



Girls Just Want Functional Clothes

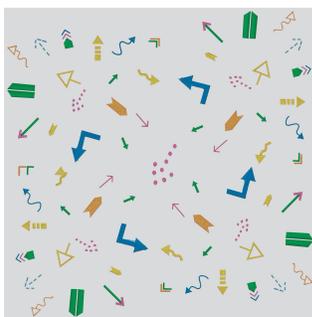
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Keywords: Gender, disparity, pockets, functional, childrenswear

Contextual Review and Concept. Great frustration has been expressed on social media and in the popular press regarding the lack of functional characteristics in girls' clothing compared to boys (Robinson, 2018). This lack of functional characteristics is of much concern as all growing children, despite gender, are recommended to participate in at least 60 minutes of vigorous activity per day (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). The ability to fully be active can impact a child long past their development years, as children's physical activity affects cognitive and emotional development (Truelove, Vanderloo, & Tucker, 2017). Clothing that does not accommodate these activities can impede a child's development. Despite the dissatisfaction and apparent concern within childrenswear design, little published research has been allotted to the topic. That which does exist focuses on older adolescents and tweens (Brock, Ulrich, & Connell, 2009; De Klerk & Tselepis, 2007; Lee & Hodges, 2019) finding dissatisfaction in garment availability. More recent creative scholarship has presented improved functional design prototypes for girls' swimwear and eveningwear (XXXXX, 2019; XXXXX, 2020) along with self-help clothing with easy access front zippers and elastic waist (Stanley & McKinney, 2017).

This creative scholarship ensemble is an application of a larger study. An analysis of 901 childrenswear pants product descriptions from four major childrenswear retailers revealed alarming functional design disparities between girls' and boys' gendered segments. Girls' garments were found to have significantly less positive functional design characteristics that enhanced donning and doffing, fit adjustability, and the ability to carry items (pockets) than boys. Girls were provided with fewer garment options that were easy to don and doff or adjustable waist. Girls had far fewer pants with the ability to carry items, with discrepancies found in the number of pockets included per garment, location on the garment, and types of pockets available. Girls were also found to have a considerable number of garments without pockets or faux pockets not seen in boys garments. Girls garments had a much higher occurrence rate of negative design characteristics that affect the durability, ease of care, and freedom of movement. Girls' garments were made out of less durable fabric and featured a high rate of nondurable sequins and embellishments with more complicated care instructions than boys' garments. Characteristics that have the potential to restrict freedom of movement, such as tight fit and very short inseams, were frequent in girls' garments, with the average short inseam for girls half that of boys. These data findings for pants have been applied to creating this girls' three-piece ensemble designed for active outdoor play. This design aimed to create a girl's ensemble that features positive functional design characteristics that will empower the wearer with clothing that allows them to be independent and prepared to take on any adventure.

Process. To guide the design process for *Girls Just Want Functional Clothes* the FEA consumer needs model and apparel design framework (Lamb & Kallal, 1992) was used. In addition to the childrenswear study findings, the designer talked to many parents and young girls about what functional design characteristics were important to them. During the rest of the process, the designer worked closely with one 6-year-old girl to maintain the perspective of a potential wearer. The young girl and other parents echoed many of the same concerns that the study revealed. The insights from the two were integrated to determine that the most *functional* design criteria to be a) ease in don and doffing, b) easy adjustability, c) durability, d) ability to move freely yet be protective and modest, and of most importance to the young girls, and e) the inclusion of several pockets. All of the garments were designed to be pulled onto the body for autonomy when dressing easily. All closures were eliminated from the design. The waist is elastic and can be adjusted further by the wearer using the left side external waist adjustment by easily pulling the exposed tab. This function was created after receiving feedback from parents that currently available internal adjustable waistbands are difficult to make on-the-go adjustments during play. The garments were constructed of durable fabrics that stretch with the body for additional comfort. The top was made of cotton jersey and the shorts and vest were made of a cotton-spandex blend twill. The ensemble's shorts feature a longer than industry average five-inch inseam that provides upper leg protection when climbing and sliding. Pockets were incorporated into the design as much as possible, with all three components having them. The top features an inseam front right chest pocket along the top pink strip. The shorts include six pockets: two deep front curved pockets, a right side cargo pocket, a left front patch pocket, and two back patch pockets. The vest was added to the ensemble for both function and flare and has a large front media pocket, a zippered pocket to secure items, a cargo pocket with flap and closure, and a large back pocket that converts the vest into a small backpack should the wear get warm. The garment met *expressive* needs through the ability that it provides the wear to participate confidently in whatever activity she wishes independently. *Aesthetic* needs were met through the fun, on-trend 1980's-inspired look that includes custom embroidery details in bright, bold colors that reflect the young, vibrant, energetic personality that most young girls possess.



Digitized Embroidery File

Vest Embroidery Detail

Vest Converted to Backpack

Technique, and Execution. The three garments were created using flat pattern methods. The embroidery on the vest was designed and digitized by the designer. The brightly-colored design features directional graphics (e.g. arrows) that signify all the adventures and directions that the wear can go now that she has all her garment functional needs taken care of. Several garment prototypes were tested to ensure the functional needs were met including ease in dressing, ease of adjustability, pocket capacity and location, and for its performance during active play. The six-year-old consultant was thrilled with all the pockets and how the vest to converts to a bag.

Design Contribution, and Innovation. *Girls just want functional clothes* draws upon apparel market analysis and parent and girls feedback to create a garment design using the FEA design framework. This design extends the sparse creative scholarship on young girls and provides an example of what girls want and needs functionally from their clothing. Additionally, this design brings much-needed attention to the apparel industry's disregard for girls' functional needs and sheds light on the blatant disparities in childrenswear design that are creating disadvantages for girls by hindering personal autonomy while ensuring this for boys.

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