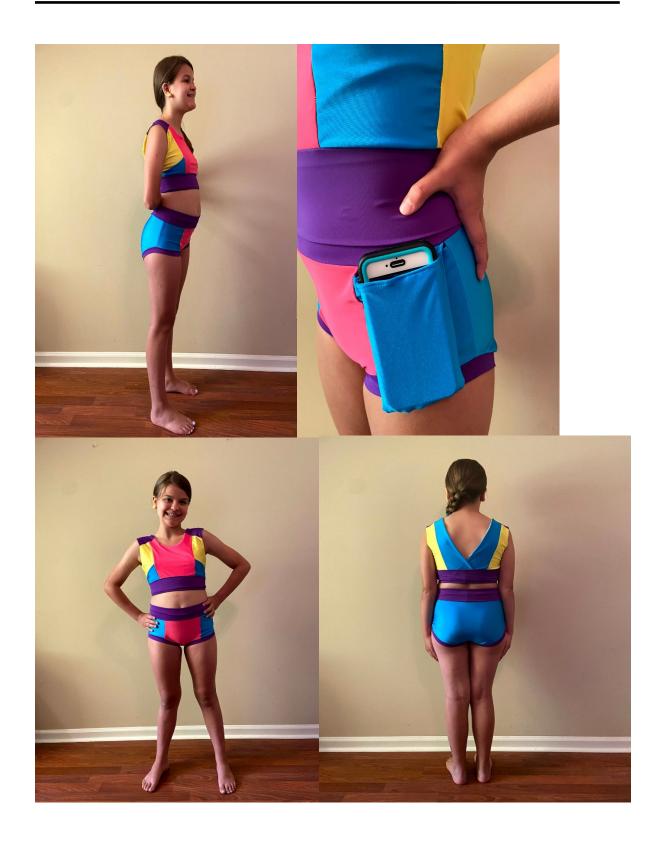
References

Brock, M. K., Ulrich, P. V., & Connell, L. J. (2010). Exploring the Apparel Needs and Preferences of Tween Girls and Their Mothers. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *28*(2), 95–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X09357930

Daters, C. (1990). Importance of clothing and self-esteem among adolescents. *Clothing and*

Textiles Research Journal, 8, 45-50.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X9000800308

De Klerk, H., M., & Tselepis, T. (2007). The early-adolescent female clothing consumer:
Expectations, evaluation and satisfaction with fit as part of the appreciation of clothing
quality. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management, 11*(3), 413-428.
doi:http://dx.doi.org.libez.lib.georgiasouthern.edu/10.1108/13612020710763146

Diehm, J., & Thomas, A. (2018). *Women's Pockets are Inferior.* The Pudding. Retrieved May 26, 2020,
from https://pudding.cool/2018/08/pockets/

Goodin, S.M., Van Denburg, A., Murnen, S.K., & Smolak, L. (2011) "Putting on" sexiness: A
content analysis of the presence of sexualizing characteristics in girls' clothing. *Sex Roles,
65*(1). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9966-8

Lindstrom, M. (2004). Branding is no longer child's play! *Journal of Consumer Marketing,
2*1(3), 175-182. https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760410534722

Morris, K., Park, J., & Sarkar, A. (2017). Development of a Nursing Sports Bra for Physically Active
Breastfeeding Women Through User-Centered Design. Clothing and Textiles Research Journal,
35(4), 290–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X17722858

References American Psychological Association (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the
sexualization of girls.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report.aspx.

Watkins, S., & Dunne, L. (2015). *Functional clothing design: From sportswear to spacesuits / Susan
M. Watkins, Lucy E. Dunne*

Wood, J. T. (1994). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture / Julia T. Wood. Wadsworth
Pub.*