



## Bandelier Mini

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Mentor: Xingqiu Lou, Washington State University

Keywords: Female Empowerment, Autonomy, Strength

*Design Mentor Statement.* This ensemble was completed as part of a senior-level apparel design course. The purpose of the mentorship relationship was to guide the student's development of a clothing collection for a specified target market. This purpose was achieved through the completion of a series of assignments, technical demonstrations, and critiques. The student was asked to create a collection by (a) developing a design brief, (b) conducting target market and *inspiration* research, (c) creating a mood board, (d) selecting colors and fabrics, (e) creating technical sketches of the garments, (f) developing technical package, (g) drafting patterns, (h) fitting models, and (i) constructing garments. The student received both formative and summative feedback from the mentor at each step. This design was selected for submission due to its creative design ideas and elaborate craftsmanship. The student put a lot of time and thoughts developing the design concept. The resulting work is not only innovative and cohesive, but also has a great story behind it, expressing the designer's personal values and beliefs.

*Statement of Purpose.* The inspiration behind this piece came from a bandolier, which is a shoulder belt that is used to hold cartridges for ammunition. The designer intentionally paired this overtly masculine detailing with a similarly overtly feminine styling. This juxtaposition is a statement on the rugged capability of women to fight back against oppression. This piece *Bandelier Mini* fits within the larger context of the designer's work, which seeks to express female worth and empowerment. Historically, fashion was mainly made by men for women and at times impeded the movement of the female wearer, as in the garment aptly titled "Hobble Skirt" that was in vogue during the early 1900s. The hobble skirt represents an instant of push back when women were seeking ways to use fashion as a means of empowerment. Just a few years before, a bifurcated garment called "The Pantaloon" was on the scene and critics of this piece passionately expressed the view that the freedom in movement afforded by the garment was a "usurpation of the rights of men" (Cunningham, 2003). During the creation of *Bandelier Mini*, it was important to create a piece that lived in both masculine and feminine realms, to clearly draw the intended parallel. Drawing inspiration from the women who dare to see their worth as inherent and their claim to rights as inalienable, the designer created pieces that are not only comfortable but also inspire the wearer to reach beyond societally imposed limitations.

*Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact.* The goal of *Bandelier Mini* is to convey the strength that is found in femininity. This dress commingles two disparate identities: a feminine lightness bordering on infantilization and a brute masculinity. These two ideas are communicated with the baby doll silhouette adorned with leather belting. The inspiration for which was taken directly from a bandolier, a piece that is traditionally used to hold ammunition. In this case, these leather belts feature soft ruffles in place of bullets. The skirt portion is pleated, adding an air of structure to the whimsy of the hot air balloon fabric it is made of. This piece is worn with a decorative shirt collar featuring chains and a jeweled pendant that hangs between the shoulder blades.

*Process, Technique, and Execution.* The design and development process for this piece began with an initial rough sketch of the concept. This sketch allowed the designer to get an idea of how to strike the balance of design elements to convey the concept (*Figure 1*). This balance can be also found in the selection of fabric and materials. As this piece is primarily about female empowerment, the motif of a hot air balloon rising was selected as the main fabric. The rich leather belting, chains and collar were all chosen for their masculine feel. With the initial sketch and material choice in mind, the designer draped the bust using traditional draping technique and transferred

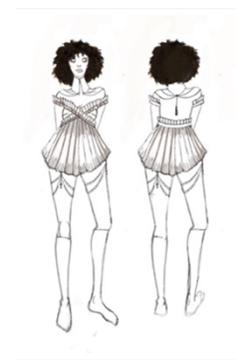


Figure 1



Figure 2

the draped muslin pieces onto paper to create the pattern pieces. For the skirted portion, the pleats were calculated with a 2" pleat depth using three separate muslin pieces, which were then transferred onto paper for the initial pattern (*Figure 2*). A muslin prototype was sewn for testing and appropriate adjustments were made to achieve a perfect fit. As with every piece, durability, quality and useability were of utmost importance; hence, the edges of each separate component were bound using an overlock stitch, which were then sewn together with a ½" seam allowance. This allows for the ease of repair or alteration on this piece in the future. A 3 ½" hem was added, allowing this piece to be let down at the hem for more length if desired by any future wearers.

*Cohesion.* The overall silhouette and color choices of this piece are that which would be deemed traditionally feminine but are presented with elements that would generally be found in a much more masculine setting. This dichotomy was intentionally created to not only provide an edge of empowerment for the wearer, but to also give anyone who views this piece a reason to reconsider the idea of women being the weaker sex. The bandolier belts sewn to the bust portion speak to a woman's ability to defend herself and that which she holds close to her heart. Instead of bullets,

these belts hold soft ruffles, which symbolize the possibility of finding solutions through other means besides a turn toward violent tendency. The hot air balloon fabric symbolizes a woman's ability to rise above that which challenges her. All together this garment speaks of the ability to hold the opposing truths of being soft and strong, grounded and empowered, and beautiful and utilitarian.

*Originality and Innovation.* The innovation of the *Bandolier Mini* is found in the various details drawn together to create a cohesive narrative. Although each detail can speak on its own in terms of aesthetic value, the leather belts, ruffles, collar and jeweled pendant come together to create a back and forth between what is traditionally considered feminine or masculine, and in doing so strengthen the overall juxtaposed message.

#### Reference

Cunningham, P. A (2003). *Reforming women's fashion, 1850-1920: politics, health, and art.*  
Kent State University Press.

