White Privilege is Being Able to Carry a TV Down the Street at Night, White Privilege is Not Being Afraid to Call the Police

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Contextual Review and Concept

The Black Lives Matter Movement began following the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, the unarmed African American teenager who was walking home with a bag of Skittles and an Arizona Iced Tea (Black Lives Matter, n. d.). In the trial after Martin's death, George Zimmerman, Martin's murderer and neighborhood watch coordinator of the area where his death occurred, was acquitted of all charges in 2015 when he claimed self defense in the trial (CNN Library, 2018). Martin's death is just one example of the many unarmed Black or African American people killed by authority, and more specifically by police brutality (Juzwiak & Chan, 2014). The history of oppression and systemic discrimination against Black people in the United States is not new and has a long history dating back to the slavery era (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). Despite the Civil Rights Movement and other advances towards equality, there is still significant "institutional oppression" experienced by Blacks or African Americans (Seabrook & Wyatt-Nichol, 2016, p. 20). In particular, there are on average more unarmed Blacks or African Americans killed by police than White people according to the most recent statistics in 2017, a trend that has continued from previous years (Police Violence Report, 2015, 2017). Black Lives Matter is the modern-day movement following resistance campaigns during the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights movement and has resulted in over 2000 protests or demonstrations since 2014 (Robinson, 2018). The purpose of this design was to engage the design process with social justice issues, specifically related to Black lives and bringing awareness to the "institutional oppression" that plagues the community (Seabrook & Wyatt-Nichol, 2016, p. 20). I sought to answer the questions: how can we use design to tackle and engage in conversations about critical issues, and how can we use design to actively communicate political and social identities, motivations, and awareness? Within the context of our current political climate that is marked with turbulence and aggression towards communities who have historically experienced discrimination (people of color, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, etc.), how can we use design and aesthetics to think more critically about our own positions of power, privilege, and hierarchy?

To consider these questions and the Black Lives Matter movement, I contextualize my work in response to other design research that has considered the comfort, performance, and mobility of authority, specifically police officers (Derafshi, Petrova, Jayadas, & Peksoz, 2017). In their work, Derafshi, Petrova, Jayadas, and Peksoz (2017) investigated the weapons belt of police officers and how comfortable officers were when wearing the bulky weapons around their waist. In this sense, these researchers were aiming to improve the ability of police officers by increasing their comfort in regards to weapons and weapon use without *any* critical engagement or dialogue about the larger impact that their work may have on communities of color – for example, while comfort is important for performance and well-being, if police are more comfortable and can access weapons with more ease, will they kill more unarmed Black people? My design is in response to this type of research that seeks to mobilize and improve performance of authority or police. It offers a critical reaction to the type of inquiry offered by Derafshi et al. (2017). In my work, in order to engage with critical questions about privilege, power, and authority, and to bring attention to social inequalities of Black lives I created an ensemble intended for protest, specifically protest of police brutality and excessive force with deadly weapons, which have impacted the Black community and the murder of the hundreds of unarmed Black or African American people by the police. I created a design that considers direct communication of injustices and also the functional needs of those in the resistance, an area of design that has received little if any attention. Some design research has considered social injustice in the design process related to race (Reddy-Best, 2014) and also inequalities related to the LGBTQ community (Reddy-Best, 2015). These themes have also recently circulated aesthetically in commercial brands such as Abasi Rosborough (Hadis, 2016) and Pyer Moss (Byrd, 2015). My design builds upon and expands these previous works by producing an ensemble that considers those resisting

police and for those actively seeking to bring attention to the social inequalities of Black people that have permeated our history since slavery.

Process, Technique, and Execution/ Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact

The design process began by researching the names of the unarmed Black people who were killed by police since 2012, the year the Black Lives Matter movement began, resulting in a list of over 300 names. These names were then incorporated into a custom fabric print resembling a newspaper. The dart uptake on the top were sewn to the outside, so that names were not hidden on the interior of the garment as their names often become unknown or hidden soon after their death. To draw ties back to the Black Power Movement and to highlight the continued history of oppression, an image of Angela Davis, an activist, scholar, and professor was also incorporated into the print. The image of her talking into a loud speaker was purposefully placed over the names to ignite feelings that we need to say their names louder and more often. Her image was also chosen to provide continued inspiration of hope throughout the design process for myself, as reading and engaging continually with the names of the unarmed Black people killed by police can be and was emotionally draining. With permission from the artist, Davis' image was manipulated and reproduced in a stylized fashion. In addition to using the names on the digital fabric print, they were stamped into the leather belt and leg harness. I created both patterns on the digitally printed fabric and stamped leather in a horizontal line for consistency in design elements.

After development of the print, I analyzed numerous blogs of individuals who actively participated in protests within the last few years, specifically individuals who discussed what to wear or bring to a protest and precautions that need to be taken before, during, and after a protest. I analyzed their blogs for emergent themes of the functional design needs of individuals attending a protest. Based upon this analysis, I incorporated the following elements into my design. First, and most important was the need for a *large face covering* to protect for anonymity during the protest and from possible tear gas spray. In the design, if the individual does not need the face covering, this piece folds down and wraps around the back of the body. The piece was designed to cut around the armholes to ensure arm mobility when the garment is in this position. The second design need was *large or deep pockets*. Due to the possibility of arrest or need to run, the individual needs to be able to hold important items close to the body. The rectangular zipper hip pocket was designed to be able to hold items identified as essential: keys, cash, phone, the number for the nearest ACLU, and a portable phone charger. The protesters also indicated the possibility of *sitting for an extended period of time if arrested*. To improve comfort during this possibility, two padded squares were added to the back side of the pant. Also related to the *possibility of arrest* and the need to film events in case of police brutality was the addition of a body-cam pocket on the center front of the top. If the protestor is forced to have their hands restrained, they can continue to film by placing their phone inside the pocket. The protestors also indicated a desire to be *able to hold water*, yet a bag/backpack was not desired, which resulted in the development of the leather holster bag attached at the waist and thigh belt. The holster was designed large enough to carry a water bottle.

Cohesion

Cohesion of the design is centered around social justice as related to Black Lives Matter, protest, and white privilege. Each part of the design from the fabric print, leather harness, and construction details all were considered with this theme as the central point from which to make decisions.

Design Contribution and Innovation

The rationale for this designed is rooted in the desire to improve the lives of Black people and to expand the Black Lives Matter movement into a visible form on the body. Dress is a powerful communication tool (Kaiser, 2012); therefore, it was chosen as the medium for which to display and promote messages of the social injustices related to the Black community. While past work has considered social justice in the design process and specifically inspiration from Black Lives Matter, my work builds upon those previous works and contributes a much needed movement to think about design as related to and for the resistance and to use the ensemble to start dialogue around these topics full of much tension and conflicting opinions in the current cultural context.

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